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A photograph of a globe with a blue surgical mask covering its face. The globe is held by two hands wearing blue and red gloves. The background is a plain, light grey color.

Implications of COVID-19 on Women Workers in the Service Sector.

A Special Focus on Spain

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Pandemic and working women: old and new dilemmas | 4 |
| 3. The changing living and working conditions of women employed in the service sector | 5 |
| 4. Solidarity networks and collective mobilizations | 7 |
| 5. Measures taken by the regional government to deal with the crisis | 8 |
| 6. Conclusions | 9 |
| 7. References | 9 |
| 8. Appendix | 10 |
| 9. Biographies | 35 |

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1. Introduction

The spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its devastating effects has brought to light the contradictions already present in our society. These include the gender gap and the low value placed on care work.

It would certainly be more suitable to refer to this crisis as a syndemic rather than a pandemic. The term syndemic was coined by the American anthropologist Merrill Singer (1994) on observing the connection between the spread of pathologies, such as AIDS, linked to social, political and economic factors.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus affects women and men differently. The higher mortality rate among men is only one side of the story.

We know that women have been hit harder than men for three crucial reasons:

- 1) The greater presence of women in the health care branch: the outbreak of the disease for women employed in this area did not result in pay reductions or loss of work, but they were over-exposed to the infection;
- 2) The major presence of women in the service sector: more than 60% of those employed in the service sector are women. By 'service sector' we refer not only to the ho.re.ca sector, but also to the clothing trade and non-food large-scale distribution sectors. Due to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, many businesses were shut down for long periods or had to reduce their opening hours. In consequence, employees in the service sector suffered suspended or reduced wages;
- 3) Over-exposure to domestic violence: restrictive measures taken by governments to limit the spread of the virus have resulted in women spending more time with violent partners. Therefore, there has been an increase in physical and psychological abuse of women by partners and family members.

In this contribution, we focus on observing the effects of the syndemic in the Spanish service sector. In the future, it is our intention to collaborate in research aimed at investigating the other two issues, which have not been addressed in this contribution. In southern Europe, Spain, like Italy, was one of the countries which was worst affected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Italy and Spain share a labour market

structure marked by strong gender segregation, high precariousness of women's employment, and wage restraint in the most female-dominated sectors.

In Spain, the gender pay gap is a structural concern. The most recent data taken from the INE's Wage Structure Survey (*Encuesta de Estructura Salarial del INE*), shows that in 2018 the average annual salary for women was only €21,012, compared to €26,738 for men. On average, men earned 27.3% more than women, equivalent to €5,726 per year and €477 per month (Gómez and López, 2021).

As in many other countries, the wage gap in Spain has narrowed in recent years. However, women continue to occupy more temporary and poorly paid positions than men.

In Spain, the pandemic has been directly reflected in the increase of redundancies and the prolongation of the ERTE Temporary Layoff Scheme (*Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo*).

As already highlighted, during the containment measures imposed by the Spanish government in spring 2020, the worst affected sectors were those in which the majority of the workforce are female. These include trade, transport, hospitality, the arts, entertainment, recreation, and other services groups.

These sectors are historically marked by a wage restraint compared to other economic sectors. Employees earn, on average, only 63.3% of the average wage in Spain. Conversely, employees within male-dominated sectors earn, on average, 43% higher than the average wage, and were able to depend on teleworking during the lockdown (Gómez and López, 2021).

The following study highlights the issue that employment does not always enable women to escape from hardship and poverty. Moreover, the increase in female employment in itself says little about the conditions women face in the labour market. The crisis produced by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has put a spotlight on the structural nature of gender discrimination in society and the presence of working conditions, which, according to ILO indicators, are far from satisfactory.

2. Pandemic and working women: old and new dilemmas

The situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed certain complex social, employment and economic constructs within our society. The most vulnerable sectors and groups have suffered from the increase in inequality, discrimination and exclusion. The shortcomings within our economic structure are offset during an economic boom, due to the greater opportunities available. Recessions however, reveal the precarious nature of this structure and the instability of vulnerable sectors' social, employment and economic success. Women in employment are particularly vulnerable to economic and social crises. In a cultural environment that values a man's work above a woman's work, job shortages mainly affect women. This pandemic has highlighted the extent to which male employment is still considered to take priority over female employment, which is often considered to be of secondary importance or even insignificant in comparison.

It cannot be said that this discrimination is more prevalent in certain cultural environments than in others. In this health, economic and social crisis we are living through, every country is suffering the consequences. As regards employment, according to the ILO, the global shortfall in employment increased by 144 million jobs in 2020. However, according to the Equality and Employment Monitor, while male employment fell by 3.9%, female employment fell by 5%. Clearly, there was no parity in this loss of employment, which has fallen largely to women. This comes in addition to other discriminatory circumstances which were present prior to COVID, such as lower wages for equal work, fewer promotion opportunities, precarious work, etc. For the most part, women occupy more expendable positions than men: unregulated work, jobs with precarious contracts, focus on the services sector, welfare-orientated (outside of official networks), domestic work, etc. In short, and in general, it may be said that the pandemic has affected men and women unequally, and has revealed previously existing inequalities and discrimination, as well as a halt in public policies aimed at achieving equality between men and women in the labour market.

There is a need for Spain to be analysed under this scenario, with consideration to the peculiarities that are typical of Spanish traditions in the sense of gender discrimination. Historically, Spain has always had a clear differentiation in

the workplace as regards gender. According to the Spanish Statistics Institute, the wage gap between men and women is 11.9%. The presence of women in management positions in the top 35 companies in the country barely reaches 5.71%. Furthermore, the number of women holding the position of *Rectora* [approximately equivalent to vice-chancellor] at a Spanish university is currently 9 (representing less than 20%), and only 22.5% of professors are women. This pattern is repeated in many other economic sectors and employment situations, although it is not always analysed and converted into statistics.

The position of unemployed women in Spain during the COVID outbreak, is a complicated scenario. We cannot overlook the fact that changes regarding women within Spain's economic model only came about after the dictatorship ended. In other words, women's entry into the labour market took place just over 40 years ago, which was far later than in neighbouring countries. Consequently, the generation of women following the death of Franco gained entry to the workforce in a very short period of time, and with economic conditions stacked against them. In the aftermath of Franco's dictatorship, unemployment rates for women have remained high, and as a result more women have had to face poor living conditions and poverty (Gálvez-Muñoz, Rodríguez-Modroño & Matus-López, 2020). Registered unemployment data for 2020, before the pandemic outbreak, indicates that women represent 57.2% of the unemployed, while men represent 42.8%. There was also a greater increase in unemployment for women over the age of 25 (data from the national public employment service records).

Work carried out by women has also been reported to have greater precariousness and instability, with a higher presence of women in sectors whose workforce are more susceptible to redundancy, such as the services sector, as mentioned above. By the end of 2020 the unemployment rate had been falling for six consecutive years, and women represented 52.4% of the unemployed.

During the restrictions implemented throughout the COVID pandemic and the resultant decrease in economic activity, there were job losses in many significant sectors in Spain. In many cases, the closure of companies due to

this lack of commerce meant that employees lost their jobs, and a high percentage of them were women. Many other companies, instead of closing, chose an alternative implemented by the government; STW schemes (short-time work schemes)¹. In this way, many employees could keep their jobs, although they had to depend on a public subsidy. These schemes helped to offset the lack of economic activity, and enabled employees to retain some of their income. However, only an average of 25% of employees were eligible for these schemes (Izquierdo, Puente and Regil, 2021). Close to 60% of employees lost their jobs completely. The percentage of women eligible for the STW schemes was considerably lower than the percentage of men, particularly in and following the second and third quarters of 2020. Nevertheless, these schemes did enable many women to keep their jobs, although they were temporarily registered as unemployed. Women's employment relationships were therefore maintained in the conditions described above under a variety of circumstances, depending on the employment type.

Most of these schemes were concluded once the companies recovered their commerce, and it is at this point that a new significant segregation began. A considerable number of the schemes were resolved negatively, as the companies concerned had closed as a result of the economic crisis following the pandemic. In the cases in which companies recovered their commerce, there have been situations in which the conclusion of an STW scheme was used to conceal covert employment adjustment plans which have a direct effect on female workers. When it came to recovering the staff that were working in a company prior to the crisis, there has been a clear preference for the re-employment of men over the re-employment of women. This was made clear to us by the women we interviewed, who emphasised the fact that men are being given priority by employers. The patriarchal ideology in Spain's employment system appears to have intensified. In short, women are coming out of the crisis worse off than men, particularly older women and those with a lower level of education, according to the aforementioned report (Izquierdo, Puente & Regil, 2021).

3. The changing living and working conditions of women employed in the service sector

If we focus on the group of women who were interviewed as part of this project, we can see how they have been affected by these events, and how they have experienced them in person. Firstly, it is important to stress that it has not been easy to find women who fit the required profile for this research project. In the first place, only a small quantity of women were eligible for the STW schemes, and women working in the services sector were employed under a wide variety of working arrangements due to the diverse nature of the industry. As mentioned above, the services sector is one of the industries that has been worst affected by the lockdowns, particularly in the context of non-regulated work. For women who had worked as home help through an agency, we found that in some cases their work relationship was maintained (although sometimes

with reduced working hours). However, in other cases the recipients of the home help service offered the opportunity of continued employment, but without the intermediary agency (non-regulated employment or undeclared work), i.e. with no official contract. This type of undeclared work is precarious, with no workers' rights and a large degree of instability and uncertainty, which leads to a situation of immense job insecurity, extending to the provisions derived from employment or a lack thereof.

The women interviewed as part of this study were aged between 25 and 50 years old, and separated into two distinct profiles: those who have a university education and who live alone or with their partner, but who have no children; and those who have only completed compulsory education and

¹ Legal form to cease employment and/or reduce working hours, which has increased considerably since April 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis, limiting dismissals through the flexibility it offers to adapt both working time and staff, depending on the company's needs (Ruesga & Viña, 2021).

who have children that they are responsible for. Considering the second profile, with the exception of the two youngest women, who work in the audio-visual sector, the rest of this group worked in the services sector with temporary jobs, so when the pandemic hit they were either made redundant or placed under an STW scheme. Tourism-related work is the dominant services sector employment type in our geographical area, and summer is usually the busiest season for tourism. However, this group of women were not able to work during the summer because tourism-related services, such as hotels, employed a minimal amount of personnel. Most of this group of interviewees received benefits under the STW schemes, such as the minimum wage scheme [SMI, by its initials in Spanish] or under special allowances for employees in their sectors, if they had not made a large enough contribution to social insurance to be entitled to unemployment benefits or they were self-employed. However, despite looking for work since becoming unemployed, this group had not received any job offers, and state that they received no help from the INEM [Spanish Employment Institute] or the SEPE [Public Employment Service] in finding work or receiving benefits.

The other interviewee profile were women under the age of 40 with a university education who do not live with a partner and who are not considered to be dependent under Spanish law. Half of this group stated that, at some point, they had found work associated with their training, while the other half worked in positions for which they were overqualified. Most of this group had temporary contracts and the pandemic caused many of them to lose their jobs. Temporary employees were among the first to lose their jobs during the pandemic, as the dismissal costs for the employer are lower than they would be for employees with permanent contracts. In many cases, not having worked for a sufficient period of time has meant that temporary employees are not entitled to unemployment benefits, leaving them unprotected. We observed that professional training is not necessarily an advantage for women, and although it provides more employment options, these options may not be in the area of their training.

For the women in this group who do have access to unemployment benefits, there was a significant delay in receiving the benefits, due to the sheer volume of applications elicited by the COVID-19 pandemic and the STW schemes.

In many cases, these circumstances have meant that women are forced to depend on their families, with all that this entails within their lives. One major issue is the subsequent inability to lead an independent life. For women, this accentuates their feeling of dependence, and the loss of opportunities for personal development.

Furthermore, most of these women are actively looking for work. Many are taking advantage of the situation to improve their education, through courses and university post-graduate studies, etc. These women are clearly attempting to gain independence by improving their options, with a view to being better qualified for employment in the future. This group of interviewees had mostly completed higher education degrees, in some cases they even had post-graduate qualifications. This indicates that the problem does not lie in being less educated or having less training. Currently, data shows that in Spain there are more women who have a university degree than men, and that, in general, women attain higher levels of education or training than men. According to the Spanish Ministry of Universities 2020-2021, 55.3% of university students are currently women, outnumbering men in every area except Architecture and engineering courses. In addition, 58.2% of graduates are women, which indicates that in general women are better qualified than men. In post-graduate studies, there is a still higher percentage of female students, at 56.6%, which is similar in doctoral studies. These statistics are also mirrored in compulsory education. These figures appear to indicate that issues in women's employment are not due to a lower level of education, and that we must look elsewhere for an explanation.

For women older than 45, their financial situation is made more difficult if they are divorced or separated. There is also the danger, as has been mentioned, that they may not be re-employed if the company they were previously working for reopens, as companies may take the opportunity to replace them with younger people at a lower business cost. The possibility of financial aid from family members is also made more complicated as the economic crisis has affected all sectors. The brunt of the crisis appears to have fallen on elderly people's pensions, which are able to keep many families afloat, albeit precariously. This results in the situation of dependence described above. Family relationships become more complex when it comes to sharing scant income between several family members, which in some cases results in them living together. All of these factors have repercus-

sions on a psychological and emotional level, resulting in frequent feelings of frustration, anxiety, and worry.

This group of interviewees also faces greater difficulties in accessing welfare benefits, as their situation is not normally considered to be extreme under the established requirements due to their prior work status and the support from their families. The welfare regulations appear only to favour women in extreme situations, who do not receive support from their families. In comparison to women, men maintain greater levels of independence, and this works in their favour with regards to meeting the requirements for welfare benefits. Some of the women we interviewed mentioned that the requirements to obtain benefits are quite strict and aimed at a very specific profile. For example, one of the women had no dependent children, but she lived on her own without support from her family. However, she was unable to obtain any financial support because she was not registered as responsible for any dependents.

These welfare regulations are not designed to support single-member households of women who have no dependent children, but who have been made unemployed and receive no income. On the other hand, we also interviewed women who did have dependent children and who did receive financial support, but they were not provided with enough to cover their basic expenses.

Analysis of the interviews show that many of the participants expressed concern regarding the issue of employers taking advantage of the pandemic to modify their workforce, in order to cut human resources expenditure. In some cases, the contract type held by these women has meant that their employers simply had to wait until the contract terminated, enabling them to avoid paying dismissal compensation. Both the STW schemes and the temporary closure of businesses have, to all intents and purposes, served to adjust staff structure, and this has particularly affected women.

4. Solidarity networks and collective mobilizations

Another factor observed about many of the women interviewed, is that they do not usually receive or ask for help after being dismissed. It would not be an exaggeration to describe these women as possessing a certain sense of resignation and inevitability which increases their vulnerability, and has its roots in our patriarchal culture. Our culture places the work of women in a subsidiary or supplementary role, in comparison to the work of men. It could be said that this is at the heart of their lack of motivation to request the help to which they are legally entitled. In some cases, these women even seem to feel unable to undertake administrative procedures to receive aid, giving priority to other, more pressing, matters. Only the women affiliated to a union have attempted to access the social rights to which they are entitled, and even then, they do not feel particularly supported by these unions. One of the women interviewed stressed the fact that unions are fairly passive and do not want to get too involved if a situation is serious, and there is no obvious case for what the employee concerned should claim or demand.

Consequently, women are less inclined to join a union, which further strengthens the contrast in work culture between men and women. This shows that gender divisions,

which traditionally have always marked the employment relationships of men and women, still very much exist.

This issue of not asking for help or benefits also extends to public employment services. Many of the interviewees did not ask these services for assistance, either because of a lack of information, or because they did not believe they would receive any help. Those who did request assistance complained about the lack of organisation and the delay in receiving financial aid. Throughout the pandemic there have been major delays in processing applications for benefits, in developing administrative processes, and in providing information about financial support options. One of the women interviewed told us she had to wait 3 months for a reply to her question, and that it was almost impossible to get through to the telephone service.

Due to these factors, most of the interviewees were supported by their families, although the social services have also played an important role. One of the interviewees states: "The financial aid was organised for me by a social assistant, and thank God, because I didn't even know how to apply for it. The office was closed and I couldn't reach

anyone by telephone, it was a disaster, but thankfully the social assistant has helped me with the paperwork”.

For many of the women interviewed, their families represent their main means of financial support, even though other family members may also be going through economic hardship, due to the complicated situation in the aftermath of the

pandemic. Most of the interviewees are looking for public employment which offers them some kind of contract protection, this is necessary as some of these women provide the only economic contribution within their household. A certain degree of security is necessary and would mean that they would not need to depend on other types of aid, to which, as we have mentioned, they do not always have easy access.

5. Measures taken by the regional government to deal with the crisis

Through analysis of the interviews, we have observed that one element that has played an important role during this period is the Andalusian Employment Service, under the Regional Government of Andalusia. Another important factor is social assistance in the form of the Minimum Living Income (IMV, by its initials in Spanish), which was approved during the pandemic, and was one of the promises of the Central Government which had only been established a few months before. The idea behind the Minimum Living Income is to offer an income which covers basic living costs to the most vulnerable groups in Spain. It was approved during the toughest period of the crisis, and aimed to alleviate the circumstances in which vulnerable groups were living.

With regard to the Andalusian Employment Service, the difficulty and inefficiency in dealing with this situation, or offering any kind of help to the women interviewed, has already been mentioned. For many of these women, it was simply not possible to rely on help from this service. It is worth noting that the duties assigned to this Service are supposed to ensure occupational inclusion within different areas. These duties include: providing aid during employment-related COVID-19 measures, including the processing of paperwork involved in managing the situation, and providing job offers suitable for a selection of profiles; providing services to companies for recruitment purposes, and acting as a bridge between potential employers and workers; providing information about the job market in Andalusia, through statistical surveys and the Argos employment observatory; management of workers' demand for employment, including the processing of job offers and job mobility; and enabling improvements in employability and access to employment, through the service's career guidance network. There are

also other duties assigned to the Andalusian Employment Service of a more institutional nature and related to European policies. In short, this service should provide a significant variety of options when it comes to resolving personal and economic issues related to employment. Instead, it was completely overstretched and rendered ineffective by an accumulation of work and an inoperative bureaucracy, as the women interviewed mentioned.

With regard to the aforementioned Minimum Living Income, this option has not been particularly favourable for women either, as has been discussed previously. To access this option, there is a series of requirements which women are unable to fulfil if they are forced to depend on help from their families. As has already been mentioned, men are generally more able to access this option, as they tend to live in more independent circumstances. The interviewees made similar comments regarding the more conventional welfare benefits, referring to the difficulties in the application process (in most cases they are processed online, so this leaves out anyone who is not familiar with the digital world and the use of computer resources); their dependence on other family members, whether it is their husband, their parents or other relatives; poor access to information; and limited possibilities for submitting an application.

The Minimum Living Income was passed in Spain by Royal Decree-Law 20/2020 of 29 May. It was set up to offer a subjective right to an economic benefit that forms part of the Social Security's protective action, and guarantees a minimum level of income for those who find themselves in a situation of economic vulnerability. It aims to ensure a real improvement in the beneficiaries' social and occupational

opportunities. Regarding women; victims of gender violence, sexual exploitation or human trafficking are direct beneficiaries. In contrast, a woman over the age of 23 who lives with her parents because she cannot achieve economic independence, would not be entitled to this benefit. The

strict requirements for the Minimum Living Income have resulted in the acceptance of only a minimal percentage of the applications submitted, which has led to a social situation of wariness regarding social assistance.

6. Conclusions

In short, the situation described above confirms the initial evaluation regarding the precariousness of women's employment, particularly in the services sector, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting crisis. Women, along with the most vulnerable groups, are among the worst affected by the current crisis. The situation is made worse by the difficulty they encounter in accessing existing social benefits, such as the recently established Minimum Living Income. Employment in Spain is still very much male-biased in its design. The belief that the income generated by the work of women is merely subsidiary, underlies these issues.

Countries like Spain, with heavily patriarchal traditions inherited from their recent history, are the most affected by this situation. It appears that the increase in gender equality that Spain had been experiencing up until March 2020, has been interrupted. Therefore, some of the ground that had been won in these social struggles against gender discrimination has been lost, which makes it necessary to analyse the world of work once again, in terms of gender, and not just using raw employment data.

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8. Appendix

INTERVIEW NO. 1

Paula M. (Málaga), 48 years old, single, previously worked in the culture and show business sector, currently unemployed.

EG: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you describe your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

PM: I did the BUP (*Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente, High School Unified Polyvalent*) but I did not finish the COU (*Curso de Orientación Universitaria, University Orientation Course*)². I went to the School of Art and Crafts in Málaga, San Telmo and I also completed a two-year modelling monograph. I had access to fine arts, and was able to focus on dressmaking and fashion design, which was what I wanted to do.

I finished this in '96, and I started working when I was only 20. At that time hardly any films were produced in Málaga, but I was lucky and found a group that had the same expectations as me regarding working conditions, and worked with film producers in Málaga. I was employed to make costumes for the films.

I combined this work with fashion jobs, I brought out my own clothing brand which I sold in several stores, and worked with films, theatre, performances, fashion and styling. I always worked as a freelancer, and my work was constantly developing and evolving. When people started to produce films in Málaga during the last five years, I was engaged to work with a lot of these films and series.

My last job was with a Spanish television series. I started in November and worked until February 2019 when, as I broke my arm, I had to leave. The second season was planned for the following February.

In September 2019 I worked with an international television series, I was a tailor and they paid me extremely well. Later came the COVID-19 pandemic, and I was going to start working with the Spanish television series again, but everything was cancelled.

Luckily I had finished working for the international television series, and was able to receive unemployment benefits due to my contract. The contract that the international producer offered me was specifically for artists and not for general employees, as an artist, I officially worked for twelve hours each day, so after just six months of work I was eligible for unemployment benefits. I started receiving unemployment benefits in September / October and I stopped receiving them during the lockdown in March. I do not receive them anymore, of course.

At the beginning of the pandemic I had very bad luck because of my arm, if I had not broken my arm I would have been registered under the ERTE³ (*Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo*), and I would not have been unemployed. For people working in the audiovisual world, it has been very hard because there has been no financial support, and I know people in very bad situations.

EG: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

PM: I live alone. I have no children because it is not possible in my kind of career, if I am told that I have to work in Madrid for 5 months, I have to pick up my suitcase and leave. My situation is terrible. I am laughing because I do have

2 In Spain, from 1975 to 2001, you had to study 3 years of BUP and then one of COU to be able to access university.

3 Procedure by which a company in an exceptional situation seeks to obtain authorization to fire workers, suspend employment contracts or temporarily reduce working hours, when they go through technical or organizational difficulties that put the continuity of the company at risk

help, I have my parents, and I can pay the rent and I can eat, that is no problem. I am making masks to bring in a little money, and I would not mind working as a waitress, but there aren't any jobs.

I am lucky to have people who help me, but I will have to pay back the money they have lent me. In the audio-visual sector we earn a lot, but we are in a difficult situation because work only lasts for 4 months on a television series, and when it ends you never know when you are going to be employed again. You always have to have money saved, and my situation is better than it could be, because I do have money saved. My work is different from most types of work, I have no job stability.

EG: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

PM: My last job was in the television series 'The Crown'. It was in September / October of last year, I worked as a tailor for one week, and they paid quite well as it was an international producer. I suppose that there are unions in the audio-visual field, but I have not joined them. While working in other sectors, I have joined unions. This turned out well for me because I was working for Canal + when it closed and was sold to Movistar. I was compensated very well, better than others, because I was a member of the union. At that time there was an ERTE and 2,500 people were fired, I was one of the 416 in Málaga who lost their jobs, and it was very important to be a member of the union. Right now, in audio-visual firms there are no freelancers, because employees are officially hired, but we are given sign-up and sign-off temporary contracts, which only last for a few days or months.

EG: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

PM: For the Spanish television series, the second season had already been planned, and I had been asked to work in it. I also worked in two films this year, one of Spanish

production and the other of international production, in both films I worked as the head of costumes. Last year I had been going to work in a television series and two movies, originally I was overjoyed to have been offered work in two movies in one year, not many people in my field get that opportunity, but due to the pandemic there hasn't been any work carried out on either of the movies. I suppose that if we are very lucky and they vaccinate us in 2021, the two films will hopefully be produced straight away. They are projects that are being postponed, and I hope they do not overlap because if the two films are shot at the same time, I can only work on one of them. I also have the television series, if they call me for the series and they call me for one of the two films at the same time, then I will have to choose one project, and lose money because of that choice.

EG: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

PM: No, I did not search for unions or other groups.

EG: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still have income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

PM: The Government has just introduced a benefit, an extraordinary benefit, for people working in the audio-visual sector. I am receiving this benefit because my support from unemployment benefits ended in March. I am considered to have lost my job due to the pandemic, and that is why I am receiving this financial aid of €430 a month, for 3 months.

EG: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

PM: No, I have been making a living during the lockdowns, I have made masks and other things for money.

EG: After losing your job, or during your suspension from work, did you get other job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

PM: During the lockdown months, I have been making masks and sewing. I adapt quickly. During Christmas, I sold garments from my clothing brand with a friend. I adjusted

quickly to the situation, but it is also true that it is necessary for me to have official work which contributes to the state, because otherwise I will not get a good pension when I retire.

EG: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think that there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

PM: I have been giving out my CV everywhere, but as I told you, I have not had any replies at all. I am still waiting for filming to start again, and meanwhile I am staying busy.

There is absolutely discrimination against women. In one situation I experienced, there was an ERTE in a non-audio-visual company I used to work for, it was announced that many people were going to lose their jobs and many of my colleagues thought and said “well, since you are single and a woman you deserve to be fired more than me: I have children”. That phrase sums it up for you. When I started working in the film industry there were very few women, and we mostly worked as costume designers, hairdressers and makeup assistants, so we were hardly offered any respect. What was it to us to work overtime? The producers would always ask the heads of the electrical and photography team whether they could work extra hours, but those of us who were women took it for granted that we would be expected to work overtime without being asked. This has changed now because there are also girls who are electricians, and camerawomen who work with spotlights that weigh 40 kilos, and they are wonderful. Things have changed a lot, and I have noticed it because I have been working in this industry for 25 years. I can tell you about the bad, but also the good. There are many girls now who are in film school, and who have the same jobs as men. On the other hand, electricians in the film industry have a very heavy job carrying cables and lights, and therefore it is logical that there are more men than women working in this area, that’s just how it is.

EG: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work that you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

PM: I have been thinking a lot about whether to continue my job or quit and look for something else, but it is what I

enjoy. For a while I thought I should find something more secure, or start my own business. I have been thinking a lot, and this situation has helped me to see that you cannot always ride on the crest of the wave, and that you have to learn to be more humble, to help people, and to think more of others. It is important to stop and rest because constant stress and burden are not good. Still, during this time I have had a lot of ups and downs. Not all workers are protected, but this was not a surprise for anyone. I am not going to blame the Government, nor am I going to blame anyone else, this situation was not expected by anyone and I believe that everyone has tried to do their best. I always try to remember that I am lucky to have support, and healthy parents. The important thing during this time is health; money and work should be seen as secondary, and better times will come. Blaming the government or blaming anyone else is just a waste of time. In order to get out of this situation, we must act together and help each other in any way we can. I believe that the government and social partners have acted in good faith and have done what they could. I am not a politician. I don’t know what their budget is, or how much power they have had in this situation. What more could have been done? I don’t know. I know that the financial support provided has been insufficient because there are people who have ended up in very bad circumstances, but I don’t know if anyone could have provided enough to support the whole country. This is the first time that such a pandemic has happened, it has been like a war, and in Málaga the hospitality industry has collapsed. I have friends who own pubs; or who devoted themselves to music, concerts, or organizing festivals, they have to support their families and have been very badly hit.

My sector has also been badly hit. We have received some support, but what about the hospitality industry? More could be done. I do not know what exactly. I only know that the opposition is not doing well and that they have a lot on their plate. There are things that I do not understand, for example, in Málaga a lot of money has been spent on lights. Apparently this is because otherwise people will not go to the shops because it wouldn’t look like Christmas. Okay, but do not put so many lights on Calle Larios, make the display more discreet and more money could be invested in aid. However, since I am not a politician, I cannot tell if this would really make things better.

In my sector, there has not been enough financial aid for workers. Also, it seems silly, but being stuck at home for 3 months reveals how important the film and television culture is, because we all relied on television series and movies to entertain us during the lockdown. What has happened? Movie and television series production has stopped, and there are no new series or films available. There is no other

option than to start filming again if we want to continue having access to this entertainment option.

It is true that a movie or a television series can provide a distraction from our problems, and I think that we have all realised the importance of the film and television culture while we have been stuck at home.

INTERVIEW NO. 2

Marta S. (Almería), 37 years old, single with no children, previously worked in a public social services company, currently unemployed.

VM: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you describe your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

MS: After I finished compulsory school, I went to university and took studies related to the social services. After finishing university, I worked in an association for several months, starting when I was approximately 23 years old. Then I worked for a public company for two years. In 2012, due to the economic crisis, I lost my job and went back to studying. I have completed three postgraduate courses since that year, and I worked in temporary jobs in various companies. Now I am finishing my doctoral thesis. My last job was in a public company focused on justice.

VM: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

MS: I live alone. Right now I do not have a partner. I have no children. Since I lost my last job, I have not received any financial support. As I had been employed for less than a year in my last job, I am not entitled to receive unemployment benefits. Financial support is for people in borderline situations. As I have a university education, and have had well paid jobs, there is no financial aid available to me. I have shared the money that I had saved while I was working with my parents. They are also in a bad economic situation. My brother is the only one in the family who is working right now. He is helping my parents and I with our expenses.

VM: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which

sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

MS: Starting in August 2019, I had been working in a public company related to justice. I worked for this company for ten months. My tasks involved evaluating social situations. My salary was between € 1,400 and € 1,600 per month. The contract was temporary. First, the company gave me a six-month contract, then they renewed my contract for four more months. They told me that at the end of those four months they would offer me a permanent contract, but the day before the contract ended, they informed me that they were, in fact, not going to offer me another contract. I lost my job in June 2020, when my temporary contract ended. Due to the economic impact of the pandemic, the company cut social spending, and as I was the only employee with a temporary contract they decided not to renew my contract. They have not hired anyone to fill my position, and the tasks that I had been doing are no longer carried out in the company. I am not a member of any union.

My relationship with my colleagues is very good. At the beginning I encountered some difficulties in feeling included within an already established group of professionals, but shortly after starting work I became part of the team. Since then, the relationships with my colleagues have been very good. I have also had good relationships with my supervisors during the entire contract period. They want me to return to my old position and to continue developing my work. Although I no longer work with them, we have remained in contact.

VM: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment, or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

MS: I lost my job in June 2020 when my contract ended. It was a temporary contract. Although my employer told me that I would receive a permanent contract after ten months, in the end they decided not to. The company is public and depends on a public budget. At the beginning of the pandemic they decided to cut spending on social services, as they had to allocate money to more urgent expenses. I receive financial support from my family. My brother supports me financially with my living expenses.

VM: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after your loss of employment? Could you tell us in which way, specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

MS: I had contact with the work union, but I did not ask for help or advice during the time that I was working. I also did not ask for help after my contract ended, and the union did not step in to help me. As it was a temporary contract termination, the union could do nothing to hinder my loss of employment.

VM: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

MS: Since I lost my job, I have not received any income support. As the job was temporary and I held my position for less than a year, I am not entitled to receive unemployment assistance. I do not have access to any other form of financial aid either, because last year when I was working, I earned more money than the stipulated limit. The grants are only for people in very poor circumstances, for the rest of us, there is no help of any kind. I am not entitled to any financial aid because I do not have children, and because I have had a good job. Therefore, I have to pay for my living costs without any support. If my brother did not help me, I would have to leave my apartment and move back into my parents' house. My parents are also in a bad financial situation, I do not want to add to their expenses.

VM: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

MS: There is a public employment service in the region. I have been enrolled in it since I lost my job. Through this service, I have applied to more than twenty job advertisements. These applications were for the entire region, I do not mind working outside my city. I also looked for work through private job vacancies. I have participated in many selection processes, but I have not been selected for a single offer, I have not even been asked for an interview.

VM: After losing your job, or during your suspension from work, did you get other job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

MS: I have not received any job offers. I hope that I will be offered a job by the company I was previously working for in the next few months. That company will need a professional profile like mine to carry out the tasks that I was doing. I think that the reason I have not received any offers is because companies do not want to hire people with higher education. I think companies believe that the worker will leave when they find a better job, and that is why they hire less qualified people.

VM: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think that there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

MS: I will continue to participate in selection processes to apply for jobs. I believe that women are discriminated against, especially in jobs related to social services, and in jobs involved in supporting the most vulnerable people in society. As women have historically always been involved in work helping those in need, we are the ones who first lose our jobs when there is a crisis. Women whose work involves helping vulnerable people, are the first to lose their jobs. These issues are cultural. The social services sector has suffered many layoffs, and it is women who have lost their employment. I, at least, have my family, but there are many others who do not have anyone they can rely on for support.

VM: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work that you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should

the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

MS: I believe that the government has done everything possible to sustain the economy of the most vulnerable people. For example, they established a minimum income, which has been vital for those people who have no income and no support. However, the government should also remember that people with training and work experience are left without any financial help if they lose their jobs. The state and the social partners should be more aware of the reality of young people who have higher education and have had a good job, but who now have no chance of getting another job. They should also promote stable contracts in private companies, and offer public employment.

I think that the different realities that exist should be reviewed, and dialogues need to be established between companies, social agents and unions in order to meet the needs of all workers.

Women are highly vulnerable in this situation. Some women have no support and must also look after their children. It is very important to guarantee the protection of jobs for women who are the only breadwinners in their households. If this was done, there would be less need for additional support.

INTERVIEW NO. 3

Lourdes R. (Málaga), 27 years old, single with no children, previously worked in an architecture studio, currently unemployed.

VM: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you describe your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

LR: After I finished compulsory school, I studied architecture at university. While I was in college I started working in an internship, in a job related to my college education. I have also pursued master's degrees.

VM: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

LR: I have no partner or children. I live with my parents. They are both teachers and are currently working. I have not been able to achieve independence because I have not had a stable job. While I was working, I was only offered part-time contracts, and the salary that I received was not enough to meet the expenses of living alone. The economic situation in my house is good because my parents have stable jobs with a good salary. Now that I have lost my job, I am financially dependent on my parents.

VM: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform?

How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

LR: The only work contract I have had was for an architecture studio. I worked there for a little over a year and a half. The contract they offered me was of a lower category than that which I was qualified for. It was a part-time contract and my salary was approximately €800 a month. No other company had offered me a contract for my professional level, so I accepted the job. I considered that for my first job it was an adequate salary, and that I could gain professional experience. When the pandemic started, the company stopped receiving work. We finished the projects we were working on, and then did not receive any more work. That is why the owner of the studio decided to close the company. They did not need the money because they had other sources of income, and I was told that I could not keep my job because there was no work to do. I am not a member of a union. The studio owner and I were the only two members of the company. My relationship with my boss has always been very good, and we worked very well together.

VM: When did you lose or become suspended your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

LR: I lost my job in May 2020. When the pandemic began, we stopped receiving applications to develop projects. Our clients could not continue with their activity and stopped needing our services. For this reason, we had not received any work projects since March and the studio had to close. After the restrictions ended, my former boss did not reopen the studio and no company hired the studio's services again. As my contract was temporary, my employment relationship with the company was terminated. If there had been no pandemic, the studio would have continued to receive projects from clients, and I would have continued working. The pandemic was the reason why I lost my job. As I had only worked for a short time, I have not been able to become independent. I still live with my parents, they take care of my needs and expenses.

VM: Did you interact with a union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

LR: I have not interacted with a union. As the company was small, it did not include any union members. Due to the lack of work, I understand why the company terminated my contract. That is why I did not seek help or information from a union. The company was closed, and I could not continue working

VM: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

LR: After I lost my job, I received unemployment benefits for one month. The amount I received was € 400. After that month, I received the financial support for unemployment of € 215 per month for six months. I am currently not receiving any support from the state.

VM: Are there any public employment services to help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

LR: There is a public employment service in the region. I have been registered as a jobseeker in this service since I became unemployed. I have not received any offers through this service. I am also participating in the selection processes of other companies. I know that I am qualified

and I have experience, but I understand that due to the pandemic companies cannot expand their workforces.

VM: After losing your job or during your suspension from work, did you get other job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

LR: Since losing my job, I have not received any job offers. The owner of the architecture studio I used to work in has told me that when the studio starts receiving work projects again, she will hire me again. In any case, I will continue looking for jobs in other companies. As I have not yet received any job offers, I decided to continue studying. When the pandemic situation ends, I will have better training and will be qualified for a better job.

VM: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think that there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

LR: I have contacted several companies to apply for jobs related to my training. However, companies are simply not hiring, either because there is no work to do, or because they do not have the money to hire more workers. There are also still restrictions in place due to the pandemic. This does not allow companies to return to the normality that existed before March. I had one job interview from an international company, which planned to develop a project in my province in September. In the end though, the company decided to hire someone else who lived closer to them. I know I am qualified, but I understand that this is not a good time for job-seekers due to the current pandemic situation.

I think there is discrimination against women in the workplace. The family situation of women influences access to employment. It is more difficult to get a job if you have children, or want to have them. I also think that it matters whether the job interview is carried out by a woman or a man. In my experience, men think that women will miss work to take care of their children, that is why they prefer to hire men, they do not consider the level of training or ability of potential female employees. This is because they want to avoid employees missing work due to maternity leave, or sick leave when their children are ill. In Spain, paternity leave is now the same length as maternity leave. I hope that this will reduce discrimination against women within the labour market, although I think that most companies are still going to consider it better to hire a man.

VM: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work that you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

LR: During the pandemic situation, many companies have had no economic activity. At first, it was only for a few weeks, but the economic situation has not returned to pre-pandemic conditions, and small businesses have not been able to survive, partly because the pandemic was unexpected, and businesses did not have the opportunity to prepare for it. The government has offered support for companies and for the self-employed, but not everyone has been eligible to receive it, or been able to keep their jobs.

The protection of workers who lost their jobs is relatively little, because financial support and subsidies do not cover their basic needs. Financial support is not accessible to everybody, and the amount is very low. Public investments are made in other, less necessary, areas than in supporting workers and small businesses. Even when an application for financial support is approved, it takes a long time to arrive. More investment in public employment is also

needed. This is especially necessary in the area involved in managing applications for financial support and benefits. This system has crashed because of the volume of requests which have been sent. This means that many families have had to survive with no income for months. In situations such as this, the financial support does not meet the current need. Women are generally the ones who lose their jobs first. This does not only happen in unskilled sectors, such as cleaning or care work. Women with training also suffer unemployment before men. This has always been the case and I don't think it will change. Before the crisis, it was possible to find a job, even if it did not correspond to your training, but currently it is almost impossible. It is much more difficult for women than men.

The state and the social partners should offer more adequate financial support for people while they cannot find work. They should create an extra fund for situations like this. No one expected that something like this was going to happen, but we have suffered economic crises before and no measures have been put into place to decrease the number of layoffs. This has resulted in the current situation. There are many families that are now depending on NGOs to feed themselves. This situation is going to last for many months, and I do not think there will be a quick recovery.

INTERVIEW NO. 4

Isabel J. (Madrid), 36 years old, in a relationship, previously employed in the advertising and culture sector, currently unemployed.

EG: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

IJ: I am a publicist, I used to work as a freelance event producer and project manager. I have worked for a long time in advertising agencies in different positions; account executive, communication account director, executive producer, event producer. For a while now I have wanted to change my profession, because when you reach a certain age you say to yourself, "either I try to embrace my dream now or I will never achieve it". My dream is to make a living with writing, therefore for the past five years I have been working on transitioning to a career in screenwriting.

I have been writing all my life, I started with poetry, but I have also written micro-theatre plays and short stories, and it was always something that I had done as a hobby in my free time while working as a publicist, but in the end everything is about creativity, content creation, etc. Therefore, I have been training as a screenwriter for the past four or five years, I have taken courses and workshops, and I have also been presenting my work in calls for screenwriting entries, with the intention of becoming a fulltime screenwriter.

When the pandemic began, I had already stopped looking for permanent work in advertising agencies because it did not allow me to write. I was able to work as a freelance

publicist, and also work on my screenwriting at the same time. For example, in November 2019, an advertising agency contacted me and offered me a big project (the last one I had), I spent two months working on the project at full capacity, and they paid me very well. Then, with the money I earned, I could spend two months working on a screenwriting project, for a call that ended in January.

EG: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

IJ: I live with my partner who is a screenwriter. No, I don't have children.

Since the pandemic began, I have been making a living as a screenwriter. At the time when the confinement measures were introduced, it looked to me as though things were going to take a long time to return to normal, and as I want to be a screenwriter, I spent the lockdowns writing and working on screenwriting projects. I managed to get a job working on a movie which paid €1,000 in September. Among other projects I worked on during the pandemic, I also signed a contract with a company to develop a script.

Right now, I am surviving financially because I have this script project, and I think the pandemic has been good for me because my options were either I start writing, or I start writing. I have nothing else to do because there is no work in advertising events any more. My intention, if everything goes well, is never to produce events again, but to continue to develop my career as a screenwriter.

My problem is that I have twenty years of experience as an event producer and therefore I have many contacts and know how to get work, as a scriptwriter I am just starting out so I will not receive the same salary. At the moment I'm ok because I just received the first payment for the script project. I also have my partner's help. He has always been a freelance scriptwriter, but just before the pandemic he entered a large production company in the content development department, so the money comes in every month. During the past few months my bank account has had the lowest numbers I have ever seen in it, but luckily my partner has earned enough for both of us, so there was no problem.

EG: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

IJ: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in February 2020, I started a project as a freelancer for an advertising agency. I was the project manager and production director of a project for a beverage brand with a fairly high budget. My job was to coordinate events in Barcelona and Madrid, which included concerts, opens bars, etc. The event was to take place in 2020 for 3 days in Madrid, in June, and for 3 days in Barcelona, in September.

EG: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment, or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

IJ: When the pandemic began, we had already begun to conduct our meetings using Zoom, because there was a girl on the team who was pregnant. We continued working, and at the beginning of the lockdown we continued working on the project, budgeting, and looking for locations online, because we believed that the restrictions were only going to last for a couple of weeks. When the pandemic continued, the event was postponed, it was cancelled in Barcelona and in Madrid it was moved from June to September. In April we got a message from the client saying, "boys, girls, we closed the project where we are, see you in 2021".

There were several agencies involved in this project, and I was the freelancer who the main advertising agency hired to act like the ring from 'The Lord of the Rings', and to coordinate them. Of course, I am a freelancer and nothing more. I invoiced less than I had planned because my originally agreed upon budget was for the entire project. However, I experienced a reduction in invoicing due to teleworking, which in fact meant a reduction in the overall working hours. As a result, I lost 90% of the budget for this year that I had with that project planned until September.

EG: Did you interact with a union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the

phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

IJ: No, I did not interact with unions or other groups of women.

EG: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

IJ: As I am a freelancer, I have not received unemployment benefits or any other financial support. I have received support from Netflix, they provided financial aid for audio-visual workers who had worked in 2019 in film and television shootings. There were specific requirements, but as I had spent 6 months in 2019 as a location assistant in the filming of a series called Malaka, which was filmed in Málaga, I was entitled to receive the support. Netflix gave me €1,000, which was very helpful at the time, but I received nothing from the state.

EG: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

IJ: I did not ask for help from the public employment service.

EG: After losing your job or during the suspension from work did you get other job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

IJ: By focusing on being a screenwriter, I was able to work for myself.

EG: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think that there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

IJ: I am a feminist and I will always tell you that the glass ceiling for women exists, but also that in my experience, women have made so many advances in advertising and in scriptwriting, that it is less noticeable. It is also true that the script writing industry have always been mainly made up of men, but it is making an effort to gain a larger representation of women, although men still make up the majority.

I think that luckily, I am in a sector that is quite sensitive to equal opportunities and that although we have not yet

achieved gender equality, I believe that there are efforts being made in the right direction.

EG: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work that you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

IJ: Of course, in reality, what I lost was the job which pays my bills. I have always wanted to write and I always did write, but I did not dedicate 100% of my time to it because I also spent a lot of time on the work that fed me. So, for me, the pandemic has been my burning of the ships, as you cannot return to the ship which has been burned. This is what the colonialists did when they arrived in America, they burned their ships so they could not return to Spain, similarly for me the pandemic has burned my boats and I can only move forward.

No, there is not enough protection for workers. I had savings. In front of my house, I can see a food bank through my window, and the queue has become longer every consecutive day of the pandemic. I am using up all my savings and I am not protected, but there are people in even worse circumstances. At least my partner is here, we are a team and I will repay him. If I wasn't with him, I would have gone back to Málaga, to my father's house or my sister's house but I would not have ended up sleeping under a bridge. There is obviously not enough protection for workers, and especially for women.

In my opinion, something that could be done is to change the system so that the self-employed automatically pay tax based on what they earn. I would appreciate such a system, in which if you earn €0, you also pay €0 tax, it would provide protection and it would mean that you would not always have to calculate whether you should register as self-employed or not every month.

INTERVIEW NO. 5

Federica H. (Mijas), 44 years old, single, previously employed in the hospitality industry, currently unemployed.

EG: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

FH: I am Argentinian. In Spain, my training has been approved as equivalent to a qualification for higher technician in Early Childhood Education. I arrived in Spain in 2002, and I initially worked as a waitress, and took care of children. Once my degree had been approved, I started working in schools, school canteens, morning classrooms and after-school activities. I could only work as a classroom monitor because my Argentinian teacher's degree was not approved in Spain. Therefore, my jobs were very precarious: I earned very little, and received no compensation. I love children, and I love working as a teacher, but the truth is that I did not earn enough, and I would have had to study the whole degree again to qualify as a teacher in Spain. Therefore, I decided to stop working in schools, and instead I started to work in the hospitality industry, in hotels. I had previously worked in pubs and cafes. I have worked in hotels for three years now.

EG: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

FH: I have a roommate, but he is not my partner. I rent an apartment with a roommate, so I share my home and no, I have no dependents.

EG: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

FH: In my last job I worked as a waitress in a hotel in Torremolinos. I finished my contract before the pandemic, my

contract ended in February, and the pandemic started in March. After my contract ended I was looking for work in other hotels. I know that my colleagues are all under the ERTE (*Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo, Record of Temporary Employment Regulation*)⁴, so I think that the hotel closed, I do not know if it will open again for the holidays. In that hotel, I only worked for a very short period of about two to three months because I was covering an employee on leave. I worked as a waitress in the hotel dining room.

I was not a member of the union because I had just started to work in that hotel, but if I had worked there for a longer time, I would have been a member. In the two hotels that I worked in before, there were no unions. My relationships with my colleagues were very good.

EG: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment, or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

FH: I cannot say I lost my job because of the pandemic. The pandemic started in March, and I lost my job in February. The issue for me was that before the pandemic, in February when I lost my job, I circulated my CV but nobody contacted me and everyone was already unemployed.

EG: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

FH: After I lost my job, I applied for the Minimum Living Income because I didn't think any hotels would remain open during the pandemic. The only hope I had of financial support was the Minimum Living Income, and on November 4 I received an email informing me that my application had

4 The Spanish Council of Ministers approved on 17 March 2020 a series of measures that allows companies to issue temporary redundancy to its workforce because of the force majeure that in this case is the coronavirus crisis. It is a special regulation that effectively suspends the contract of a worker – or reduces their working hours – for as long as is deemed necessary during the crisis.

been rejected, they did not even send me a letter to tell me about the termination of the employment contract. When I realised that the Minimum Living Income was not accessible to me, I went to the SEPE (*Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal*), the state public employment service and spoke with the director and he told me "You are not eligible for any financial aid that the SEPE provides". I am not entitled to financial support because I have no family responsibilities, I am not a woman who faces gender violence, I am not of gypsy ethnicity or race, and I have no children. I am not over 45 years old, if I were over 45 years old and unemployed, I would be eligible for financial aid. In other words, I cannot receive any benefits provided by the State. I asked the director of the SEPE if he could give me a certificate to show that the state has forsaken me, as the SEPE could not provide me with any support. He told me that he cannot supply me with a certificate because I do not require the support.

It is true that the SEPE helps people in worse circumstances than me, but I am also vulnerable because now I am living off my savings, if I did not have savings I would have to go back to Argentina because I would not be able to keep my apartment.

I spoke with a social worker/social assistant and the only help they could offer me, here in Mijas, was the wallet card which gives you €100 for food. Nothing else, I have no other income. There is no support for people like me. I thought that the Minimum Living Income would include my group this time. In January I'm going to try to apply for it again so that they will see that I haven't worked in 2020, and maybe they can give me those miserable €430. It makes me sick that people say it is possible to live on aid, because I don't think anyone could survive with an income of €430. I pay €450 rent, plus gas, electricity, water, every month. I no longer have unemployment benefits and I have no other financial support; I have nothing.

EG: Since you became unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

FH: I have not received any financial support because my application for the Minimum Living Income was rejected.

EG: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures deal-

ing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

FH: I applied for the Minimum Living Income, but my application was rejected.

EG: After losing your job or during your suspension from work, did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

FH: No, nothing. Waitressing and hotels, forget it, nothing. Now I am taking care of a little girl, one day a week for 3 hours, nothing more, and without a contract or anything, so illegally. They pay me what is stipulated, €8 an hour, but I am not officially hired.

EG: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think that there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

FH: I am desperate. I am able to remain calm because I have savings, but I can also see that it is going to take a long time for things to return to normal. If I do not work my savings are going to run out, I don't know what I'm going to do then because my job prospects are zero. I have even signed up to work as a field labourer. In Jaen, I have friends working in an olive plantation who do not know if they are going to work or not. They have to work outside during the day and it has been raining in Jaen so they can't work, they have now had eight days without work. That is eight days in which they have not earned money. They have to pay rent there, because they need a place to sleep and rest, so their situation is really bad.

There is discrimination against women. I was talking about this the other day with a friend, how women are only concerned with care, especially now during the crisis. For men, as they are physically strong and seen to be good at technical jobs, they have many options for employment, including plumbing, watering and mowing grass. I know they have work because all my male friends are working. Women only have the choice of care of the elderly, the care of children or domestic work, nothing more. Because what else is left for us? Who is going to employ a woman to mix cement? I would like to see how many women there are in masonry. Almost none, and women are just as able as men, but no, only care for us as always, we have care and nothing else in this time of crisis.

EG: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

FH: I am a feminist, I am a member of a feminist association and it seems to me, in the face of the crisis, that women always have to deal with more difficult circumstances than men. This has been the case for centuries, and things have remained difficult for us. Thank God I am healthy, I live in a quiet environment, but there are situations in which women are now locked up with their abuser, and what has the Ministry of Equality done about this? Nothing. We are being killed like flies, there are already 42 dead women, how many more are there going to be, and how much longer are we going to have to wait before something is done?

When I reflect on this situation, it occurs to me that the one who is harmed the most is always the woman. The poor woman especially, but also women like me, who only have a small amount of stability due to their savings, are in a difficult situation. Women who were already in a situation of total destitution, I don't even want to think about. The bottom line is that it is bad for everyone, but much worse for us.

There is no protection for workers. There are some employers who ask their workforce to pay for their own social security. It is assumed that if a company hires you, it pays for your social security, but now there are companies that force you to pay for your social security if you want to work for them. This is totally illegal, but they are still doing it. There is a lot of job insecurity, particularly in the underground economy.

In the summer I was asked to work for 8 hours, taking care of two children, one of which was a 6-month-old baby, without paying for my bus. They wanted to pay me €400 a month for 8 hours work per day. I need work, but I don't want to be exploited, above all I have dignity, and I don't have a dependent, I know that if I had a child, I would have taken the job, but since I don't, I said no. I know that as I did not take it, another girl who needs it will take it. That is how this precarious circle works, it is easy to take advantage of workers in the underground economy because there is no contract, and no legality.

It is very difficult because I believe that a part of the government is trying to change things, in fact, now they want to raise the Minimum Living Income but not all members of the government are working in the same direction. It is difficult to manage policies, and they have put many issues aside because of the pandemic. If the healthcare service was public and had not been privatized, there would not have been a shortage of UCIs (*Unidad de Cuidados Intensivos*). The situation is difficult because no matter how much one wants to change labour policies, it seems that everything is focused on the pandemic, on the vaccine, and on when this is going to end.

We are all in a precarious situation, at least I have savings, but I have friends who have already returned to Argentina. This is like the crisis in 2008, friends have had to return because they could not find work here, they did not have enough savings, and they thought that before spending their savings here, they would return home, because at least then they would have a family, a roof and a plate of food, whereas they have nothing here. We are immigrants, we have no family here, only friends, but how much can friends help you? If I cannot work, I have no choice but to return to Argentina, there is no other way to survive. If the government does not offer aid, there is no way for me to survive.

I am not a transsexual woman, I am not an abused woman, I do not have children, I am not over 45 years old, I just have very little and there are many others like me. I believe that all minorities must be given aid, I understand this as I am one of them. I never asked for help before the pandemic because I had always worked. Now I am in a situation where I am not working because there is no work, not because I do not want to, and I am still not being given any support.

I am an empathic person, but it does not seem right for the state to abandon me. When the Minimum Living Income was introduced, it seemed to me an excellent proposal from the Government which would take groups like mine into account; single people sharing rooms or apartments who pay rent and also contribute to the economy. They promised to take us into account, but that was a lie. I have many friends who are in the same situation and their application for the IMV was also rejected, so it was a lie.

INTERVIEW NO. 6

Elena F. (Málaga), 37 years old, single with no children, previously worked in a private clinic, currently unemployed.

VM: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

EF: After finishing compulsory school, I spent three years completing higher technical training in technology. During these years, I did a working internship at a private clinic. A teacher offered me the internship because I would have the option to continue working in the company after the internship ended. After I finished my training, the company hired me to continue carrying out the tasks I had been performing. I was 20 when I started the employment contract. While working in this company, I also completed university studies in technology.

VM: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

EF: I live alone and I have no children. After losing my job, I applied for unemployment benefits. My application was successful, and I will receive this financial support for two years. Due to the pandemic situation, the agencies which manage financial support applications are overwhelmed. There are many applications and few workers. That is why I have not yet started receiving the monthly support. I am currently using severance pay money from the company to pay for my expenses.

VM: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

EF: I worked in a private clinic and carried out computer management tasks. I had been working in this company for 16 years and I had a permanent contract. The salary was between €1,100 and €1,300 per month. I was paying union dues, but had no interaction with any union workers. My relationships with my colleagues were good. My relationship with my supervisors was good at first, but then we encountered problems. I received pressure from my supervi-

sors not to attend university. The working conditions at the beginning were very good, but when I started studying at university, the working conditions changed for the worse. I took a leave of absence from work for a year to finish my university studies. After returning to work the situation became much more unpleasant.

VM: When did you lose or become suspended your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment, or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

EF: In the summer of 2020, I missed work due to health problems. When I returned to my job in September, they told me that I was going to be fired. I have been unemployed since October 2020. The company had already dismissed several colleagues who had also been working there for many years. These layoffs began during the first stage of the pandemic. The reasons given for these dismissals did not match reality. After being pressured by the company, I ended up accepting my dismissal for objective reasons, and to avoid going to trial. The situation at work was unsustainable. I preferred to accept the dismissal and leave. I had the support of my family and friends during the time I had been working. When I lost my job, they offered me emotional support. As the company has had to pay me financial compensation for my dismissal, I have not needed financial help.

VM: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

EF: Before losing my job, a colleague from the union gave me advice on options at work. She also helped me to improve the conditions of my dismissal. The union could do nothing to prevent the layoffs. The company has a lot of power and knows how to handle layoffs in a favourable way for them. In such powerful companies, unions cannot give much help to workers who are laid-off. I believe that the unions can help us by providing information. When there is a problem with the company, they are not always

on the side of the worker. It depends on the relationship between the union and the company. The greatest help they can give is counselling, especially once a worker has lost their job. Unions should put more pressure on companies to prevent them from using the pandemic situation to fire workers, unless they have economic losses to justify it. They can do a good job if there are highly motivated people who are really want to get involved.

VM: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

EF: I have received financial compensation from the company for my dismissal. As I have worked for many years, I am entitled to receive unemployment benefits for the maximum period of time, which is two years. The money that I will receive is approximately between €700–900 per month. My application for this financial support has been approved, but I have not started receiving it yet.

VM: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

EF: There is an Andalusian Employment Service. This service manages job offers and advises workers who have lost their jobs. I have been registered with this service since I was fired. There is also a state public service that processes unemployment benefits and other support. This public service managed my application for unemployment benefits.

VM: After losing your job or during your suspension from work did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

EF: I have not had any job offers since I lost my job. Therefore, I decided to go back to studying. I want to be qualified to get a better job in the future.

VM: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

EF: I am currently pursuing a postgraduate degree and I want to focus on finishing this before looking for a new job. I believe that women are discriminated against in the workplace. I have experienced discrimination in the company where I had previously worked. In the technology

sector there are differences between working conditions for women and men. Women receive less money than men for doing the same work. Some companies believe that women have less knowledge regarding technology, even though we have the same level of training as men. This problem begins at university, although nowadays many universities are making an effort to encourage more women to pursue technical careers. Until recently, the presence of women in these areas was minimal, among other reasons, this was because of the difficulties of finding a job in this field with the same conditions that a man is offered.

VM: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

EF: I think that the pandemic situation has been an excuse that many companies have used to lay off workers. Companies have decided to fire people who have been working for them a long time, and they have given these employees less financial compensation than what they are legally entitled to. Companies have made up unreal excuses and no one has penalized them for it. They have done this to minimise their losses. They have reduced expenses by firing permanent workers, even when their economic losses due to the pandemic were not so severe.

I don't think there is enough protection for workers. The financial support provided for unemployed people who had not been working for a long period is insufficient. There is also a lack of workers who process the applications for and provision of financial support, and are responsible for ensuring that this support reaches the people who are laid-off as soon as possible. This situation has been exceptional, but there should be more people hired in the public companies that carry out these steps.

Women have been the ones who have suffered the most from unemployment. Especially women with children who are not married, they are the ones who most need help. More women than men have been laid-off by companies and no one is investigating the real causes of these layoffs.

The state and the social partners should prioritize providing support to families that do not work or receive any financial support. They should also prevent companies from

firing workers without just cause. This is their responsibility, with or without a pandemic situation.

INTERVIEW NO. 7

Carmen L. (Málaga), 47 years old, divorced with two daughters, 13 and 19 years old, previously worked in the hospitality sector, currently unemployed.

VM: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

CL: After compulsory school, I completed higher technical studies in Image and Sound. Subsequently, I took several specialized courses in this area. I started working when I was 18, in the family restaurant business. I have worked for the last twenty years in different restaurants in the province. The contracts have not been stable, and the conditions have not been very favourable for me, which is why I have worked for many different companies. Occasionally, I have done work related to my studies.

VM: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

CL: I am divorced. I live with my two daughters who are 13 and 19. They are both studying. My oldest daughter is looking for work. I currently receive financial support for women over 45 with children, but the money I receive is insufficient to cover all my expenses. In addition to this financial support from the state, I receive money from my ex-husband for the expenses of our daughters. I have also occasionally received financial help from my family and friends.

VM: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

CL: My last job was in a restaurant, I was a waitress and I had been working for five years in that company. The conditions of my work contracts were not very good. I worked full time but was not always insured. In addition, the con-

tract I was offered stated that I worked fewer hours than I actually did. Unfortunately, this is done in many companies. The contracts were temporary and part-time, which did not correspond to reality. The salary was approximately € 1000 per month.

I am not a member of a union. My relationships with my colleagues have always been very good. I have had some conflicts with the owner of the restaurant because of the working conditions. That was the reason I was looking for another job while I was still working at that restaurant.

Just when I was about to start working for another company, the pandemic began. All businesses had to close. Then I lost my job and I could not find work in any restaurant. In the summer, I worked as a lifeguard on the beach for three months (June, July and August) for a public job offered by the Andalusian government. In September the contract ended, and I became unemployed again. I am currently still unemployed.

VM: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

CL: I lost my job at the restaurant when the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020. When the government ordered the lockdown, the restaurant was closed, and everyone who had been employed there lost their jobs. Now the owner of the restaurant has opened a new restaurant, but has hired other younger and less experienced people. The pandemic was the main reason for the loss of my job because it caused many businesses related to the hospitality industry to close. Due to restrictions, restaurants have

not reopened, and those that are open have had to reduce their workforce.

My family and friends help me financially so that I can pay for my basic expenses. The money I receive from the state does not cover my basic needs. It is very frustrating for me to depend on financial help from my friends and family. I know that everyone is going through a difficult situation, but I cannot do anything else right now. When I go back to work, the first thing I will do is to pay these people back.

VM: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way, specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

CL: I did not interact with a union while I was working, or after I lost my job. There were no union workers in the restaurant, and I did not receive any help or advice from the union. I know that the contracts these companies offer are not legal but no union stands up to these employers. Workers do not want to lose their jobs, even if they have bad working conditions. We have to keep working in order to survive.

When I became unemployed, I used Meridianos, a private organization that is helping me in my job search process. Through it, I am participating in the selection processes of different companies.

VM: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

CL: I have been unemployed since September 2020. When I lost my last job, I applied for financial support for unemployed women with children. The amount is approximately € 400 per month. I will receive this support for eighteen months. Later, I will be able to request more financial aid for women in my situation.

VM: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

CL: There is the Andalusian Employment Service (SAE) that manages job searches and advises unemployed people. I have been in the process of actively seeking employment

through this service since I became unemployed. There is also another public body, the Public State Employment Service (SEPE) which manages unemployment benefits and other financial support for people without work. This public service advised me on obtaining financial support, and has managed the documentation involved. As there have been so many people who have lost their jobs since March, the SEPE offices have closed. It is difficult to access help, but I understand that there are few workers and a lot of work to do.

VM: After losing your job or during your suspension from work did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

CL: I have not received any job offers. Through the organization that I mentioned above (Meridianos) I am participating in selection processes for different companies. The companies are generally stores that sell clothing or other products. The jobs I am applying for involve work selling products in these stores. The contracts offered are temporary. Currently, restaurants cannot hire more workers as there are no tourists, and the opening hours are short. They are losing a lot of money.

VM: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

CL: I continue to participate in all the selection processes for the job offers indicated to me by the SAE and Meridianos. I would like to open my own business, but I do not have enough money to invest in it. That is why I am going to keep looking for work.

I think there is employment discrimination against women, especially if we are mothers or caregivers of dependent people. If we are also over 45 years old, there is even less chance of getting a job. If a man of that age applies for a job, the company will hire him, but if it is a woman and a mother, the employer thinks she will miss work in order to care for her family. This means that there is always a preference for hiring men. Sometimes we women think that taking care of our children is our responsibility, and nobody else's. This maintains discrimination.

Men have the same responsibilities, but generally it is mothers who care for their children. This is taken into account by employers, and it is why there are differences between a man's or a woman's opportunities in the labour market.

VM: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

CL: I think that workers do not have enough protection. Nobody checks whether people are adequately insured, especially those working in restaurants, where there is very little protection. The group that is suffering the most are

young people and people over 45 years of age, and especially if they are women. The state and the social partners should regulate contracts and insist on better, more stable contracts instead of temporary and part-time contracts. They should also penalize companies that make contracts which do not correspond to reality. I believe that more help and facilities should be offered to people who want to open their own businesses. There should also be more information about these processes. The positive side to this situation has been that, for the first time, I have been able to spend quality time with my daughters.

INTERVIEW NO. 8

Carla H. (Málaga), 50 years old, divorced mother of four children, previously worked in the hospitality industry, currently unemployed.

EG: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

CH: I completed basic education, which was known as the EGB (*Educación General Básica, Basic General Education*)⁵ at the time. I got married very young, I had four children and I never worked. Since I divorced, 15 years ago, I have been working in the hospitality industry. I worked in hotels, and very often without insurance.

EG: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

CH: I have four children and two of them live with me. The two that live with me are 19 and 21 years old. Regarding the economic situation of my family, I may be put me in jail because I am not paying any of my bills, I have unpaid loans and credit card debt. It is a disaster, I am desperate.

EG: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform?

How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

CH: I worked in Fuengirola, as a hotel room maid. I have been working in hotels since 2016. I always only worked for a period of one year at a time, so I would work for one year, then I would be dismissed and have no job for 6 months, and then they would hire me again for a year, and so on. In February 2020, I started working and would have had a guaranteed job until February 2021, but due to the pandemic, the hotel closed.

EG: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

CH: In February of this year, and of course I lost my job due to the pandemic, because the hotel had to closed. If the pandemic hadn't happened I would be working now, by February 2021 I would have finished my year of work and the hotel would have given me my severance pay. Then I would have received unemployment benefits, and I would have spent 6 months at home, but now everything is different. No, nothing at all, I have no financial support from my family. Today I have eaten a piece of stale bread: that is all.

⁵ In Spain, the EGB was implemented from 1970 to 1990.

EG: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

CH: No, I didn't.

EG: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still receive income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

CH: I applied for financial help, and I receive €430 per month. However, since I had only been working at the hotel for a month before I lost my job, I am not entitled to receive unemployment benefits.

Before starting to work in the hotel, I also received benefits of €430, which ceased when I started working in February. Since the pandemic started and I lost my job, the benefits were restored and I think I have a year left.

EG: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

CH: No, the financial aid was organised for me by a social assistant, and thank God, because I didn't even know how to apply for it. The office was closed and I couldn't reach anyone by telephone, it was a disaster, but thankfully the social assistant has helped me with the paperwork.

EG: After losing your job or during your suspension from work did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

CH: No, I would have liked to receive them.

EG: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

CH: I have always worked in the hospitality industry as a room maid, and most of the hotels are closed. Therefore I asked a social worker for help sending my CV to a meat company in Málaga which I knew was hiring, and to some cleaning companies. I have been told to contact the social worker again in January, she will continue to help me circulate my CV. I believe that everyone is in the same situation, my son-in-law is also unemployed and has a 4-month-old daughter. My son is also unemployed: he was registered under the ERTE (*Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo*)⁶, and then laid off. Therefore I think that men and women are suffering equally, at least from what I have seen.

EG: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

CH: The hotel ran out of customers and all flights were cancelled, so the rooms were empty and everyone working at the hotel, including the director, sustained losses. COVID-19 has been a disaster. It has been a disaster for everyone, it has left me in debt. When the phone rings, I don't pick it up because I know it is the bank. I have not paid the community tax, the water, the electricity, or any of my bills, because I cannot.

The state is not helping, they are liars. At the INEM (*Instituto Nacional de Empleo*)⁷ they told me that all people who were working when the pandemic began had the right to unemployment benefits, but this is not the case, since I have not received them.

The INEM have said that even if you have not been contributing for a year, you are still entitled to receive unemployment benefits. This is advertised on television, and would be great because unemployment benefits are like a salary,

6 The Spanish Council of Ministers approved on 17 March 2020 a series of measures that allows companies to issue temporary redundancy to its workforce because of the force majeure that in this case is the coronavirus crisis. It is a special regulation that effectively suspends the contract of a worker – or reduces their working hours – for as long as is deemed necessary during the crisis.

7 The INEM, which stands for Instituto Nacional de Empleo (National Employment Institute) disappeared in 2003 and is now called SEPE (Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal), is an autonomous institution that is linked to the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security.

but nothing has happened. I have only received basic financial support, which is hardly enough to really support me, and I received it only after a 3 month delay. I had to survive for 3 months without any income, by the time it arrived I was feeling suicidal.

I don't know, but I think that for all the people who had had a job and an employment contract and who lost their jobs because of COVID-19, the Government should pay their salaries as if they were still working, like the people registered under the ERTE. Then, these people would stay at home, but would also receive their former salary. If the pandemic had not happened, today I would have worked in the hotel and I would be earning €1,500 a month. I was not worried about my finances before the pandemic, but suddenly this crisis has happened, and I have been left with nothing.

I am grateful that I do at least receive some financial support, because I had only worked in the hotel for a month

and a half before the crisis began, and you cannot expect much unemployment support under those circumstances.

I am in a very bad situation, I would not wish it on anybody. If things improve and travel becomes possible again in March or April, hotels will reopen, but of course the permanent workers will be re-employed first. Maybe I will get my job back in September.

I am desperate, because I only have €430 per month to live on, and now I also have credit card debt building up, and loans which I cannot pay back. I have been told that a legal notice will be issued against me, and I have been asked whether I have anyone who can help me. Sorry, but the help which people can give me only extends to a plate of food, they will not be able to pay for my credit card debt. Legal proceedings were postponed in March, then they were postponed again for 3 or 4 months more due to my unemployment, but now they are calling me again and I am still unemployed. How am I going to pay? I have nothing.

INTERVIEW NO. 9

Almudena P. (Málaga), 52 years old, married, previously employed in the hospitality industry, temporarily laid off.

EG: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

AP: I completed the EGB (*Educación General Básica, Basic General Education*)⁸, the basic education level at that time. After my graduation from school I qualified to work in childcare, but I have never done so because at the time I wanted to start working as soon as possible. In fact, I started to work at the age of 16 in a hotel, and have continued working there.

EG: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

AP: I am married. I have two children and two grandchildren. My daughter is 35 years old, she is the mother of my grandchildren, and my son is 22. My husband also works in the hospitality industry, he works in a hospital cafeteria.

The economic situation in my house is not too bad, I cannot complain because my husband is a permanent worker and I am entitled to special benefits for my employment in the hospitality industry. This is financial aid which the government has provided for permanent and temporary workers. This aid will affect my unemployment benefits later because it is deducted from my unemployment support, but it is described as a special financial aid. Until now I have been receiving support under the ERTE (*Expediente de Reg-*

⁸ In Spain, the EGB was implemented from 1970 to 1990.

ulación Temporal de Empleo)⁹, and then I worked from June 26 to October 15.

My son is unemployed, as I suppose all of the youth are. He worked with his father for a time, but due to the pandemic, he lost his job in March. I cannot complain because there are two of us working in my household, and two salaries coming in, but I recognize that the situation is very difficult and we are all scared. We are scared because we do not know what will happen next and it is clear that the hospitality industry has been badly damaged. We will have to see how we are going to face this coming year.

EG: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationships with colleagues?

AP: During my last job I worked in a hotel, between June 26 and October 15. I worked in the kitchen, washing up dishes. This year I joined the union, and I am very happy with it. It has been difficult in the past because I had problems with workplace harassment, and it is very difficult to fight against such a large company, but I am not alone. We have 9 members in the union now, and we are negotiating for the best conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

No, I have no problems with any of my colleagues. There will always be some who like me, and some who don't like me, but generally I feel appreciated by them. I started working at the hotel when I was 16, so almost everybody knows me. For me, the main problem in my workplace is that you are considered to be a good employee as long as you keep your head down, but as soon as you stand up for yourself and say, "Hey, that is against the law", you have to face workplace harassment, and life is made very difficult. I was subjected to a lot of humiliation and psychological abuse, and when I could not take it anymore, I told them what I really thought, which caused a lot of problems.

EG: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

AP: The hotel I was working in only had 900 guests in August, it was a very difficult season as we are used to having 2,300 guests. In addition, we had to undertake extreme security measures with regards to COVID-19.

We are used to having many guests staying in the hotel, but this year, due to the travel restrictions, we have had very few guests, and therefore very few employees were required to work. It has been difficult working with so few colleagues, but we have done the best we can.

The working season ended on October 15, for me this was not too bad because we usually finish on October 30. But what about my colleagues who have not been able to work this year? Yes, there has been very little work. The hotel employed the minimum possible number of employees, they actually didn't engage quite enough employees to carry out all the work that had to be done.

I started working in January, on March 20 I had to stop working because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this suspension from work I was registered under the ERTE, and I returned to work on June 26. I finished working in October. This year we only had four people working in the hotel, usually we have 12/13 people.

EG: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If so, in what way?

AP: Things are very difficult, the union is very quiet, they do not want to get involved much because the situation is serious, and we do not know what to ask for. We do not know whether to speak out or not, for example we demanded that the hotel let us use the staff dining room again during

⁹ The Spanish Council of Ministers approved on 17 March 2020 a series of measures that allows companies to issue temporary redundancy to its workforce because of the force majeure that in this case is the coronavirus crisis. It is a special regulation that effectively suspends the contract of a worker – or reduces their working hours – for as long as is deemed necessary during the crisis.

our shifts, since it had been closed due to sanitary measures, but they refused.

In the staff dining room we had access to water, this has now been taken away from us and the hotel does not provide us with water during our shifts at work. I asked the committee to speak with the director, if they cannot keep the staff dining room open for hygiene reasons due to COVID-19, then they should at least provide us with water. They are taking everything from us.

EG: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still have income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

AP: Yes, I was registered under the ERTE when we had to stop working in March. And then I also received a special aid which the state created for permanent and temporary workers in the hospitality industry. I will receive this special aid until February 2, this month I received around €1,140.

EG: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures dealing with the relocation of workers and support? What answers did you get?

AP: No, honestly at my age and after all the years I have worked, I am just going to wait and see where this situation will lead, and I hope it will end soon. When the hotel reopens, I am assured re-employment. Originally they wanted to open the hotel again on January 8, because that is when they usually open, but it was too difficult so now they have decided on a date in February, right now they want to re-open the hotel on February 14.

EG: After losing your job or during your suspension from work did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

AP: No, I did not receive other job offers.

EG: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

AP: I am waiting for the hotel where I used to work to re-open. Yes, we are more discriminated against than men. When companies choose which employees to lay off, they

choose women first, it is also more difficult for us to get to certain positions.

EG: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

AP: To me this whole situation seems like a movie, I can't believe that it is really happening. Do employers take advantage of the situation? Yes. All inconvenient workers are going to be removed, because an ERTE can be changed to an ERE (*Expediente de Regulación de Empleo*). I am very afraid, because I am 52 years of age, tired of working, with osteoarthritis all over my body. The labour market is terrible. I do not know what will happen to the hospitality sector. I do not want to imagine myself in a situation in which I am not re-employed, but I have to be realistic. I am glad that there is a date for the re-opening of the hotel, but employers are still able to take advantage of the situation.

There is no protection because we employees always keep quiet and do what we are told, if we stood up for ourselves, the situation would be different. However, I do know it is difficult, and that there are people in very bad situations who will take any job, no matter how bad the conditions are.

There is a lot of discrimination against women. When it comes to the kitchen, it is a man's territory, I do not know whether this will change one day, but right now the kitchen working environment is full of sexism. Now, thank God, younger chefs are being employed, but the older ones? I have had many battles with them. I believe in parity, but I always prefer to work with women because women are tougher and don't complain so much, men are crankier.

We have many disadvantages in the workplace, and we earn less than men, in Spain women earn less than men. The top positions are always given to men, in all the years that I have worked at the hotel I have not seen a single woman working as head chef. And yes, when it comes to redundancies, a dishwasher is almost always laid off before a chef. I might have thought that a chef would have to be laid off at the same time as a dishwasher, as more cooking

means more dishes to clean, but it appears that chefs will always be employed in preference to dishwashers.

Firstly, the government should clarify their intentions, and then they must support the hospitality industry, because Spain lives from the hospitality industry. If they do not support the hospitality industry, I do not think our economy will survive.

INTERVIEW NO.10

Alba M. (Málaga), 25 years old, single with no children, previously worked in warehouse inventory management, currently unemployed.

VM: Can you tell us about your educational path after finishing compulsory school? Can you tell us about your career path? At what age did you start paid work? In which sector? What other occupations did you perform?

AM: When I finished compulsory school, I took university studies related to languages. I am currently studying a master's degree. I started working in the family business (a pastry shop) at the age of 14 while attending compulsory school. I did not have a work contract. After finishing university studies, at the age of 23, I started working in warehouse inventory management for a company whose services were hired by other companies. I started working there two years ago, in November 2018. The conditions of my contract were not very good for me. I always received temporary contracts which lasted for a day, and I only received my salary on the days I worked. In November 2020 I lost my job. Since then, I have not returned to work.

VM: Who do you live with? If you live with a partner, what work does your partner do? Do you have children? If so, how old are they? How would you describe the economic condition of your household?

AM: I have a partner, but we have not been able to become independent and live together due to job instability. My partner is also currently unemployed. I have no children. I live in my mother's house with my mother and my brother, my mother is separated from my father. My mother used to work as a cleaner. She is currently unemployed. My brother is the only one who works. He pays for our expenses. The situation is not very good, but we are able to survive.

Politicians should earn less. We have many politicians, there should be less politicians and more support for other employees!

The state must look into the cases of people in need individually, because each person is in a different situation, but it must help, and it must promote industry. During the pandemic we have all realized that Spain lives off the hospitality industry, this is not sustainable and we must invest in other industries and transform ourselves as a country.

VM: In relation to your last job, can you tell us which institution/enterprise was involved? Is it still active? In which sector does it work/did it work? How long have you worked in this institution/enterprise? What tasks did you perform? How much did you earn? Were you a member of a union? Can you describe your relationship with colleagues?

AM: My last job was for a private warehouse management company. I worked for this company for two years, my tasks involved organization and warehouse management.

After I had been working there for a while, I became the coordinator of a working group. The salary I received for my work was approximately €900 per month. It was not a fixed salary, it depended on the number of days I worked each month. I have never belonged to a union. My relationships with my colleagues have always been good, communication and teamwork were very important for our work.

VM: When did you lose or become suspended from your job? Can you describe the reasons and conditions that led to this loss of employment or its suspension? To what extent did the pandemic play a role in the loss of your job or its suspension? Were you supported by your family and friends? If so, in what way?

AM: I lost my job in November 2020. In March 2020, my working days were reduced due to the work situation caused by the pandemic. Although I continued to work in the summer, I was given fewer and fewer work days each month. In October I was told that in November I would not continue working for the company. All companies have

suffered losses due to the pandemic. This has caused many of them to cut costs and relinquish services provided by other companies. As there was not enough work, my company was not able to maintain their workforce. As my employment contracts only ever lasted for one day, the company were able to fire me without any problem. I believe that the pandemic situation was the reason for my loss of employment. Since I lost my job, I have had to depend on my family. I live in my family home, and my brother is the one who contributes money to pay for our expenses.

VM: Did you interact with any union and/or other groups (women's networks, local volunteer networks, etc) in the phase immediately before and after the beginning of the pandemic? Could you tell us in which way specifically? Did the trade unions intervene to help you? If yes, in what way?

AM: I did not interact with the union or any other group before or after I lost my job. I do not know anyone from the union at my old job. Nor do I have much knowledge about the work they do. No organization helped or advised me after I lost my job. The type of contract I held made it very easy for the company to dismiss me. The company has not had to compensate me for my dismissal. My colleagues are in the same situation. If there is no work, it makes sense that contracts have to be terminated.

VM: Since becoming unemployed or temporarily laid-off, what income support have you received? For what amount? Do you still have income support from the state? If so, how long will you receive it and how much is it?

AM: Since I lost my job, I have not received any financial support. I am not entitled to receive any unemployment benefits. Although I had been working for the company for two years, I have not officially contributed enough to be eligible for any economic support for unemployment, due to my temporary contracts. Nor am I eligible for any other type of financial support, because I live with my family and I have no children. I don't have much information about other grants that I could apply for.

VM: Are there any public employment services which could help you? Have you asked for help from the structures deal-

ing with the relocation of workers? What answers did you get?

AM: There is the public Andalusian Employment Service (SAE) which advises unemployed people, and manages job offers. I have been registered with this service since November 2020. Through this service, I can check job offers from various companies. I participate in some selection processes, but I have not had a job offer yet.

As I have been out of work for a short time, I am not likely to be offered a job. People who have been unemployed the longest are prioritised.

I understand that this is fair, although those of us who have recently lost work also have financial needs, especially those of us who do not receive any help from the state.

VM: After losing your job or during your suspension from work did you get any job offers? If so, in which sectors and under what conditions?

AM: Since losing my job, I have not received any job offers. I am still applying for job advertisements that I find through the SAE and in other employment pages, but in the situation I do not think I have a chance of finding work anytime soon.

VM: Have you thought about finding another job? If so, what actions have you taken? Do you think there is discrimination against women in the labour market?

AM: I began working on a project to start my own travel company a few months ago, before the pandemic. I went to various organizations for advice on entrepreneurship, and they informed me about my options. I have maintained communication with CADE¹⁰, which helps young people through an entrepreneurship support program which receives grants from the regional government. This entrepreneurship centre has provided me with information concerning grants, subsidies and how to access them. The project was well advanced, but due to the pandemic, I have had to postpone it. Now I have to wait for the situation to improve, before I can proceed. Personally, I did not experience gender discrimination in my previous job, but I have heard of cases of discrimination. In the company where a

¹⁰ Andalusian Entrepreneurship Centres for the creation and development of companies (*Centros Andaluces De Empeñamiento para la creación y desarrollo de empresas*).

friend works, a man earns € 500 more than a woman who does the same job. If the degree of training and the job is the same, there should be no difference in salary. I am sure that there is discrimination both when it comes to accessing work and its conditions. We are so used to these things that they no longer surprise us, but it is true that women tend to have a disadvantage in the workplace. Statistically, women of today are equally or more highly trained than men. We are equally qualified to do the same job, but other factors that are not related to qualification for employment are taken into account by employers.

VM: What reflections have you made in relation to the job loss or temporary suspension from work you experienced? Do you think there is sufficient protection for workers who lose their jobs or are suspended from work? What about for women who lose their jobs? What should the state and social partners do to support workers in this particular phase of the pandemic?

AM: I think that the economic measures that the government has taken in terms of unemployment support make sense in the circumstances, although I also think that there should be reduce spending on areas which are less important than unemployment support. It is important to know how to prioritize. All families should have their basic needs covered by financial support. When employment is not possible, this financial support must be offered to the most vulnerable people.

One problem is that financial support is often delayed due to a lack of personnel to manage it. I also believe that there is a lack of information about support and how to access it. There are many people who do not know how to access this information, and that is why they do not apply for support.

I live in a neighbourhood where there is a lot of poverty. It is not only financial aid which is missing, but also information. There are many NGOs helping women and informing them about job vacancies in areas such as cleaning, or other unskilled temporary work. If they cannot find a job, the NGOs help to manage their applications for support. Often, these women don't know how to apply for support themselves. I think a lot of information is missing, which is why there are still families who need help but do not know how to ask for it.

9. Biographies

Emelina Galarza Fernández is a feminist scholar and professor at the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the University of Málaga. She has carried out national and international investigations. She has published book chapters and articles in national and international scientific journals. Her latest publications are: with Valcarcel, A. et al. (2019). Las competencias profesionales como factor clave en la metodología didáctica de la comunicación organizacional. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria*, 17(2), pp. 11-24; with Vilena Alarcón, E. et al. (2020). Funcionalidad turística de la gestión de la comunicación en redes sociales de museos de Málaga. *Doxa Comunicación Revista interdisciplinar de estudios de comunicación y ciencias sociales*, 30(30), pp. 1-22.

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Tania Toffanin is a feminist sociologist, lecturer at the University of Padua and research associate of Lise-Cnam (Paris),

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Tania Toffanin designed the research project, elaborated the questionnaire to be submitted to the interviewees, coordinated the fieldwork and wrote the introduction.

Emelina Galarza Fernández and **Virginia Martagon Vazquez** selected the workers to be interviewed and conducted the interviews.

Emelina Galarza Fernández, **Virginia Martagon Vazquez**, and **José Ignacio Rivas Flores** wrote the research report.



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