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EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis

France

Gilles Huteau, Michel Legros, Claude Martin, Alis Sopadzhiyan,
Béatrice Valdes



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

**ESPN Thematic Report:
Social protection and inclusion
policy responses to the
COVID-19 crisis**

France

2021

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Béatrice

The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

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SUMMARY

Between Monday 3 February 2020 and Sunday 18 April 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in France, it was 8,157. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for both the EU-27 and France.

The health crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic has had a very strong impact in France, as it has in other countries, to the point where, for the first time ever, public authorities implemented an almost total lockdown of the country, its population and activities from 17 March to 20 May 2020. A second lockdown was implemented between 30 October and 15 December 2020, immediately followed by a curfew between 8pm and 6am, rapidly extended to 6pm-8am. President Macron decided to extend measures to curb the pandemic and, in particular, to close schools during 5-26 April 2021. Since then, schools have reopened progressively. The curfew was relaxed to 9pm on 3 May 2021 and to 11pm on 9 June 2021. Any form of curfew will stop on 30 June 2021.

The scale and suddenness of this measure followed a period (January to March 2020) during which risks had seemed relatively minor, and had even been played down. This triggered numerous criticisms of the slowness and limitations of public action, including controversies around the accessibility of the required measures (in particular the number of masks available and access to tests).

An extensive series of measures ensued, affecting all sectors of social protection, as well as employment and housing, and concerning education and support for economic activity in numerous sectors. This massive set of public support measures was summed up by the French President in his address to the nation with the since much quoted words: "whatever it costs".

The measures adopted included generous financial packages to help tackle the wide-scale impact of this totally new situation on households, their daily lives and incomes. They consist mainly in a relaxation of existing legislation in numerous social protection sectors (involving extended coverage or more flexible criteria to avoid loss of eligibility). They mostly prioritised groups of the population at risk or affected by the pandemic, with a focus on epidemiological and medical aspects, without taking into account the full extent of economic and social consequences, in particular how the measures adopted may reinforce inequalities.

A notable exception is the set of measures to arrange shelter for homeless people, to support young people and students facing precarious economic, social and housing conditions and some vulnerable job-seekers on short-term contracts, or to support working parents during the lockdown. Overall, all social policy sectors have been affected to different degrees by the measures implemented, but what constitute a major shift is the job-retention scheme.

The urgency and extent of the mobilisation of public funds to deal with the intensity of the pandemic during the first half of 2020 has also had the effect of suspending projects for reform that had either been announced or were underway: a structural reform of pensions and a reform of the unemployment insurance scheme. Both will no doubt be picked up again when the effects of the pandemic are under control.

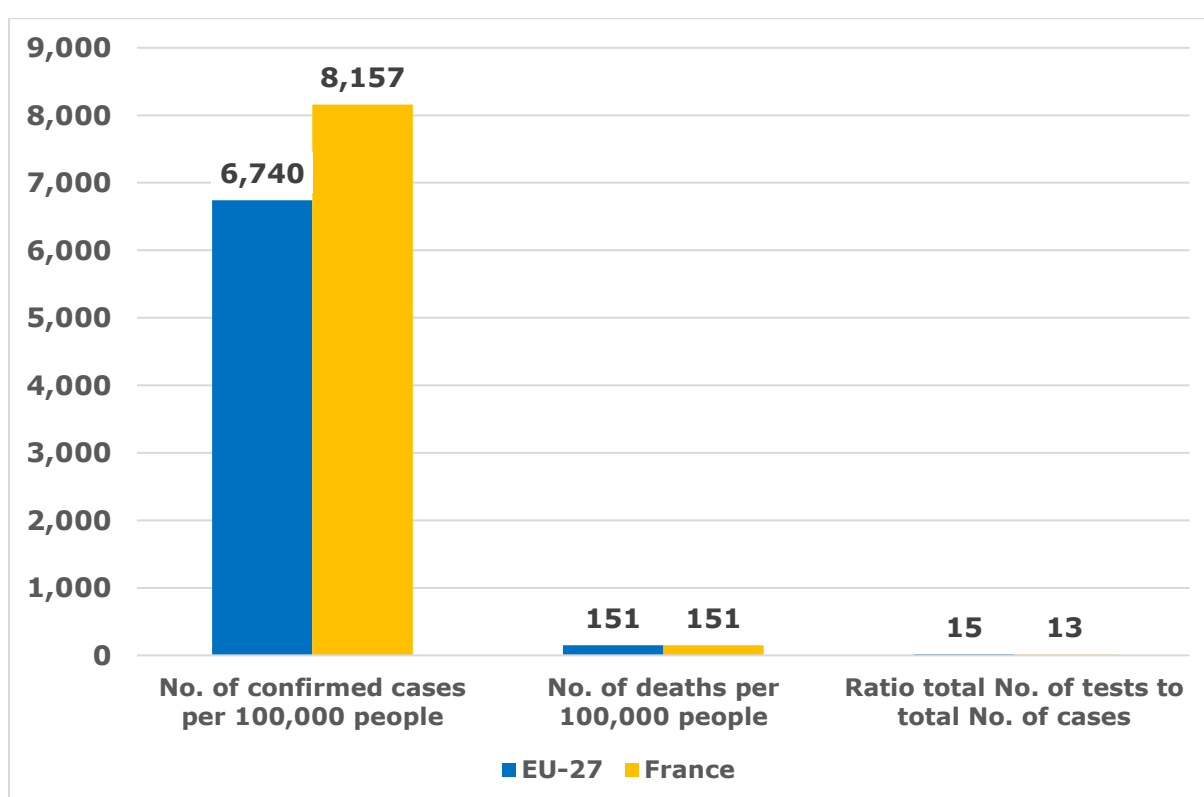
This report takes into account the situation up to mid-April 2021. It should be noted that at the moment of finalising this report quite a lot of the requested data/information are still unavailable. We do not consider that this situation is due to a failure in the French statistics system. Reporting and evaluation will be done at a later date, and subsequent reports will no doubt fill these gaps.

1 TRENDS OF THE PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT¹

1.1 Epidemiological situation

During the 63 weeks considered for these three indicators (from Monday 3 February 2020 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in France, it was 8,157. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27 versus 151 in France. The ratio of the total number of COVID-19 tests conducted to the total number of confirmed cases was 15.3 for the EU-27 and 13.1 for France.

Figure 1: Total number of COVID-19 cases and deaths per 100,000 people & ratio of total number of COVID-19 tests to total number of cases, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and France)

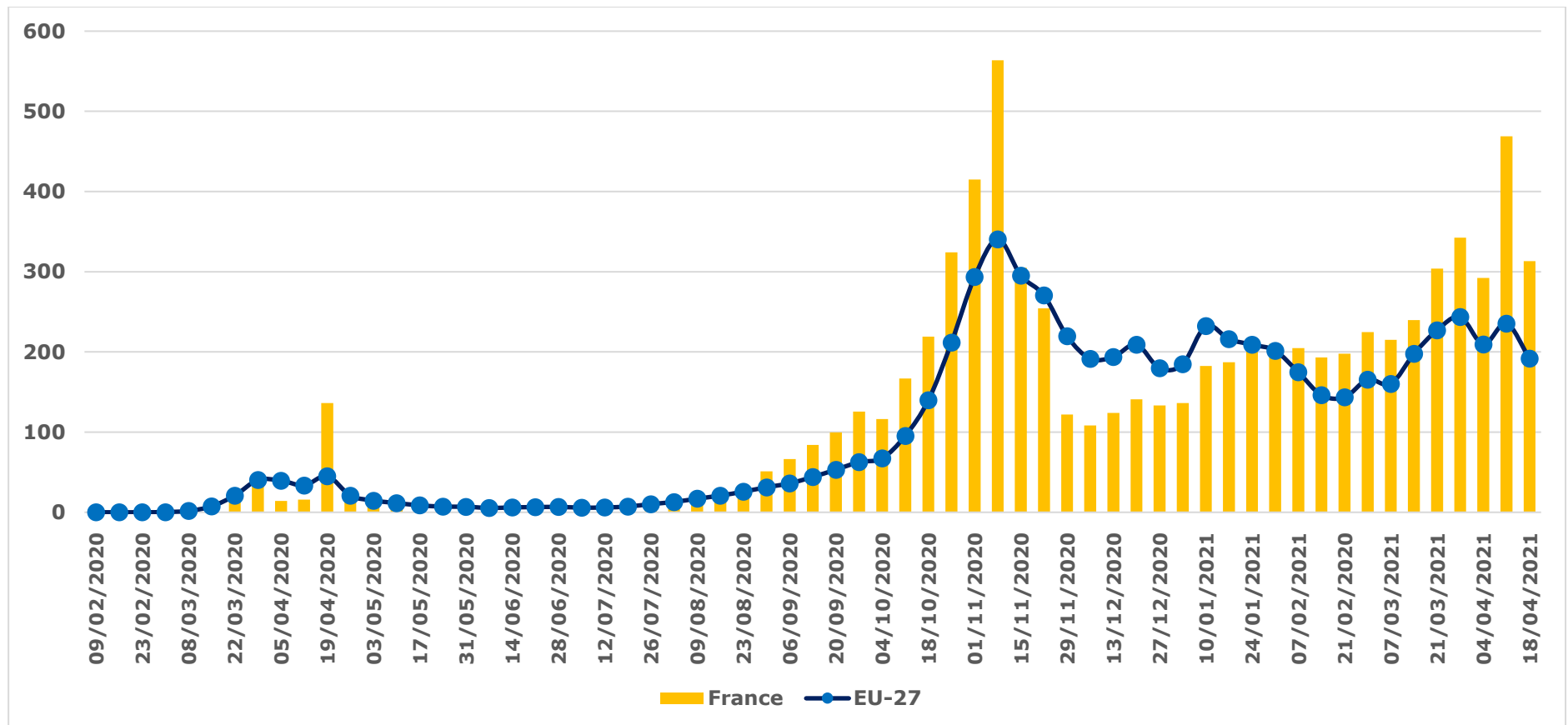


Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021

¹ Except if otherwise specified, the indicators presented in Sections 1.1 and 1.2 were calculated by the ESPN Network Core Team on the basis of data coming from two data sources: Our World in Data (OWID: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-source-data>) and the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>). These indicators were calculated for all the 35 ESPN countries for which data were available. All of them are presented in Annex B of the following report: Isabel Baptista, Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Ramón Peña-Casas, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazzoni (2021), *Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. This report also provides additional explanations on the data sources used and the calculation of the indicators. In addition, Annex B of the report provides the country results related to all ESPN countries included in the two international data sources used (see Tables B1.1, B2.1 and B3.1 for Figure 1, Table B1.2 for Figure 2, Table B2.2 for Figure 3, Table B3.2 for Figure 4, Tables B4.1, B4.2 and B4.3 for Figure 5, Table B5 for Figure 6, Tables B6.1-3 for Figures 7a-c, and Tables B7.1-3 for Figures 8a-c). The full report and its various annexes can be downloaded [here](#).

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people reached 191.8 for the EU-27. In France, it was 313.3.

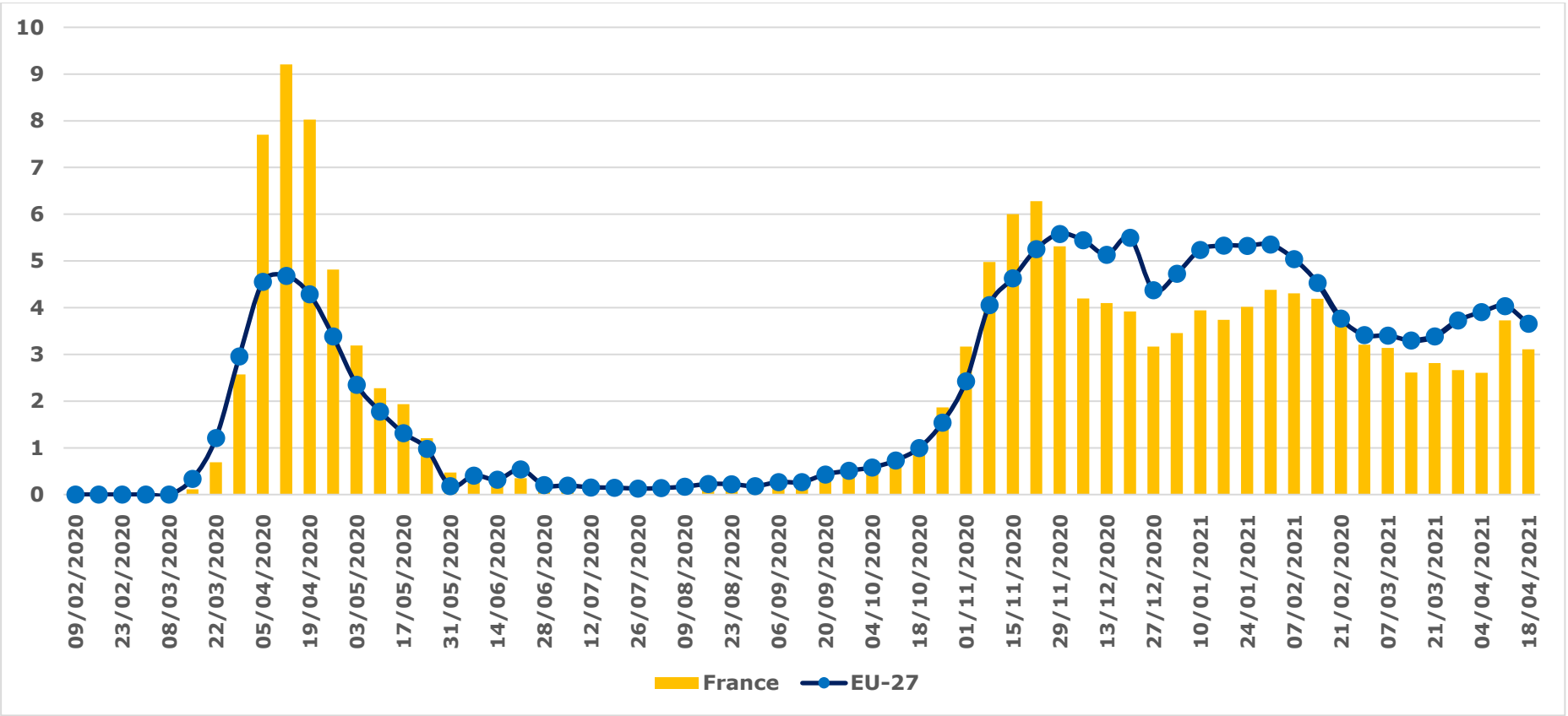
Figure 2: Weekly evolution - Number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and France)



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people reached 3.66 for the EU-27 as a whole. In France, it was 3.11.

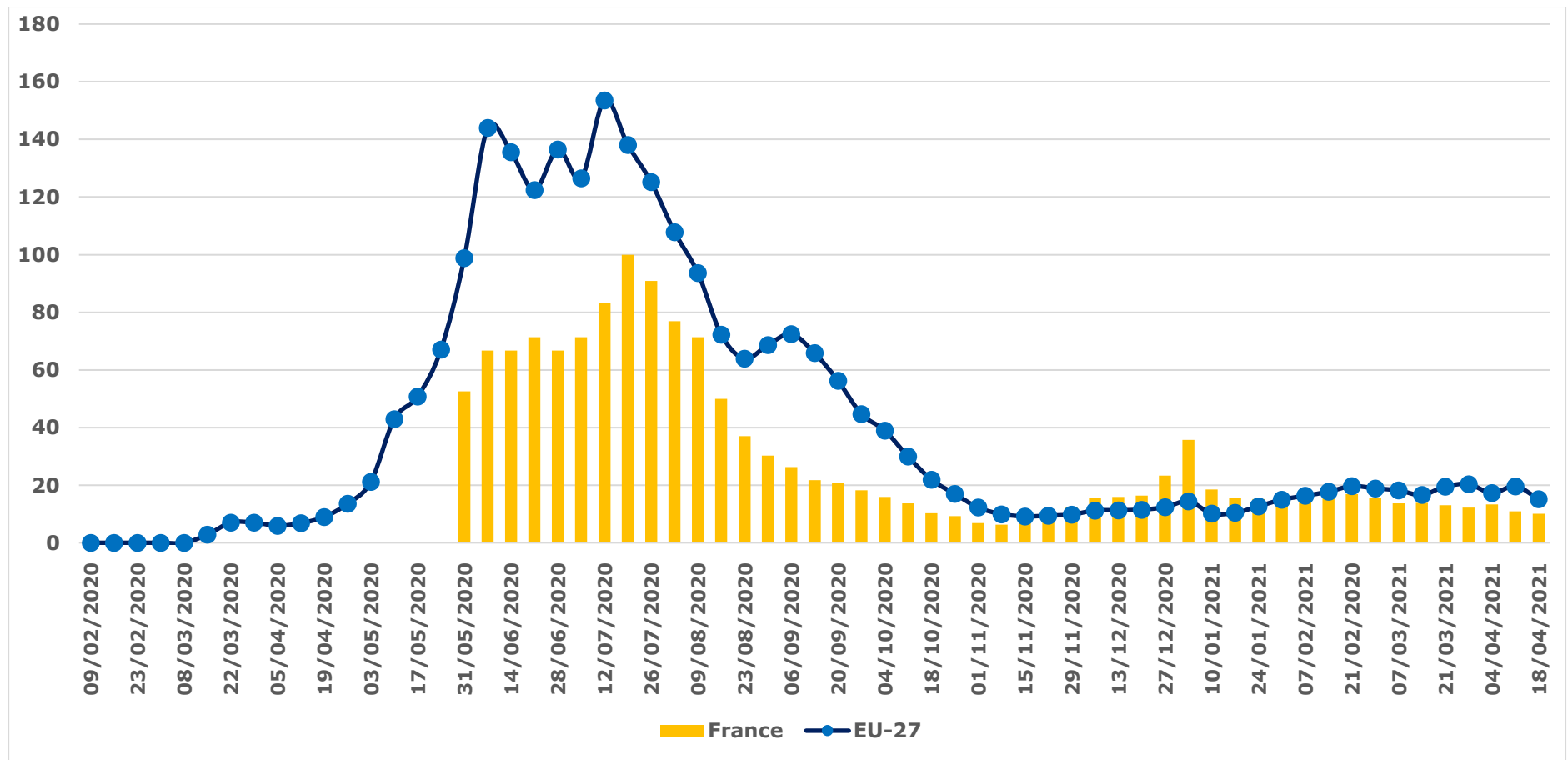
Figure 3: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and France)



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 cases was 15.2 for the EU-27. In France, it was 10.1.

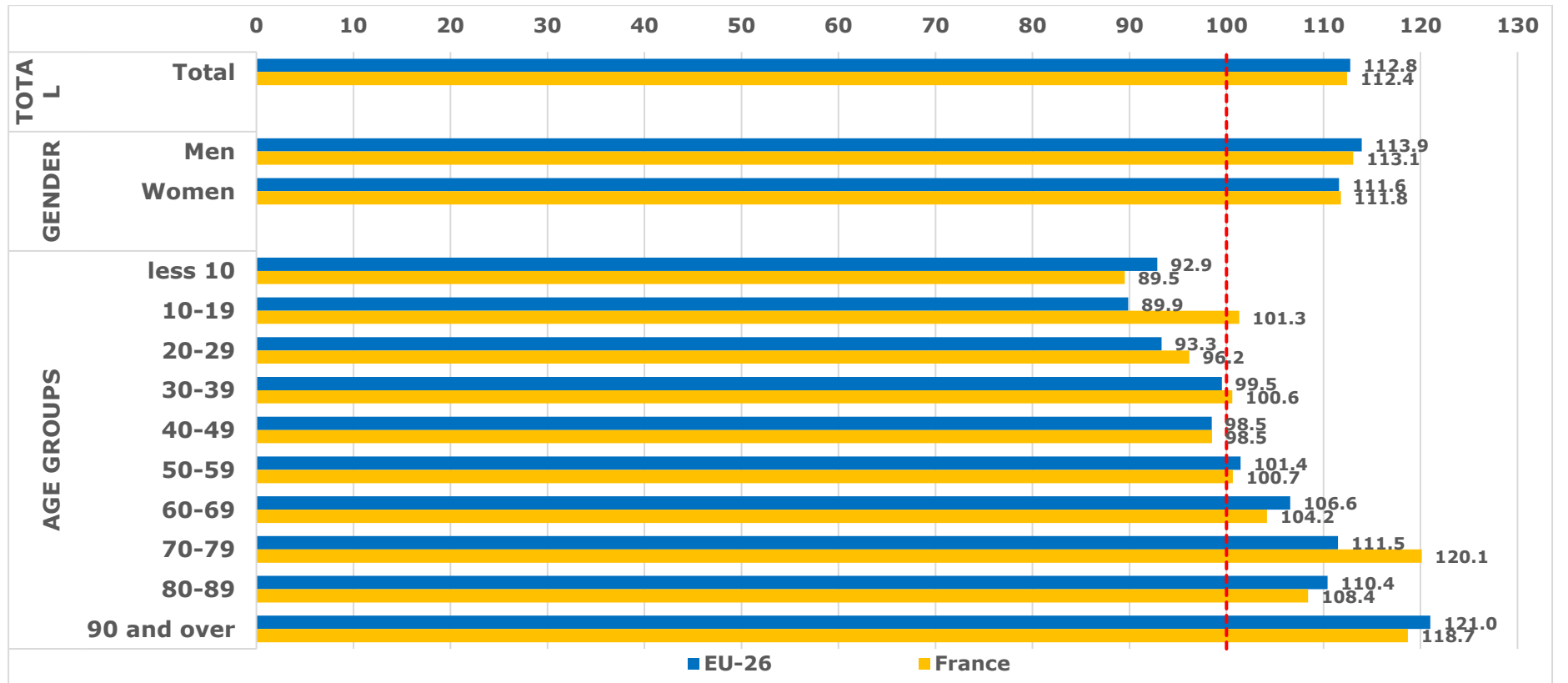
Figure 4: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 case, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and France)



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021. Full quote for these testing data: Hasell, J., Mathieu, E., Beltekian, D. et al. (2020). "A cross-country database of COVID-19 testing". *Sci Data* 7, 345 (2020) (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-020-00688-8>).

The excess mortality ratio for 2020 is the total number of deaths (without distinction of causes) in the year 2020 expressed as a percentage of the previous 4-year (2016-2019) annual average of the total number of deaths. For the EU-26 average (no data for Ireland), the ratio of the total population is 112.8% while it is 112.4% in France. For the EU-26, it is 113.9% for men and 111.6% for women. In France, these gendered ratios are 113.1% and 111.8% respectively. Excess mortality is higher among older age groups. For those aged 90 years and more it reaches 121.0% for EU-26 and 118.7% for France.

Figure 5: Excess mortality - Total number of all deaths in 2020 as percentage of the 2016-2019 annual average (including gender and age breakdowns (EU-26 and France))

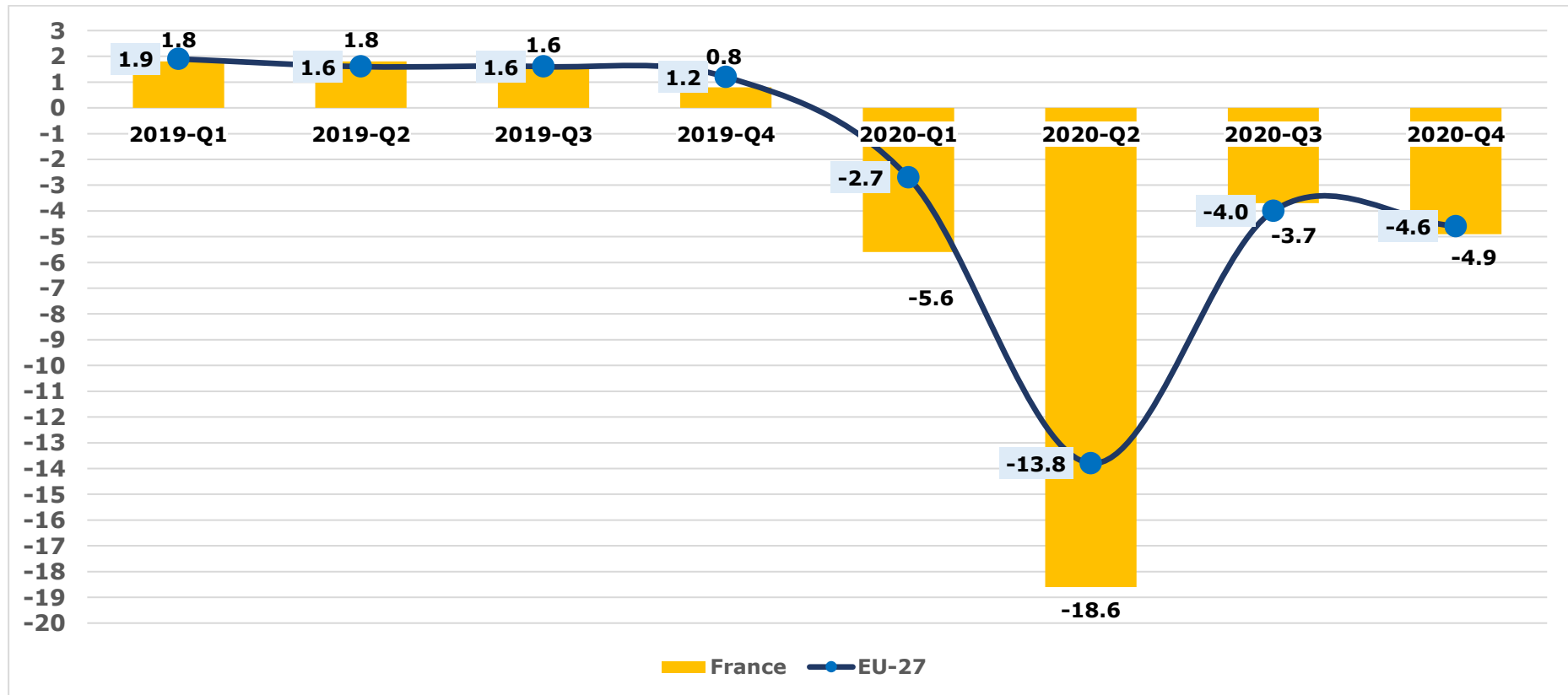


Source: Eurostat - indicator [DEMO_R_MWK_10_custom_560457] Deaths by week, sex and 10-year age groups - downloaded 26 April 2021. For Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (data received upon request on 19 April 2021).

1.2 Economic and (un)employment situation

In the EU-27, GDP in the fourth quarter (2020-Q4) of 2020 fell by 4.6% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 (2019-Q4). In France, the decrease was 4.9% for the same period.

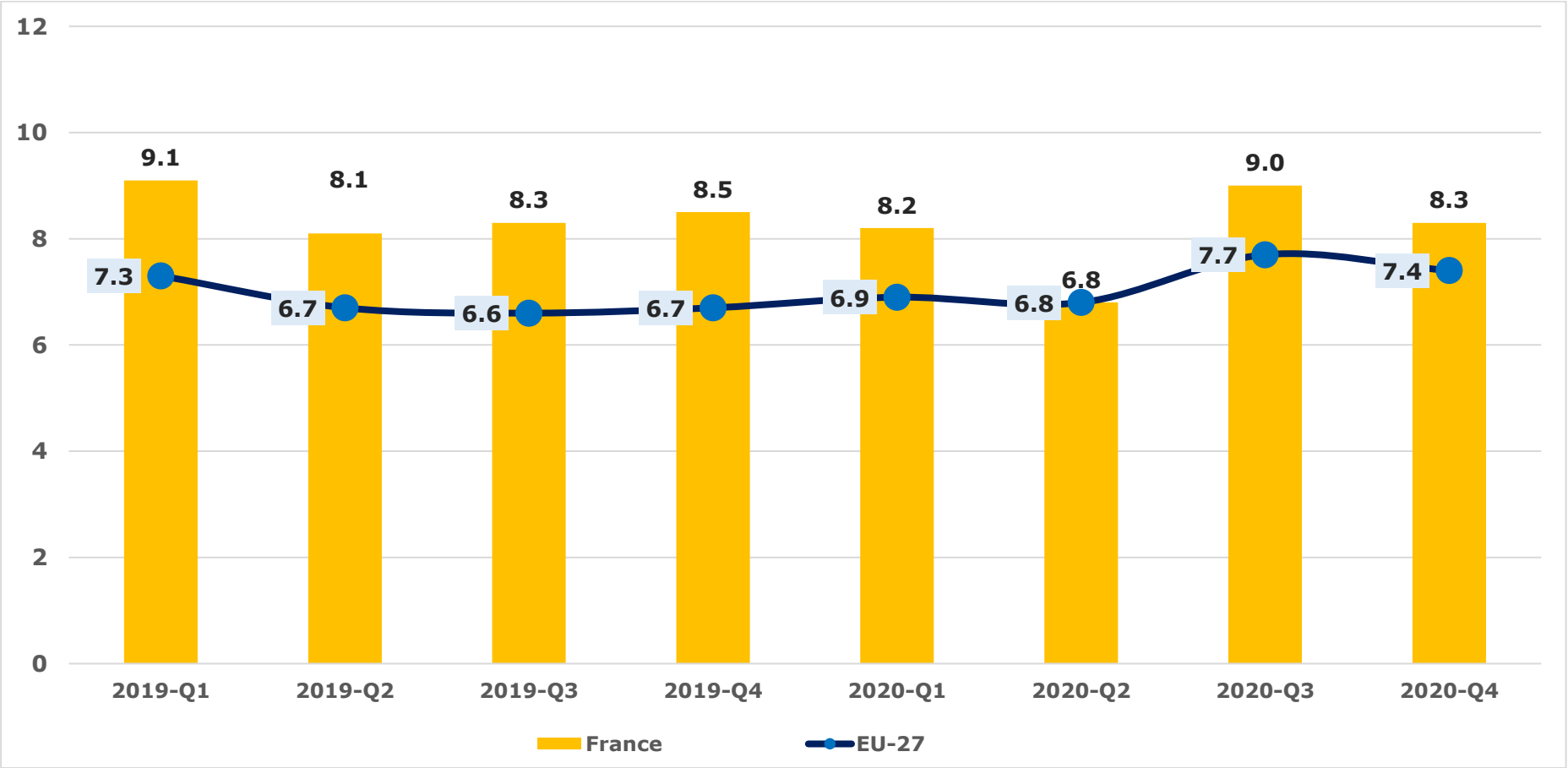
Figure 6: Gross domestic product at market prices, chain-linked volumes prices adjusted, percentage changes in quarter compared with same quarter in previous year (2019-2020, EU-27 and France, %)



Source: Eurostat -GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income) - indicator [NAMQ_10_GDP__custom_507806] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.4%. In France, it is 8.3%.

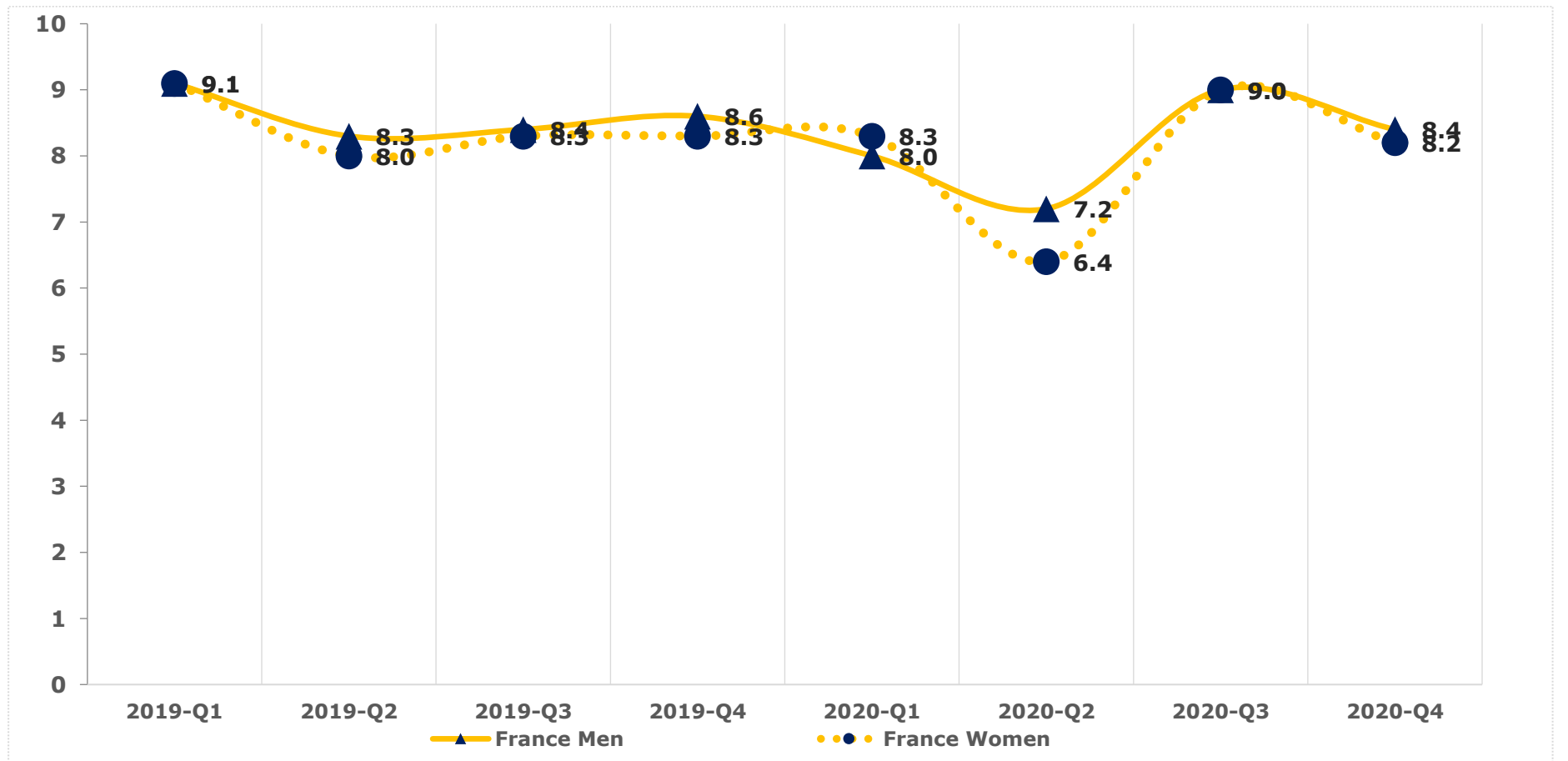
Figure 7a: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.1% for men and 7.7% for women. In France, these figures are 8.4% and 8.2% respectively.

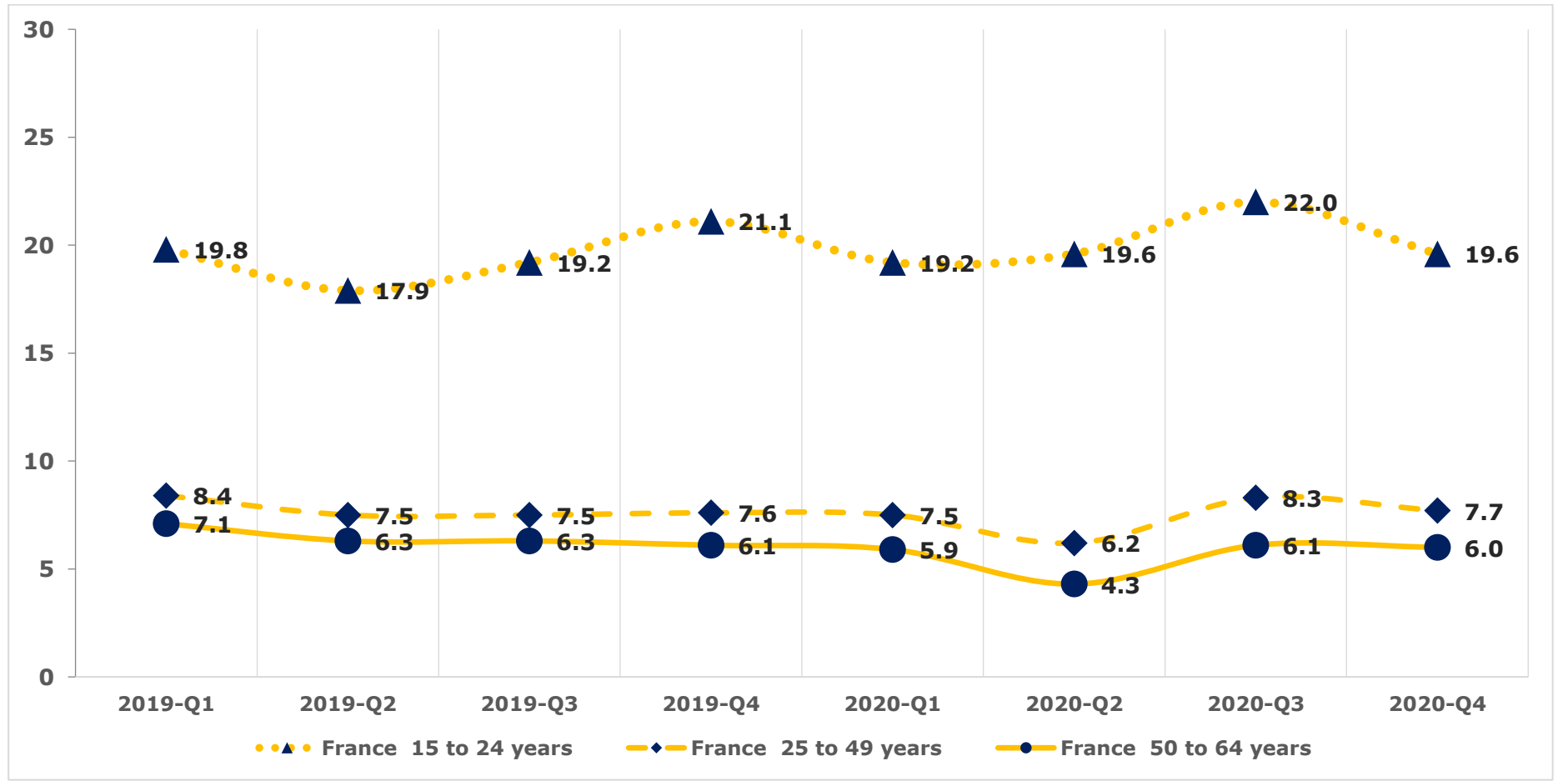
Figure 7b: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 is 16.9% for the 15-24 age group. In France, it is 19.6%.

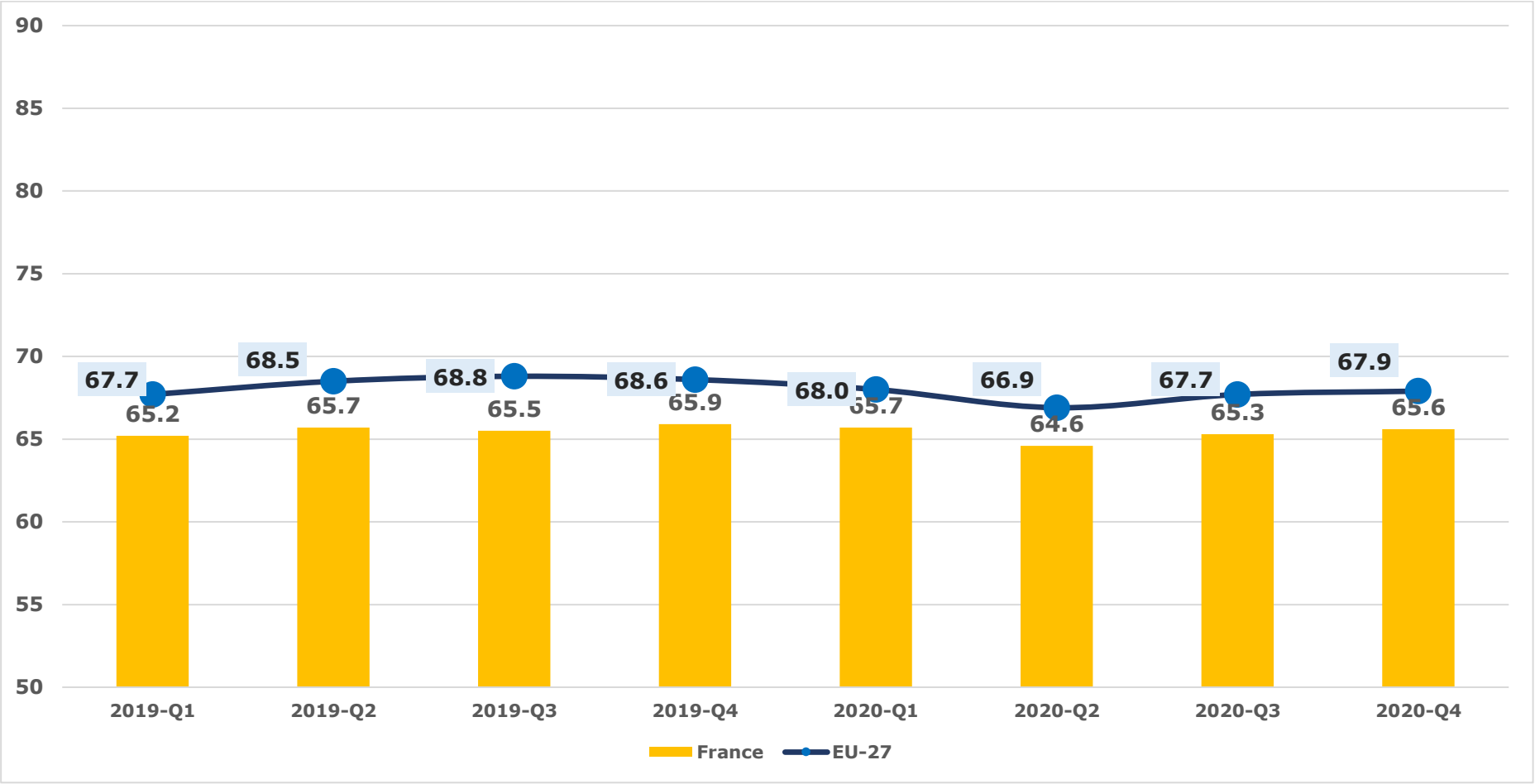
Figure 7c: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_organ] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate for people aged 15-64 in the EU-27 is 67.9%. In France, it is 65.6%.

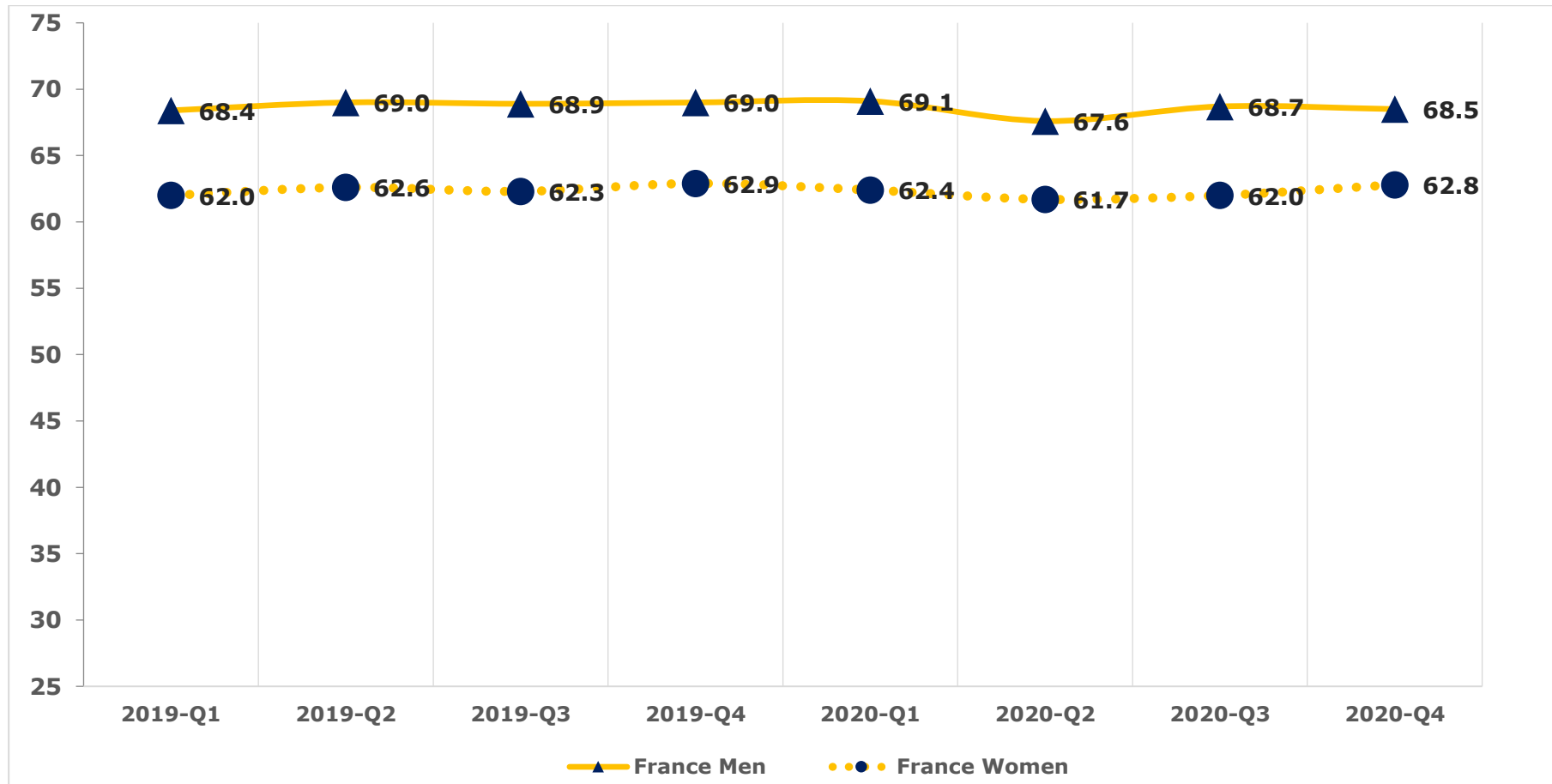
Figure 8a: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 73.0% for men and 62.8% for women. In France, these figures are 68.5% and 62.8% respectively.

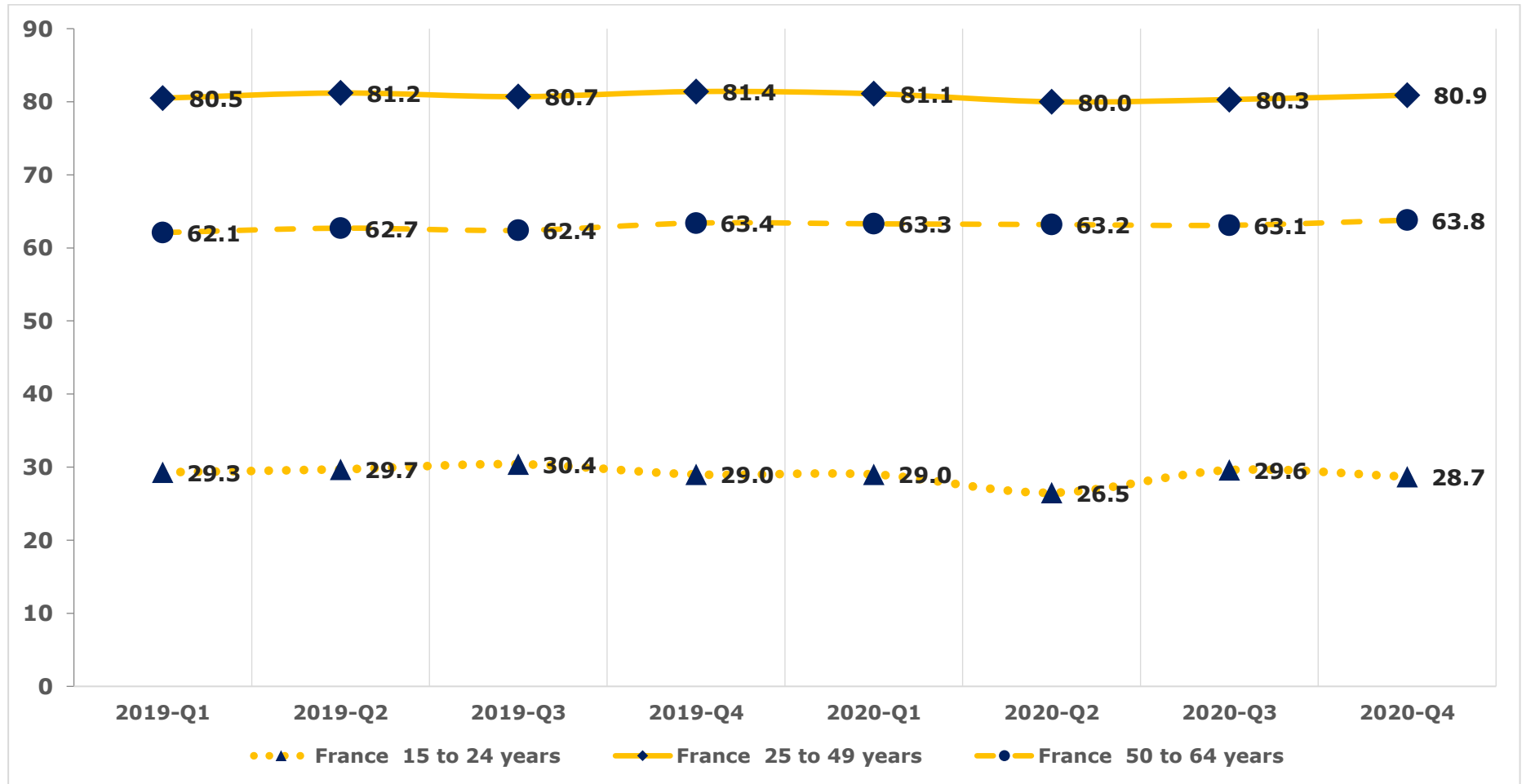
Figure 8b: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 31.1% for the 15-24 age group. In France, it is 28.7%.

Figure 8c: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, France, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

1.3 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion situation

Income poverty statistics for 2020 are not available yet, but different sources highlight an inevitable increase in poverty since the start of the first lockdown, as follows.

- At the end of December 2020, 2.06 million households were claiming *revenu de solidarité active* (active solidarity income – RSA) compared with 1.9 million in December 2019, which was an increase of 7.5%. (DREES, 2021). While still higher than the pre-health crisis figure, the number of RSA recipients continued in February and March 2021 the downward trend that began in December 2020.
- The *Caisse nationale des allocations familiales* (National Family Benefits Fund) (Cnaf, 2020) estimates that the number of households claiming RSA should have remained almost stable throughout 2020. The observed increase is clearly a consequence of the health crisis (Cnaf, 2021).
- During 2020, the *Fédération Française des Banques Alimentaires* (French federation of food banks), which supplies 5,400 centres, increased its distributions by 25%, and on 8 September 2020 the Minister for Health and Solidarity reported that an estimated 8 million people were in need of food aid, compared with 5.5 million in 2019.
- Increased social support for students is also an issue of concern. In January 2021, 9,100 students benefited from a one-off special allowance allocated by the *Crous* (student welfare offices) to young people in emergency situations or subject to economic distress, which was a rise of 39% compared with January 2020 (DREES, 2021).

Based on the observation of 700,000 net job losses in the first half of 2020 (INSEE, 2020 a,b), and their experience in the field, charitable organisations estimate that around one million people have fallen into poverty due to the health crisis². Some authors underline that one should remain attentive in the coming months and years to the possibility of an artificial reduction in the poverty rate due to the likely decline in median income (Duvoux, Lelièvre, 2021).

Concerning inequality, the first results of the survey by Epicov (Épidémiologie et conditions de vie [epidemiology and living conditions]) involving 135,000 people from March to May 2020 underline the cumulative impact of social inequalities. These inequalities include differences in mortality rates, the prevalence of infection, and more acute social vulnerabilities. (Bajos et al, 2020). The most recent analysis on inequality and poverty highlights both the short-term protective role played by state measures and the risks faced by the poorest groups in the post-crisis period (Lambert, Cayouette-Remblière, 2021; Duvoux, Lelièvre, 2021): “It’s never been easy to be poor but now it’s worse. Beyond the need to compensate for the immediate impact of the crisis, it is absolutely essential to prevent the long-term and sometimes irreversible trajectories of poverty, which are often the hidden side of crises: France in 2021 still bears the traces of the 2008 crisis”³.

² Le Monde, 6 October 2020.

³ Fiona Lazaar, President of the National Council for Policies to Combat Poverty and social Exclusion, preface to the report on poverty and the health crisis (Duvoux, Lelièvre, 2021).

2 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC⁴

This section provides a brief description of the main measures related to social protection and social inclusion that have been put in place to help mitigate the financial and social distress produced by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. It is based on readily available data and evidence. For each measure, it provides the following information.

- a) Short description of the measure.
- b) Category: Is it a flat benefit, a conditional benefit, both a flat and a conditional benefit, or neither a flat nor a conditional benefit?
- c) Timing: When did the measure start/end? Has it been extended?
- d) Depending on the category:
 - amount and duration (for flat measures); and
 - range (minimum-maximum), duration and conditionality (thresholds) (for conditional measures).

If the measure is neither flat nor conditional, this is indicated by "Not applicable".

- e) Targeted population: what is/are the target(s) of the measure? – that is to say, which parts of the population or of the labour force or which sectors. Where data and evidence are readily available, estimated number of people targeted and/or applicants.
- f) Beneficiaries: What is the number of recipients of the measure (if relevant and available)?
- g) Novelty: Was the measure new or an already existing one that was adjusted?

Quite a lot of the requested data/information were unavailable or non-existent, in particular those needed for this section. In our view, this is not due to a failure in the French statistics system. With the need to provide an emergency response to the sanitary crisis, and applying the "whatever it costs" approach put forward by the French President, public authorities have had to distribute support in an exceptional period of unlimited expenditure. Reporting and evaluation will be done at a later date, and subsequent reports will no doubt fill these gaps.

2.1 Measures related to unemployment benefits

Mesures exceptionnelles et temporaires d'indemnisation (Extraordinary and temporary benefit measures)

- a) Short description of the measure: Starting from March 2020, the government has relaxed most of the benefit procedures affecting job-seekers. These fine adjustments, which are presented below, are aimed at making it easier to access unemployment benefits, to extend their duration, reduce constraints, and even increase the amounts of the benefit. These alleviations are as follows.
 - *Suspension de la dégressivité de l'indemnité pour les hauts salaires* (Suspension of the phased reduction of benefits for high salaries). The scheduled 30% drop in the *Allocation de Retour à l'Emploi* – ARE (back-to-work allowance) for beneficiaries aged under 57 whose former salary was above €148.54 per day, or €4,518 per month, was suspended until 31 March 2021.
 - *Allongement du délai de forclusion* (extension of time limit). To be eligible for unemployment benefit, claimants at the end of their work contract formerly had 12 months to sign up as a job-seeker with *Pôle Emploi* (jobcentre). Due to the health crisis, this period has been extended by the number of days without a work contract from 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2021.

⁴ The temporary measures mentioned in this report refer to the situation as of 15 April 2021. Their duration may have been extended since then.

- *Maintien de l'indemnité de formation* (Maintenance of the training allowance). In cases of suspension of a training course accredited by jobcentres, opening up the right to claim *Allocation de Retour à l'Emploi-Formation* (back-to-work/training allowance, AREF), this allowance is maintained during the period of interruption.
 - *Prolongation du versement de l'Allocation de Retour à l'Emploi* (Extension of payment of back-to-work allowance, ARE). For beneficiaries coming to the end of their eligibility for this principal unemployment benefit between 30 October 2020 and 31 January 2021, payment was automatic until the end of February 2021 and was likely to be extended beyond that date.
 - *Allongement de la période de référence d'affiliation* (Extension of the employment reference period). This period concerns the minimum duration of employment in order to be eligible for, or reaffirm eligibility for, unemployment benefit. It used to be 24 months, but has now been automatically extended by three months, amounting to 27 months for employees aged under 53, and 39 months for those aged 53 and over.
 - *Assouplissement de la durée minimale d'affiliation* (Greater flexibility for the minimum employment period). From 1 November 2019, to receive unemployment benefits, claimants had to have worked at least 130 days, or 910 hours (about six months) during the reference period mentioned above. Since 1 August 2020, this condition has been reduced to 88 days, or 610 hours (about four months) during the previous 24 months.
 - *Dérogation aux conditions de cumul de l'ARE avec des tâches d'intérêt général* (Exemption from conditions concerning a cumulation of ARE with general interest tasks). By way of derogation, ARE may be cumulated with income earned from general interest tasks carried out as part of action against the COVID-19 pandemic, whatever the number of hours involved in these activities.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Most of the measures were implemented during the first lockdown in mid-March 2020. Several have been readjusted, in particular between the two lockdowns; for example, the minimum employment period. Initially announced to apply until 31 December 2020, the measures have been extended every month so far in 2021 to reflect the health crisis situation. In January 2021, no detailed data were available on the temporary and extraordinary measures constituting a relaxation of the different procedures to access unemployment benefits.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: These measures apply to all private sector employees seeking employment and signed up at jobcentres who receive unemployment benefits or meet with criteria for doing so. At the end of June 2020, the number of claimants eligible for benefits represented 67.4% of unemployed people signed up at jobcentres in categories A, B and C. Of these, 78.0% receive unemployment benefit.
- f) Beneficiaries: Thus, 52.6% of people signed up at jobcentres in categories A, B and C receive benefits (Dares, 2021).
- g) Novelty: These different measures, which are only adjustments to existing provisions, are not designed to be maintained beyond the health crisis. Forthcoming conventions involving social partners will need to decide on new terms regulating unemployment benefit for job-seekers, and probably re-examine the unemployment insurance reform in its totality. While the reform of unemployment insurance had been suspended during the health crisis, the decree of 30 March 2021 (Decree No 2021-346, JO 31 March 2021) makes applicable, from 1 July 2021, a new method of calculating daily unemployment benefits. This measure is expected to affect 1.15 million job-seekers in the first year of implementation, with a 17% reduction in the daily allowance. (UNEDIC 2021c, Unemployment Insurance Reform).

Mesures exceptionnelles et temporaires pour les intermittents du spectacle (Exceptional and temporary measures for people employed in the entertainment industry)

- a) Short description of the measure: Given the COVID-19 health crisis, which has put a stop to all activities relating to the performing arts, and the audio-visual and film industries, since March 2020 employees in this sector have benefited from an extension of their entitlement to claim unemployment benefits in what has been called an *année blanche* (blank or free covered year).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: At the end of this measure, scheduled to run until 31 August 2021, an examination will be made of eligibility to claim unemployment benefit including a number of potential modifications that have not yet been announced.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: To be eligible for the status of “*intermittent*” and the related benefits, artists must be able to provide evidence of 507 hours of declared, remunerated activity (subject to precise conditions) over 12 months. Claimants’ cases are reviewed annually: if they have not cumulated another 507 hours over the previous 12 months, they lose their status; and if they have, they are eligible for another year of benefits. The status of *intermittent du spectacle* opens up the right to a daily allowance proportional to income, ranging from €31.36 to €133.27.
- e) Targeted population: *Intermittents du spectacle* are employees occupied as artists, technicians or in an administrative position in the performing arts, audio-visual or film industries. They alternate periods of work and unemployment on short-term contracts based on a project rationale. They come under a specific regime in the unemployment insurance system, which entitles them to benefits if they can prove 507 hours of work over the previous 12 months. This status concerns 272,000 employees.
- f) Beneficiaries: 117,000 *intermittents* (43%) declare sufficient hours of work to benefit from this status.
- g) Novelty: This measure constitutes a strong response to professionals in a sector subject to total shutdown who are entitled to a specific unemployment package (which has, however, been the subject of numerous conflicts in the past).

2.2 Measures of job protection provided through support to employers, employees and the self-employed

Modulation des cotisations sociales (Adjustment of social contributions)

- a) Short description of the measure: Starting from March 2020, the *Unions de Recouvrement des cotisations de Sécurité Sociale et d’Allocations Familiales* (organisations for the collection of social security and family benefit contributions, URSSAF) have allowed private employers and self-employed people to reduce the level of their social contribution payments. These measures take the form of deferred contributions, exemptions, and aid towards payment.
 - *Reports de cotisations* (deferred contributions). At each due date, employers can postpone all or part of their employer and employee contributions. Declarations must still be sent in at the scheduled dates. The deferral must follow an online application. If URSSAF does not reply within 48 hours, the application is considered to be accepted. Any unpaid contributions are automatically deferred and URSSAF then offers employers a debt-clearance plan. No penalties or additional charges for late payments are applied. Direct debit contributions for self-employed people have been totally suspended.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures have been regularly renewed since March 2020 and are likely to apply during the first semester of 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality:

- Deferred employer contributions: At the end of November 2020, the amount of deferred employer contributions since March 2020 came to €10.25 billion (6.0% of social contributions due over the period) and concerned 70% of companies. Four sectors account for 27% of the deferrals: retail (8.2%), specialised construction work (8.5%), catering (5.5%) and wholesale trades (4.9%).
 - Contributions made by self-employed workers. These contributions were not required between 20 March 2020 and the end of August 2020, amounting to €10.3 billion. In November 2020, self-employed workers (apart from medical practitioners and auxiliaries) were entitled to postpone their contributions once again, and direct debits were suspended. Six sectors account for half of self-employed workers' outstanding balance: retail and wholesale trades, specialised construction work, catering, legal and accounting activities, and real estate.
 - Exemption from social contributions. Article 65 of the amending Finance Act of 30 July 2020 defined the scope for benefiting from an exemption from social contributions (fewer than 250 employees and a 50% loss in turnover compared with the previous year). The total amount of exemptions and funding towards payment received by a company cannot exceed €800,000. This figure is €100,000 per company for the primary agricultural production sector. A budget of €3.9 billion has been allocated to this expenditure.
- e) Targeted population: Although contribution deferrals apply to all employers, exemptions concern companies with fewer than 250 employees in sectors affected by administrative restrictions or by a drop in their activity of at least 80%. Under certain conditions, companies in these sectors can also benefit from a contribution credit (aid towards payment) of an amount no higher than 20% of wages paid out.
- f) Beneficiaries: These benefits concern companies and not people. Data providing a detailed breakdown of these companies are not available.
- g) Novelty: The measures do not really involve anything new, but rather the strong mobilisation of existing special rules.

Activité à temps partiel (Job-retention scheme/furlough)

- a) Short description of the measure: The furlough scheme, known as *activité partielle* in France, is a job-retention measure regulated by the labour code and financed by the state and UNEDIC (national union for employment in industry and trade). This scheme allows employers to neutralise all or part of the cost of unemployment compensation paid out to workers in cases of a suspension or temporary reduction of their business activity caused by economic difficulties or exceptional circumstances. Employers must first make a *demande d'activité partielle* (furlough claim, DAP), which must be accepted by the local services of the Ministry for Labour, Employment and Economic Inclusion. The measure is not subject to a working time threshold (UNEDIC, 2020 a). Although initially set to apply until end April 2021, it may be extended depending on the development of the health crisis.

A special measure called *activité partielle de longue durée* (long-term job retention, APLD) has been in place since 1 July 2020 and is currently in force until July 2022. It is conditioned on the conclusion of a collective agreement. This measure is applicable for a renewable six-month period, for a maximum of 24 months. The reduction of an employee's working hours cannot exceed 40% of the legal hours per employee, for the total duration of the agreement.

- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: This measure, which was adopted from the start of the first lockdown (16 March 2020), was in uninterrupted operation until 31 January 2021 and is likely to be extended throughout the health crisis.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount of benefits received by a furloughed employee depends on the salary that they earned previously and the actual number of furlough hours. Employees receive a job-retention compensation instead of their salary.

This compensation corresponds to 70% of their gross wages (i.e. about 95% of net wages) at a minimum of €8.03 per hour. Companies receive a payment from the state corresponding to 85% of the amount of employees' job-retention compensation, capped at 4.5 times the minimum wage. This coverage by the state can amount to 100% for companies in the tourism, hotel, catering, sport, culture, airline and events sectors, and for companies in sectors subject to legal restrictions or specific regulations due to the health crisis or affected by the curfew in place in several French towns starting from 17 October 2020. The current rules of the job-retention scheme will therefore last until at least 1 June 2021 and will then be withdrawn in stages.

- e) Targeted population: The job-retention scheme concerns all employees, including all kinds of non-standard workers (part-timers, temporary contact workers, temporary agency workers etc.) subject to a drop in their remuneration following a reduction in their working hours or the temporary closure of all or part of their workplace. Eligibility for the furlough scheme is not dependent on seniority, type of contract (short-term, apprenticeship, permanent, etc.), or working hours. All employees on a contract subject to French private law can be furloughed provided that their employer is eligible. Whatever their size and business sector, all companies are eligible for the job-retention scheme. However, self-employed workers and micro-entrepreneurs are not eligible.
- f) Beneficiaries: At the height of the first lockdown, in April 2020, 8.4 million employees benefited from the job-retention scheme (Table 1). The sectors that made the greatest number of applications were hospitality, retail and business services. In November 2020, two regions, Ile-de-France and Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, accounted for the highest rate of DAP. During the first lockdown, 8.4 million employees were furloughed, totalling 816 million hours. The cumulated cost of this measure since March 2020 amounts to €25.1 billion, funded two-thirds by the state and one-third by UNEDIC.
- g) Novelty: The *activité partielle* furlough scheme is a measure that dates from 1968, improved by the Employment Protection Act of 14 June 2013. Nevertheless, the measure had never been used so intensely. However, the *activité partielle de longue durée* (long-term job-retention scheme) is a new creation designed to support recovery, and could be used beyond the health crisis situation.

Table 1: Job retention in 2020-2021 during the health crisis

Estimate on 26 April 2021	March	April	May	June	October	November	March 21
Number of furloughed employees (millions)	6.9	8.4	7.0	3.6	1.8	2.9	2.3
Number of furloughed full-time equivalents (millions)	2.1	5.4	2.8	1.4	0.5	1.5	1.1
Number of hours (millions)	322	816	429	219	84	233	197

Source: Dares – *Situation sur le marché du travail durant la crise sanitaire [situation of the labour market during the health crisis]*, 26 April 2021 (Dares, 2021).

2.3 Measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay

2.3.1. Suppression de conditions relatives à l'attribution des indemnités journalières maladie (Cancellation of conditions for allocating daily sickness allowance)

- a) Short description of the measure: The ability to claim a daily allowance without having to fulfil eligibility conditions concerning minimum employment or minimum contributions (starting from February 2020).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: This measure applies during the full duration of the health crisis.

- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Daily sickness allowance amounts to 50% of the claimant's basic daily wage. This is calculated based on the average gross wage up to a maximum of 1.8 times the monthly *salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance* (minimum wage – Smic) – €2,770.96 net, based on the Smic rate at 1 January 2020. Even if the claimant's wages are higher than this amount, the maximum daily sickness allowance rate for 2020 was €45.55 gross, and €60.73 gross for claimants with three dependent children and cases of long-term sick leave (compared with €60.02 in 2019).
- e) Targeted population: This measure concerns all work stoppages concerning people suffering from a health condition, vulnerable people at greater risk of developing a serious form of COVID-19, and parents obliged to look after their children following the closure of their school or crèche.
- f) Beneficiaries: During the first lockdown (17 March to 11 May 2020), the number of work stoppages comprised 400,000 for vulnerable people, 60,000 for COVID-19 cases, and 2.3 million for parents looking after children. This number is higher than the number of beneficiaries because stoppage requests had to be renewed every three weeks during lockdown⁵.
- g) Novelty: This measure is essentially an adaptation designed to make existing rules more flexible.

2.3.2 Attribution des indemnités journalières maladie à compter du 1er jour d'arrêt de travail (Allocation of daily sickness allowance starting from the first day of stopping work)

- a) Short description: The cancellation of the three-day waiting period usually included in the calculation of daily allowances, so that allowances can be paid out from the first day of sick leave (starting from 23 March 2020). This measure cancels out the unpaid three-day waiting period normally applicable, resulting in an additional three days of allowance payments for beneficiaries.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: This measure applies during the full duration of the health crisis.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: This measure concerns all work stoppages concerning people suffering from a health condition, vulnerable people at greater risk of developing a serious form of COVID-19, and parents obliged to look after their children following the closure of their school or crèche.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: This measure is essentially an adaptation designed to make existing rules more flexible.

2.3.3 Prolongation de la période maximale d'indemnisation de l'arrêt de travail (Extension of the maximum period for sick leave compensation)

- a) Short description: The cancellation of the maximum number or maximum period of payment of daily allowances in order not to penalise beneficiaries at the end of their daily allowance (from 23 March 2020). COVID-19 can trigger chronic disorders. However, this pathology does not feature on the established list of long-term diseases. In general, the total maximum duration of allowances for people coming under the health insurance scheme is 360 days every three years. In the case of COVID-19, this duration condition no longer applies.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: This measure applies during the full duration of the health crisis.

⁵ La Tribune, based on a communication from the national health insurance to Agence France-Presse. 22 April 2020.

- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: This measure concerns both employees and the self-employed diagnosed with COVID-19.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: This measure is essentially an adaptation designed to make existing rules more flexible.

2.3.4 Allocations complémentaires dues par les employeurs en cas d'arrêt de travail (Additional allowances payable by employers in cases of work stoppage)

- a) Short description: The supplementary health insurance benefits in addition to daily allowances, which are payable by employers, have been modified as follows:
 - they must be paid from the first day of sick leave (since 1 March 2020);
 - they are no longer conditional on seniority for employees on sick leave (since 26 March 2020).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: This measure applies during the full duration of the health crisis.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: In cases of stopping work, in addition to a daily sickness allowance paid out by the health insurance scheme, employees receive a payment from their employer. This amounts to 40% of their gross salary, or more if stipulated by their collective labour agreement. This payment is subject to an eight-day waiting period and is only applicable after one year's seniority in the company. These two criteria do not apply in the case of COVID-19. This measure also applies to people stopping work to take care of children in the case of COVID-19.
- e) Targeted population: These measures apply to people suffering from the virus in different ways: self-isolating due to contact with someone with COVID-19 or following a stay in an area concerned by a COVID-19 cluster; and people covered by the social insurance scheme who have symptoms of COVID-19 or are considered as a "contact case" for employees on sick leave due to the health crisis. Since these measures relate to additional allowances payable by employers, self-employed people are not concerned.
- f) Beneficiaries: Figures not available.
- g) Novelty: This measure is essentially an adaptation designed to make existing rules more flexible.

2.3.5 Mise en place d'une allocation journalière en cas de COVID-19 (Establishment of new COVID-19-specific daily allowances)

- a) Short description of the measure: Following the closure of all schools and establishments for young people on 16 March 2020, it was decided that people covered by healthcare insurance obliged to stay at home to look after children aged under 16 could benefit from compensation for stopping work for the entire period of the school closure. On 18 March 2020, the state decided that people at risk of developing a serious form of COVID-19 could also stop work and benefit from sick pay as a preventative measure. The measure was then extended to people sharing their homes with someone at risk.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures are applicable during the entire health crisis. However, the rules for compensation for private sector employees were extensively modified from 1 May 2020, at which point these workers were eligible for the job-retention scheme if they were unable to exercise their professional activity (see Section 2.7).
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: This measure is only applicable to employees. It is regulated by two items of legislation, as follows.

- The first institutes the measure (Decree No 2020-227 of 9 March 2020)⁶. This decree extends to the parents concerned the provisions of Decree No 2020-73 of 31 January 2020.
 - The second establishes the terms of payment. For parents who have stopped work to take care of children following the closure of schools, this payment follows the specific rules established by Decree No 2020-434 of 16 April 2020⁷.
- e) Targeted population: People covered by healthcare insurance with children or at risk of developing serious forms of COVID-19. This concerns people at a high risk of developing serious forms of the virus, based on criteria established by the *Haut conseil de la santé publique* (French public health council), for example people with a history of cardio-vascular disease.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: New measures taken in the context of the health crisis.

2.3.6 Mesure pour des catégories particulières de population au travail (Measures related to specific categories of the working population)

- a) Short description of the measure:
- Self-employed professionals can claim special lump-sum daily allowances for looking after children and vulnerable people.
 - The medical liberal professions nevertheless benefit from ad hoc payments instead. This aid is combined with an additional payment for self-employed doctors suffering from COVID-19 or in a vulnerable situation (high-risk pathologies) who cannot work due to the pandemic situation.
 - Farmers: income-replacement allowance for farmers has been extended to victims of COVID-19 and to people obliged to stay at home to look after children aged under 16.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures have been applicable since 1 April 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Different professional groups have received specific payments during the COVID-19 period as follows.
- Farm workers who do not have an employee status and are subject to self-isolation or have a child under 16, and who have had to stop work, can benefit from a replacement allowance designed to maintain the work carried out on the farm. This allowance can either be used to directly hire an employee or to make use of a replacement service. The daily amount can be as high as €112.
 - Care workers and professionals, and even medical students, who worked on the front line during the first lockdown were awarded a €1,000 bonus following the decree of 15 May 2020. This amount was increased to €1,500 for those working in areas of France strongly affected by COVID-19.
- e) Targeted population: Care workers and farmers. Farm workers: 400,000. Care workers: not available.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: New measures taken in the context of the health crisis.

⁶ Article 1: "For insured parties who are the parents of a child aged under sixteen who is him or herself obliged to stay away from school and self-isolate in the home, daily allowances may be paid throughout the closure period of the school that the child attends."

⁷ Article 9: If the employee is temporarily unable to attend work as stipulated in [Article 1 of the above-mentioned decree dated 31 January 2020](#), and taking into account the amount of daily sickness allowance, the amount of additional allowance mentioned in Article L. 1226-1 of the code is equal to 90% of the gross wage that the beneficiary would have received if they had continued to work. This is an overall payment (daily sickness allowance and additional allowance) that can amount to as much as 100% of gross pay depending on the collective labour agreement. No maximum payment applies.

Reconnaissance de la COVID-19 comme maladie professionnelle (Recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease)

- a) Short description of the measure: Care workers suffering from a severe form of COVID-19 have been able to claim recognition of occupational disease since 15 September 2020. For non-care workers, the procedure for the recognition of occupational disease has been made easier: instead of regional committees, a single national recognition committee dedicated to COVID-19 has been set up to ensure standardised treatment of requests. However, all other types of employees remain subject to a decision by the regional committee, and self-employed workers are not protected by this measure. The recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease opens the right to higher payments from the health insurance scheme. This recognition requires fulfilling a number of criteria.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures are applicable during the entire health crisis.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: Care workers and non-care health workers. In the application of the decree dated 14 September 2020, 16,919 healthcare professionals infected by COVID-19 had made an application by late February 2021 to the health insurance scheme for their illness to be recognised as an occupational disease. Of these, 3,500 applications had been declared admissible.
- f) Beneficiaries: At the end of February 2021, 437 professionals had had their illness recognised as an occupational disease⁸.
- g) Novelty: New measures taken in the context of the health crisis.

2.4 Measures related to health insurance

Modalités de couverture des dépenses de santé (Arrangement of conditions to cover healthcare costs)

- a) Short description of the measure: to guarantee the continuity of eligibility for healthcare cost coverage, two measures have been adopted:
 - pharmacists can renew prescriptions without going through a doctor for patients with chronic diseases (since 31 March 2020);
 - nurses can continue some treatments after the expiry of a prescription, with their actions still being covered under conditions of ordinary law (since 31 March 2020).
 - In addition, since 20 March 2020, measures have been taken to facilitate remote medical consultations, and people covered by the national insurance system are no longer liable for financial participation for acts carried out by remote consultation or telecare.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures have been applicable during the entire health crisis.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Eligible people: Entire French population.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: The development of telemedicine is not related to the health crisis, but the pandemic situation has led to a surge in this practice.

⁸ Besse-Desmoulière R., Bissuel B., « La lente reconnaissance du COVID-19 comme maladie professionnelle », Le Monde, 10 mars 2021.

Extension du champ de la prévention liée à la COVID-19 (Extension of the scope of prevention related to COVID-19 measures)

- a) Short description of the measure: Dating from 28 May 2020, the national health insurance system covers 100% of the following:
- acts and services delivered to people covered by the health insurance system in ambulatory centres dedicated to COVID-19, for virological and serological testing;
 - initial information consultations for patients and the establishment of a therapeutic strategy following a positive COVID-19 test result; and
 - consultations carried out by a doctor with the aim of listing and contacting people who have been in contact with COVID-19-positive patients apart from the people they live with.

Lastly, health insurance funds have made available personnel (6,500 people) to work in "health brigades" constituted to attempt to stop the pandemic from spreading further.

- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures have been applicable during the entire health crisis.
- d) Amount and duration: Coverage of individual tests and protective facemasks. The price of a RT-PCR, which is 100% covered by the national insurance fund, is €43.20 while antigenic tests cost €34.00 (Source: national insurance fund) and distribution throughout 2020 of three batches of six washable face masks for the general public, reusable 21 times, at a price per item of €2-3 (Source: low-range market price).
- e) Targeted population: Entire population for individual tests, and people on low incomes (annual income threshold of €9,032 for a single person) for protective facemasks.
- f) Beneficiaries: Individuals could do several tests, with no limit in number, between 1 March 2020 and 10 January 2021; about 42.6 million tests (37.9 million RT-PCR and 4.7 million antigenic) were carried out (Source: Ministry for Health and Solidarity, DREES, 21 January 2021). About 7 to 8 million people received protective facemasks.
- g) Novelty: Existing measures massively extended in response to the health crisis situation.

Prise en compte des personnes à bas revenus (Consideration of categories of people on low incomes)

- a) Short description of the measure: Granted for a maximum of one year, the right to claim *complémentaire santé solidaire* (inclusive complementary healthcare) has been automatically extended along with the right to claim *aide médicale d'Etat* (state medical aid), which is aimed at non-nationals in irregular situations. The measures are identical but concern different categories of beneficiary. Although not a specific COVID-19 measure, beneficiaries of state medical aid and complementary health plans have free access to doctors, dentists and hospitals. They do not pay for medication, medical apparatus, health-related transport, medical tests and x-rays.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures have been applicable during the entire health crisis.
- d) Amount and duration: Annual expenditure in 2019 amounted to €422 for each beneficiary of the general national healthcare insurance scheme and €360 for the agricultural scheme.
- e) Targeted population: People on low incomes (annual income threshold of €9,032 for a single person), beneficiaries of inclusive complementary healthcare and state medical aid, totalling around 7.5 million beneficiaries.
- f) Beneficiaries: The number of beneficiaries relating to COVID-19 is not available.
- g) Novelty: These measures are essentially adaptations designed to make existing rules more flexible.

2.5 Measures related to minimum-income schemes and other forms of social assistance

Aides exceptionnelles de solidarité aux ménages les plus modestes (Exceptional solidarity aid for the poorest households)

- a) Short description of the measure: To tackle the consequences of the health crisis for poorer households, the state set up two exceptional solidarity allowances at separate times.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was decided on and implemented separately. A first single payment was made directly on 15 May 2020. The allowance was delivered by the organisations paying out the different social benefits received by beneficiaries, who did not need to apply. A second, single, automatic payment began from 27 November 2020, with no need to apply, for all beneficiaries of one of these allowances in September or October 2020.
- d) Amount and duration: The two exceptional solidarity allowances amount to €150 per household⁹ in a single payment. Beneficiaries who have children receive an additional €100 per dependent child. Beneficiaries who are eligible twice receive two payments.
- e) Targeted population: Beneficiaries of the different minimum-income schemes¹⁰ and beneficiaries of one of the personalised housing allowances who do not receive RSA or *allocation de solidarité spécifique* (specific solidarity income, ASS) and have children. The number of eligible people amounted to 4.1 million households.
- f) Beneficiaries: These state-funded, extraordinary solidarity allowances have been paid out to 4.1 million poor families and precarious households, i.e. 100% of eligible people. They concerned about 5 million children.
- g) Novelty: Exceptional measure to support the poorest households resulting from the health crisis.

Mesures de soutien aux étudiants et aux jeunes précaires (Measures to support students and young people in precarious situations)

- a) Short description of the measure: To support young people undergoing financial difficulties due to the measures taken during the emergency health situation, the state has created two allowances at separate times¹¹. These were complemented by a series of measures of diverse nature related to: employment (mentoring services, creation of civic volunteer services, professional training, additional financial support for young unemployed people); higher education (additional scholarships for young people whose family income has fallen as a consequence of the crisis, simplified administrative procedures to apply for support, meals for €1, reopening of university restaurants, option to attend classes as an alternative to distant teaching); housing (rent freeze for university housing, support for setting up); and mental health (psychological support).
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: Made in a single payment since the start of June 2020 to students, whether or not they receive a financial grant, and since 25 June 2020 to young non-students aged under 25, and then since December 2020 to students who receive a financial grant at the same time as their usual monthly grant payment.
- d) Amount and duration: A first €200 allowance in a single payment in June 2020, then a second allowance of €150 in a single payment in November 2020. The rest of the

⁹ Statutory text: Decree No 2020-519 of 5 May 2020 relating to the award of an exceptional solidarity allowance to the poorest households due to the health emergency.

¹⁰ These minimum-income schemes are: RSA; *revenu de solidarité* (solidarity income, RSO); ASS; flat-rate premium for going back to work; and *allocation équivalent retraite* (equivalent pension allowance, AER).

¹¹ Decree published in the Official Journal on 25 June 2020.

measures were decided in February 2021 as part of a large governmental plan to support young people.

- e) Targeted population: The first allowance can be claimed by students, whether or not they already receive a financial grant, who have either lost their jobs (minimum of 32 hours a month, or eight hours a week, during at least two months since 1 January 2020) or their stipend internship of a duration of at least two months (obligatory on their course, programmed to take place before 1 June 2020 at the latest or interrupted before its initial end date, between 17 March and 1 June 2020), and all students from overseas French territories confined to the mainland during lockdown. Students on furlough are not concerned. The first allowance also targets those aged under 25 in precarious situations who receive *aides personnalisées au logement* (personalised housing allowance – APL). Apprentices and sandwich-course students can qualify as non-student young people in precarious situations. The second allowance is aimed at all young people aged under 25 who receive APL and students who receive a financial grant. Young people under 25 not receiving APL or students not receiving a financial grant are not eligible to this second allowance. According to the speech made by the Prime Minister on 4 May 2020, the €200 allowance was aimed at the 800,000 most precarious and poorest young people aged under 25. On 14 October 2020, the French President announced a new €150 allowance for people receiving personalised housing benefits, mostly young people and students aged 18 to 25.
- f) Beneficiaries: In June, the allowance was paid out to 800,000 young people in precarious situations and students. In November 2020, it was paid out to 560,000 non-students under 25 who received housing benefits (press release, Ministry for Health and Solidarity, November 2020). Students were not included in the micro-simulations mentioned above. Targeting aid at them is particularly difficult because socio-fiscal data do not easily capture intra-family transfers towards students. The extraordinary allowances distributed to these young people in June and November were aimed at housing benefit claimants and students receiving financial grants (Bénassy-Quéré, 2021).
- g) Novelty: First allowance of this type for this sector of the public related to the consequences of the emergency measures taken in response to the health crisis.

Prime exceptionnelle à destination de certains demandeurs d'emploi (Extraordinary bonus for some job-seekers)

- a) Short description of the measure: An extraordinary bonus guarantees a minimum income for precarious employees who work part time or have casual employment, and for unemployed people receiving very low unemployment benefits. This state aid is paid automatically (without the need for an application) by jobcentres to job-seekers, whether or not they receive unemployment benefit.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Decision taken at the end of December 2020 concerning the period from November 2020 to May 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount of the bonus makes up the difference between an individual's income (unemployment benefits, replacement revenue such as RSA, 60% of wages, etc.) and the monthly amount of €900 net. To be eligible for this financial bonus promised by the state, claimants must meet with the following criteria:
- reside on the national territory;
 - have been signed up as looking for work during at least one month between November 2020 and May 2021;
 - have cumulated short-term contracts and worked at least 60% of the time in 2019 (138 days minimum) and not have worked sufficiently in 2020 to recharge their right to unemployment benefits due to the health crisis; and
 - have an income of less than €900 per month.

- e) Targeted population: The target is workers affected by a considerable drop in the number of missions proposed by temporary employment agencies and short-term contracts caused by the health crisis. They are known as *permittents* and concern employees in the hospitality industry, such as hotels, restaurants and events, seasonal workers and temporary staff. The bonus does not concern beneficiaries of back-to-work or business creation allowances. This measure should benefit about 450,000 precarious workers including 80,000 young people.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: First measure of this type targeting this sector.

Mesures à destination des travailleurs indépendants: le fonds de solidarité (Measures aimed at self-employed people: the solidarity fund)

- a) Short description of the measure: Since the start of the COVID-19 health crisis, the state and the regions have established a solidarity fund to prevent the closure of small businesses, micro-entrepreneurs, self-employed people and the liberal professions, all of which have been strongly affected by the economic downturn linked to COVID-19. Insurance companies provided a contribution of up to €400 million, and inter-communal structures and large businesses are also expected to do so. The fund pays out compensation for the loss of revenue endured by self-employed people affected by the crisis.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Created on 25 March 2020 initially for three renewable months renewable three times, the measure will remain in force at least until June 2021. The latest changes in the measure date from 5 May 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The scope of this fund changes every month, as do the eligibility criteria, the amount of benefits and the population targeted by the measure. Decrees stipulate monthly the means for obtaining this financial support created as a response to the COVID-19 crisis: the first was Decree No 2020-371 of 30 March 2020, and the most recent is decree No 2021-553 of 5 May 2021. The support is based on two pillars: a first pillar of a maximum of €1,500 used in most cases; and a second pillar amounting from €2,000 to €5,000 for beneficiaries eligible for the first aid of up to €1,500 and who face major financial difficulties.
- e) Targeted population: The sectors targeted are retailers, artisans, liberal professions and other economic agents, whatever their status (company, individual entrepreneur, association, etc.) and tax and social regime (including micro-entrepreneurs) with fewer than initially 50 then 10 employees.
- f) Beneficiaries: The three amending Finance Acts (of March, April and July 2020) established a budget of about €8 billion for the solidarity funds in 2020. In early May 2021, the total amount allocated to this support amounted to just over €25 billion. On the same date, 8,695,913 allowances had been paid out, benefiting 2,010,020 companies, of which 33.5% were individual entrepreneurs, 37.3% were limited companies, 23.3% joint-stock companies, and 5.9% came into other legal categories.
- g) Novelty: An extraordinary measure that is part of a larger package of measures aimed at preserving the economic sector from the impacts of the crisis.

2.6 Measures related to housing support

Aide au logement de €150 aux chômeurs et aux salariés en difficulté (€150 housing allowance for the unemployed and employees in difficulty)

- a) Short description of the measure: A one-off housing allowance, renewable once, was put in place in June 2020 by *Action Logement*¹² to facilitate rent payments or mortgage

¹² Organisation run by social partners with the support of the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs.

reimbursements and to prevent unpaid bills related to housing. In October and December 2020, it was made more flexible, including possible renewal up to six times (instead of two) in case of loss of employment. The total amount of this measure amounts to €100 million.

- b) Category: Both flat and conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Created in June 2020, with retroactive effect from 1 April 2020; can be activated up to three months after the loss of the job/revenue and until the end of the crisis (date as yet unknown).
- d) Amount and duration of the flat element: €150 per beneficiary in a single payment, initially renewable once (i.e. two different payments for a total of €300), then extended for up to six months (i.e. payments of €150 for a total of €900) for job-seekers or those who had lost their job since their initial application.

Range, duration and conditionality of the conditional element: It is granted based on an income threshold (1.5 times the amount of the legal minimum wage, or €1,828.50 net per month). One single allowance per household. To receive the allowance, beneficiaries must make a claim (not paid out automatically).

- e) Targeted population: The target public is job-seekers and employees (or former employees) in the private sector and seasonal workers in the agricultural sector. Beneficiaries must have suffered a drop in income of at least 15%, and have housing expenditure amounting to more than 33% of their income. The measure concerns tenants in private, social and intermediate housing, collective residential housing, and new home-owners.
- f) Beneficiaries: By mid-December 2020, almost 80,000 people had benefited from this support (Action Logement, December 2020).
- g) Novelty: First measure of this type related to the health crisis.

Prolongation de la trêve hivernale 2019-2020 et 2020-2021 (Extension of the winter truce 2019-2020 and 2020-2021)

- a) Short description of the measure: The annual winter truce was extended in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 to reduce the risk of eviction for the poorest households. The *trêve hivernale* is a legal measure that prevents landlords from evicting tenants during the cold winter months and prohibits the cutting off of heating, gas and electricity in cases of non-payment of bills.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Concerning winter 2019-2020, decision taken on 12 March 2020, initially up to 31 May 2020, then to 10 July 2020. On 1 February 2021, the 2020-2021 winter truce was also prolonged until 1 June 2021 (instead of 31 March 2021), the date decided on by the legislator for the end of the state of emergency (bill prolonging the health state of emergency currently under adoption).
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: All tenants who have stopped paying their rent to their landlords during the winter months.
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- g) Novelty: The *trêve hivernale* is a legal device enacted every year from 1 November to 31 March set out in the law.

Ouverture de places d'hébergement d'urgence pour les personnes les plus vulnérables vivant à la rue (Opening up of emergency shelters for the most vulnerable living on the street)

- a) Short description of the measure: The state adapted an arrangement for providing shelter (usually night shelters) and emergency accommodation that normally closes in

the morning, by financing their opening during the day for people living on the street. It also financed additional nights in hotels, due to the need to reinforce shelter options during the first lockdown.

- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: March 2020 to June 2021.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The most vulnerable people living on the street, and emergency and night shelter users.
- f) Beneficiaries: 26,000 additional shelter places were mobilised during the first lockdown, and 16,069 since the second confinement. 14,000 of these temporary places will be maintained during the period 2020-2021¹³. Lastly, 927 places in specialised accommodation have been opened in partnership with the *Agences régionales de santé* (regional health agencies) to shelter homeless people and sheltered people who have tested positive for COVID-19 but do not require hospitalisation. Their occupation rate is 17%¹⁴.
- g) Novelty: Extraordinary measure related to the health situation, unprecedented concerning the number of places created and maintained.

2.7 Leave for parents whose children are unable to attend school or a pre-school service by reason of COVID-19

Arrêt de travail pour garder un enfant de moins de 16 ans (Leave for taking care of children aged under 16)

- a) Short description of the measure: Through a series of decrees in January 2020¹⁵, the government attempted to provide solutions to parents with no other choice but to stop work to look after their children following the closure of their crèche or school, or when children were identified by the national insurance system as being contact cases of infected people. Thanks to these measures, parents have benefited from a replacement income from the first day of stopping work, and at the latest until the end of the confinement period.

The compensation measures cover all work stoppages concerned, with different applications: first between 17 March 2020 to 30 April 2020 with the daily sickness allowance (see Section 2.3.5) and then, since 1 May 2020 with *chômage partiel* (job-retention scheme). These measures were not applied during school holidays. Since 1 September 2020, they concern parents with some restrictions. The compensation can be claimed by one parent per household, in case of both parents' incapacity to telework, following presentation of an attestation either the closure of the class or a contact case situation for the child.

- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: These measures were implemented as soon as the schools closed, in other words between 1 September 2020 and end of April 2021, which does not mean that they were equally taken up by the working parents concerned.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality of the conditional element: For all types of work status, the replacement rate is 100% of wages with no obligatory waiting period. The duration of the payment is the following 14 days.

¹³ Press release, Ministry for Housing, 2 December 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Decree No 2021-13 of 8 January 2021 providing for the application of derogations relating to the benefit of daily allowances and complementary allowances established in Article L. 1226-1 of the labour code and to the conditions for health insurance coverage of certain healthcare costs in order to combat the COVID-19 epidemic. Decree No 2020-1386 of 14 November 2020 amending Decree No 2020-73 of 31 January 2020 relating to the adoption of suitable conditions to claim cash benefits for people exposed to coronavirus. Decree No 2020-73 of 31 January 2020 relating to the adoption of suitable conditions to claim cash benefits for people exposed to coronavirus.

- For the self-employed:
 - Both parents must be incapable of teleworking.
 - Both parents must be incapable of working remotely. The claimant must therefore present two documents to their employer: (i) an attestation that the class is closed (provided by the school or town hall) or that the child is a contact case (document provided by the national health insurance); and (ii) a sworn statement that they are the only one of the two parents applying to stop work for the days concerned. This arrangement, which only one parent can claim, applies from the first day of stopping work and up to the end of the confinement period at the latest
 - The child must be younger than 16 on the day of the start of the work stoppage. For disabled children, there is no age limit.
 - An attestation regarding the closure of the class or a contact case situation must be retained and made available to the national health insurance for verification purposes.
 - This measure applies from the first day of stopping work and at the latest until the end of the confinement period. The authorisation to stop work can be declared for a duration corresponding to the closure of the school provided it does not exceed 21 days.

NB: The work stoppage can be split over time or shared between the parents for the duration of the school closure¹⁶.

The conditions for eligibility and the waiting period are not applicable and the daily allowances are not counted in the tally of maximum daily allowances.

- For civil servants: When they cannot work remotely, civil servants are placed on ASA and paid 100% of their wages. Civil servants concerned must provide their employer with the following:
 - an attestation from the school that the child cannot come to school, or a document from the national health insurance certifying that the child is considered as a contact case;
 - a sworn statement that they are the only one of the two parents applying for an ASA for the days concerned.
- e) Targeted population: Since 1 September 2020, the measures distinguish three types of situation depending on the status of the workers concerned:
- For employees under private law (including part-time and temporary employees), the option is the job-retention scheme.
 - For the self-employed, liberal professions, and contract workers under public law, the formula is a special authorisation to stop work. The following people are concerned by this authorisation to stop work with no obligatory waiting period: self-employed people; self-employed farm workers; author artists; people on vocational training; liberal professions; healthcare professionals; employee managers; contract workers under public law; part-time civil servants working fewer than 28 hours; and registered childminders.
 - For civil servants: placement on *Autorisation spéciale d'absence* (special absence authorisation, ASA)
- f) Beneficiaries: Not available¹⁷.

¹⁶ The authorisation to stop work is established by the national health insurance system following an online declaration via the teleservice set up by the *Caisse nationale de l'Assurance maladie* (national health insurance fund, CNAM) or the *Mutualité sociale agricole* (agricultural mutual insurance fund, MSA) made by the beneficiary, except for: (i) people on vocational training courses, who are declared by their training provider; and (ii) agents under public law, who are declared by their employer. The above must provide the following to their employer: i) a justification from the school certifying that the child cannot come to school, or a document from the national health insurance certifying that the child is considered as a "contact case"; and ii) a sworn statement that he or she is the only one of the two parents applying for an authorisation to stop work for the days concerned.

¹⁷ However, researchers from the OFCE (*Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques* – French economic observatory) published a note on "l'emploi des femmes et des hommes pendant la période de confinement du 17

- g) Novelty: These measures are innovative in terms of: the freedom to take advantage of furlough with compensation of lost wages for employees coming under private law; the suppression of waiting periods for refunds of special authorisations to stop work for self-employed people and liberal professions; and the extension of ASA for civil servants to cover these specific conditions, even though they initially date from a circular of 10 February 2012 devised to allow people to respect the main religious holidays of the different faiths.

mars au 10 mai 2020” [employment of men and women during the lockdown from 17 March to 10 May 2020]. The authors looked at each gender by employment sector to evaluate the number of people whose employment was destroyed during the period, those who were furloughed, and those who were authorised to take paid leave to look after children. When both parents were eligible, the authors conclude that 90% of parents who took advantage of the latter measure were women (Ducoudré, 2020).

3 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS: OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBLE GAPS

This third section briefly considers three aspects: the expected cost of the social protection and inclusion measures put in place by the country (Section 3.1), the impact of these measures on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies (Section 3.2), and the possible remaining gaps in the social protection system and in social inclusion policies (Section 3.3). It concludes with Section 3.4 on debates and recommendations.

3.1 Expected cost of social protection and inclusion measures

Definitive financial data for 2020 revealing the excess costs generated by the pandemic will not be available for the next two or three months (HCFiPs, 2020). Nevertheless, it is possible to obtain a fairly precise idea by aggregating the information available, often up to October 2020, and estimates for the end of the year. Reliable orders of magnitude for 2020 can be estimated drawing on data from the four amending Finance Acts, forecasts by the French national institute for statistical and economic studies (INSEE) and UNEDIC, and OFCE estimations (Dauvin, 2020).

The OFCE's summary of these figures is as follows.

- Job-retention scheme: The French government estimates the global cost of this scheme all along the health crisis at €34 billion (OFCE indicated €29 million) (from 1.1% to 1.4% of 2019 GDP). This expenditure item was particularly high during the first lockdown from March to May 2020. Table 2 presents the costs between March and November 2020, which corresponds to the first wave of the pandemic.

Table 2: Job-retention expenditure in 2020 during the health crisis

Estimate on 21 December 2020	March	April	May	June	October	November
Amount of compensation (€billion)	3.3	8.6	4.6	2.3	0.9	2.3

Source: Dares – *Situation sur le marché du travail durant la crise sanitaire [situation of the labour market during the health crisis]*, 19 January 2021 (Dares, 2021).

- Solidarity fund: €19 billion (0.07% of 2019 GDP).
- Exemption from social contributions: €10 billion (0.04% of 2019 GDP).
- Healthcare expenditure: €10 billion (0.04% of 2019 GDP).
- Support for people in precarious situations: €9 billion (0.037% of 2019 GDP).

The amount of €80 billion established by the OFCE corresponds to 3.4% of 2019 GDP. Note that expenditure on employment is €39-44 billion, or 1.6-1.8% of 2019 GDP.

These amounts do not include the financial guarantees granted to companies and financial facilities (e.g. deferral of charges). These amounts should be reimbursed by debt-clearance plans starting from 2021 or 2022.

3.2 Impact on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies

The pandemic has led to the suspension of social reforms considered as vital by the government and of part of the national reform programmes (i.e. the pensions reform and the unemployment insurance scheme reform¹⁸). From this point of view, the health crisis has not led to an overhaul of the social protection system, but has rather maintained the status quo, or made several minor adjustments, leaving these projects to the next five-year presidential term (Legros, Martin, 2020; ESPN, 2021). Following discussions between unions and the Ministry for Labour, Employment and Social Inclusion, on 2 March 2021 the

¹⁸ See Section 2.1.1 under "novelty".

unions announced the application of part of the unemployment scheme reform on 1 July 2021¹⁹.

In the work and employment domain, measures to adjust compensation procedures for job-seekers do not constitute major changes, but rather relax the current rules in response to the crisis, a relaxation that will be discontinued at the end of the health crisis. The situation is similar for all measures relating to workers in the entertainment industry (*intermittents*). On the other hand, the massive use of furlough constitutes a major and genuine innovation that has proved remarkably effective throughout the months of the crisis, and in particular during the two lockdowns in 2020. The application of the APLD is the most innovative part of this policy, and its adoption was made possible following an agreement by the metal-worker unions, which had been deeply marked by the increase in redundancies following the 2008-2009 crisis. This procedure opens the way for a new regulation of relations between the state, employer organisations and trade unions. In our opinion, the evolution of work to include the possibility of telework, although it does not feature in the guidelines of this report, constitutes a future avenue that deserves close attention, in particular to understand the changing relations between work life and family life.

In the healthcare domain, negotiations opened as part of the so-called *Ségur de la santé*²⁰. The procedure appears to catch up on delays rather than to open new perspectives for transforming the healthcare system, even though a reform of this kind appears increasingly inevitable, for example concerning relations between hospital and non-hospital healthcare. The measures taken during the health crisis mainly involve greater flexibility to enable people affected by the pandemic to support the costs of accessing healthcare. We can expect that the wide extension of more flexible rules to financially support and compensate citizens during the pandemic might lead to a change in the strategy of the national insurance system. This shift could encourage the health insurance system to opt for a more comprehensive, preventative, response, with less of an accent on individuals.

The way that the French social welfare system has reacted to the COVID-19 crisis has already shifted the long-standing boundaries between its different components. Health insurance funds were entrusted with a key role in preventing pandemic risks, including more innovatively through the application of daily sickness allowances (compensation for infected, asymptomatic individuals or contact cases). More fundamentally, the measures included in the government's pandemic action plan have also blurred the ostensibly well defined lines between the health insurance and unemployment insurance schemes, as shown by the coverage for parental leave to care for children when schools closed. In addition, because it has triggered an economic and social crisis, social protection has emerged as more necessary than ever to attenuate the impacts on the most vulnerable communities. Therefore, although they have not been postponed, the announced reforms of social protection (pension reform, unemployment scheme reform, etc.) cannot now be viewed in the same way as prior to the crisis. Along with the recurrent requirement to progressively balance out the accounts, all of the considerations mentioned above make it even more necessary to ensure the overall coherence of these reforms and their equity with a view to avoiding an increase in poverty and social inequality. "This exceptional solidarity aid, funded by the state, has benefited 4.1 million families of modest means and insecure households, with nearly 5 million children. They represent a budget of €900 million for the first, and more than €970 million for the second" (National Assembly, June 2020; press release, Ministry for Health and Solidarity, November 2020). The *Institut des Politiques Publiques* (Public Policy Institute) simulated the impact of these extraordinary support measures on the income of different types of households, based on their 2019 incomes. The results show that these extraordinary social allowances raised the average annual income of the first twentieth in terms of living standards by more than 5%, and 2.6% for the next twentieth, with the effect decreasing rapidly for higher living standards.

¹⁹ *Le Monde* newspaper, 2 March 2021.

²⁰ The *Ségur de la santé* are health agreements that were signed on 13 July 2020 by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Solidarity and Health, and most trade union organisations representing both non-medical professions and public hospital medical staff. It has included working with all trade union and professional representatives to negotiate strong commitments to upgrade the status of professionals and managers of healthcare establishments and care homes for the elderly.

In total, the financial support appears to be strongly targeted at the lowest living standard levels (Bénassy-Quéré, 2021). These results corroborate the micro-simulations carried out by the *Direction Générale du Trésor* (French Treasury), showing that the allowances raised the average living standard of the first decile of households by 2.4%, and by 1% for the second decile. The allowances successfully targeted the poorest households. Over one-third of households receiving these allowances are situated in the first decile of the population in terms of living standards, and almost two-thirds in the first two deciles (ibid, 2021).

Concerning housing, despite the massive support provided, in particular in the emergency shelter sector, the latest report by the Abbé-Pierre Foundation (Fondation Abbé-Pierre, 2021) puts more emphasis on the damage endured by the poorest communities and substandard housing than on the existence of innovations made necessary by the pandemic. This makes the need for a population-based policy rather than individual responses clearer than ever. As a symptom of the tension in the housing market, every year 15-20,000 households are evicted from their homes for unpaid rent. Due to the health crisis, in 2020 this number was only 3,500. The Abbé-Pierre Foundation, however, is sounding the alarm about the post-health crisis period. Many households with unpaid rent, unable to save during the crisis, faced with the decline in the construction of social housing and a slowdown in the "housing first" policy may find themselves in difficulty in the coming quarters.

Lastly, concerning action directed at the most vulnerable populations, the necessary increase in food aid, both for families and young people, including students, cannot be considered as progress. Despite demands by associations, this support has mainly taken the form of temporary financial payments rather than an extension of the RSA for young people or an increase in minimum-income benefits. Since 2017, France has adopted a national strategy for preventing and combating poverty. The policy has two objectives: to avoid the social reproduction of poverty and to enable people to lift themselves out of poverty. The evaluation committee of this strategy has added a third objective, which since 2015 has been the subject of a commitment by France to the United Nations: not to leave anyone in a situation of great poverty. The 2021 evaluation report highlights six areas of improvement: better defining and understanding extreme poverty; combating the effects of the coronavirus crisis on poverty; strengthening measures to reduce non-recourse; helping the poorest young people aged 18-24; assessing the effectiveness of support as a whole; and accelerating the implementation of the "housing first" plan. In addition, the committee strongly recommends experimenting with a basic income for the poorest young people aged 18-24 (France Stratégie, 2021).

3.3 Remaining gaps in the social protection system and social inclusion policies

The very strong accent put on furlough and support for companies by the solidarity fund and *Prêts Garantis par l'État* (state-guaranteed loans, PGE) has had the effect of limiting total unemployment and massive redundancies and has reduced the number of bankruptcies, especially for small and medium enterprises (CNP, 2020). On the other hand, protection for precarious workers, either on very short-term contracts or in temporary work situations who are not eligible for unemployment benefits, remains a genuine problem that the pandemic has aggravated.

The pandemic has also highlighted the difficult situation of isolated young people from families on low incomes, which involves single-person households and young people who cannot access work, are too young to receive RSA, and are obliged to seek food aid.

In terms of housing, the Abbé-Pierre Foundation points out the negative impacts of the pandemic on the section of the population already in the greatest difficulty: "Sharp drop in the production of housing, in particular social housing, blocked social-housing allocations, increased arrears, greater precarity and unemployment, interruption of social support, the imminent destruction of jobs, and widespread indebtedness" (Fondation Abbé-Pierre, 2021).

For a long time in France, most self-employed workers were non-salaried farm workers, small retailers or members of the professional class, who possessed sufficient funds to cope with a cessation of activity and were rarely affected by unemployment. Times have changed. The creation of the “*autoentrepreneur*” status in 2009 and the development of services that often take the form of sub-contracted activities have created a new generation of people for whom self-employment is the only way of obtaining work. With an annual growth rate of 2.2% since 2008, self-employed workers make up a heterogeneous group of about 3.3 million people, of whom 2.8 million have a single activity, totalling 10% of the labour force. Self-employed people are not protected in cases of an employment termination, since affiliation to the unemployment insurance scheme requires the existence of a work contract between an employer and an employee. Except for a minority with private insurance, self-employed people whose activity comes to an end are generally obliged to turn to minimum-income schemes.

3.4 Debates and recommendations

Fuelled by the observation of increased inequalities over the last few years (INSEE, 2020 a), the debate on inequalities generated by the health crisis remains ongoing (Assemblée nationale, 2020). INSEE in fact put it at the centre of its latest *Portrait social de la France* (INSEE, 2020b), in which it shows that job losses during the first lockdown mostly affected temporary workers and those in the most precarious jobs, including young people aged 15-24. During the same period, infections were more frequent in densely populated towns and overcrowded housing. In a note dated 20 October 2020, the *Conseil d'Analyse Économique* showed that, at the end of August 2020, 70% of the €50 billion savings made by French people belonged to the 20% of households in the last two (highest income) deciles (CAE, 2020). In sharp contrast, the first two deciles had either made no savings or had accumulated debts.

For several years, research has shown that France has performed particularly badly in terms of initial and continuous training. As in most countries, schools in France remained closed during the first lockdown. Tests carried out by the national education system on all students in the first year of primary school and the first year of secondary school show, in comparison with the previous year, “contrasting situations, but mostly a deterioration in pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds” (CNP, 2021, p. 100). The differences in scores for mathematics have widened between advantaged and disadvantaged geographic areas. Other studies show the persistent character of these differences throughout students’ education. Even in the absence of such precise studies of university students, we can nevertheless expect a high drop-out rate for some of them at the end of the health crisis.

The adoption by social partners of an approach with a focus on long-term job retention is interesting because it inaugurates a support model for the end of the crisis that would take into account the weaknesses and stress accumulated during the long duration of the health crisis situation. This need for support is apparent in all of the domains analysed in this report, but also in adjacent sectors, in particular education and training. When the massive support provided by the state stops, the risk is that an increase in the different forms of unemployment will accentuate the risk of dropping-out from school and university, for many students who were engaged in part-time jobs and who lost that income during the pandemic.

Parliamentary work (report on the European Pillar of Social Rights of 21 March 2019), and the joint interventions of the Minister of Employment and Insertion and the Secretary of State for European Affairs (in support of the presentation by the European Commission on 4 March 2021 of the action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights), bear witness to the progress of this dossier, which may be accelerated within the framework of the next French presidency. However, discussions with trade unions and employers’ organisations have yet to be moved forward.

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