



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

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

Spain

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
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ESPN Thematic Report: Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis

Spain

2021

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Manuscript completed in July 2021

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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 Spain, it was 7,419. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27 versus 166 in Spain.

The pandemic has also had a severe social and economic impact on the country. The Spanish government has implemented an ambitious plan of investment in social and health protection, as well as measures to protect employment and business activity that will last, in principle, until 31 May 2021.

The government, with the agreement of its social partners, has introduced a considerable degree of flexibility in access to unemployment protection. This has entailed an extraordinary extension of the coverage of the unemployed: in May 2020, the exceptional measures covered 2,661,878 employees and 1,412,605 self-employed workers. These measures have been extended, but at the same time the requirements for accessing and benefiting from them have been tightened.

The measures to protect employment have been developed mainly through the so-called Programme of Temporary Adjustment of Employment (ERTE), which reduces the number of working hours or suspends employment contracts. The ERTes are accompanied by exemption from social contributions and income support for workers (including non-standard workers) and the self-employed, with unemployment benefits paid by Social Security. The access to an ERTE is for all sectors and has been extended (to 31 May 2021) through the Social Dialogue.

As a result of COVID-19, the temporary incapacity (TI) measure has been rolled into sick leave due to an accident at work. This is aimed at employees and self-employed workers who are registered with Social Security. The novelty is that COVID-19 infection is considered to be an accident at work, rather than a common illness.

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has forced the Spanish public healthcare system (*Sistema Nacional de Salud* – SNS) to reorganise its structures: it has moved in the direction of non-face-to-face interaction with patients, and waiting times for non-COVID-19 related conditions have increased. Following its universal 'eligibility logic', the SNS has continued to provide health care to everybody residing in the country, including vaccinations, medical treatment and hospitalisation linked to COVID-19.

In June 2020, a new non-contributory social security benefit, the Minimum Living Income (*Ingreso Mínimo Vital* – henceforth MLI), was approved. This is a flagship measure creating a state scheme of social protection for people living in poverty. The new scheme is also a step towards the rationalisation and improved management of the entire Minimum Income Schemes (MIS) system. However, the MLI is facing many difficulties in ensuring coverage of its potential beneficiaries and in adapting Social Security management structures to this new benefit. Another major challenge concerns its integration into the guaranteed income system.

The *Mecuida* Plan, approved by Royal Decree Law (RDL) 8/2020 of 17 March 2020, aims at allowing salaried workers whose underage children are unable to attend school or a childcare centre due to the pandemic to adjust their work schedule accordingly.

The deadlines for the suspension of foreclosure due to the mortgages arrears have been extended until May 2024, expanding the population covered. The move also protects people who are unable to pay their rent, by compensating landlords financially. For the duration of the pandemic, access to electricity, natural gas and water utilities is guaranteed for vulnerable consumers and those at risk of social exclusion.

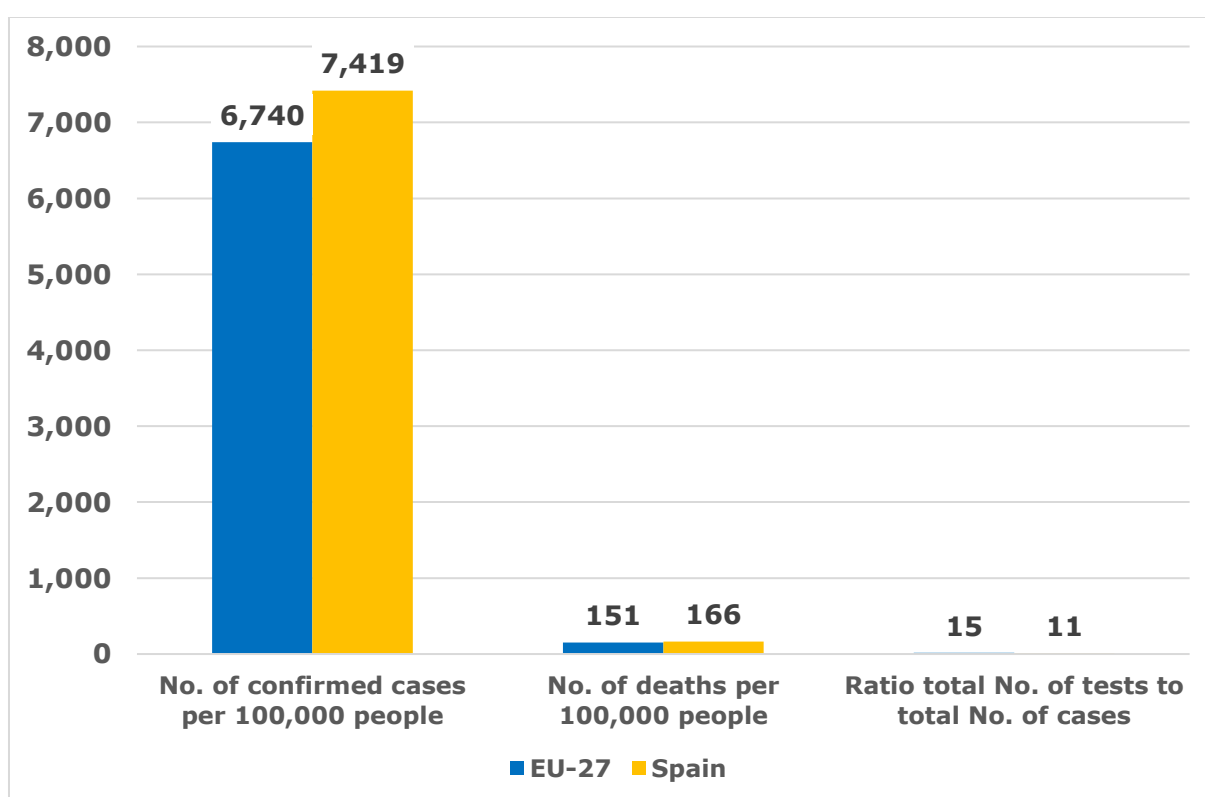
In 2020, the Spanish government invested 3.61% of 2019 GDP in income support for workers and households. Some 70% of the investment is earmarked for social protection and inclusion measures to combat the economic effects of COVID-19.

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 Spain, it was 7,419. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27 versus 166 in Spain. 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 11.1 for Spain.

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 Spain)

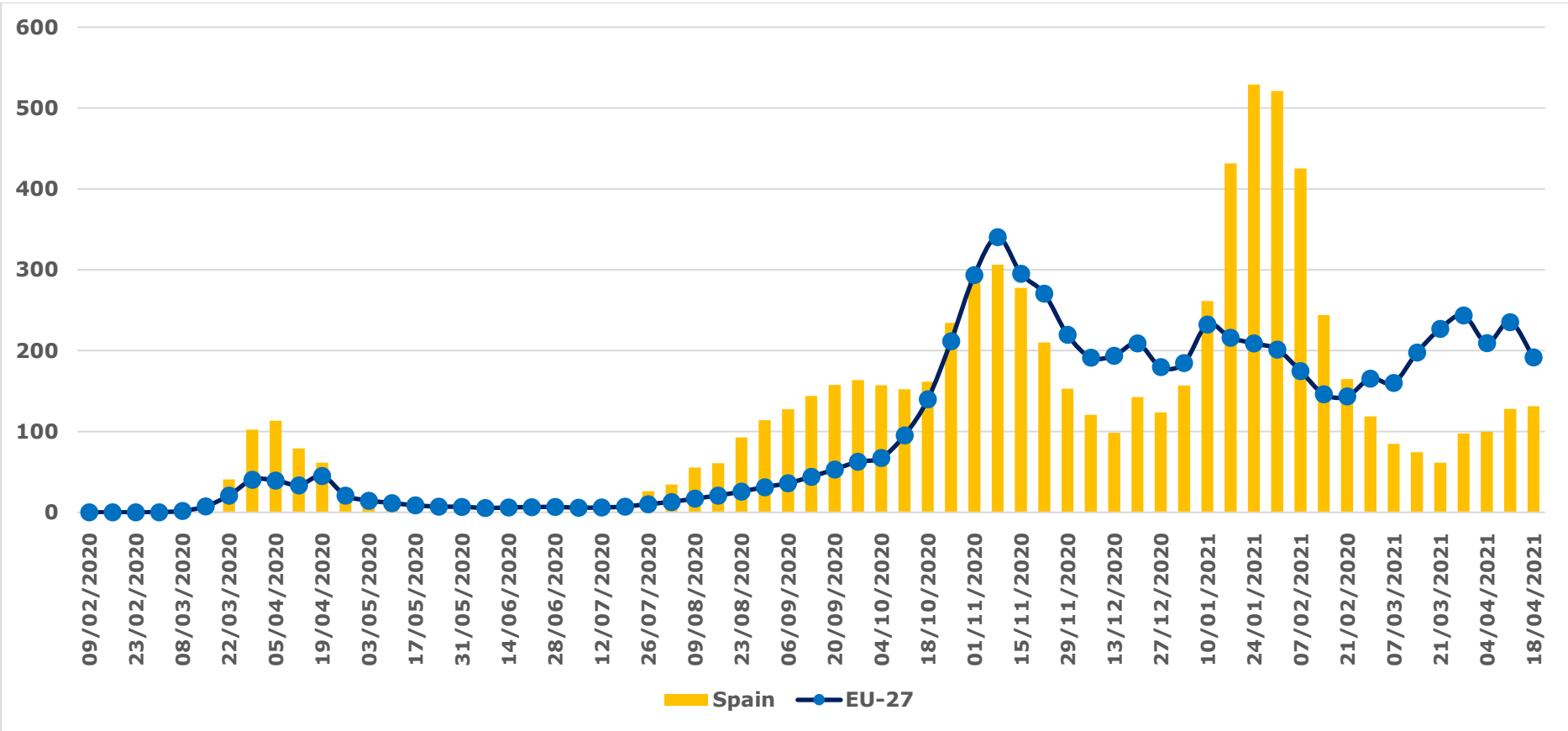


Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021

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 Spain, it was 131.2.

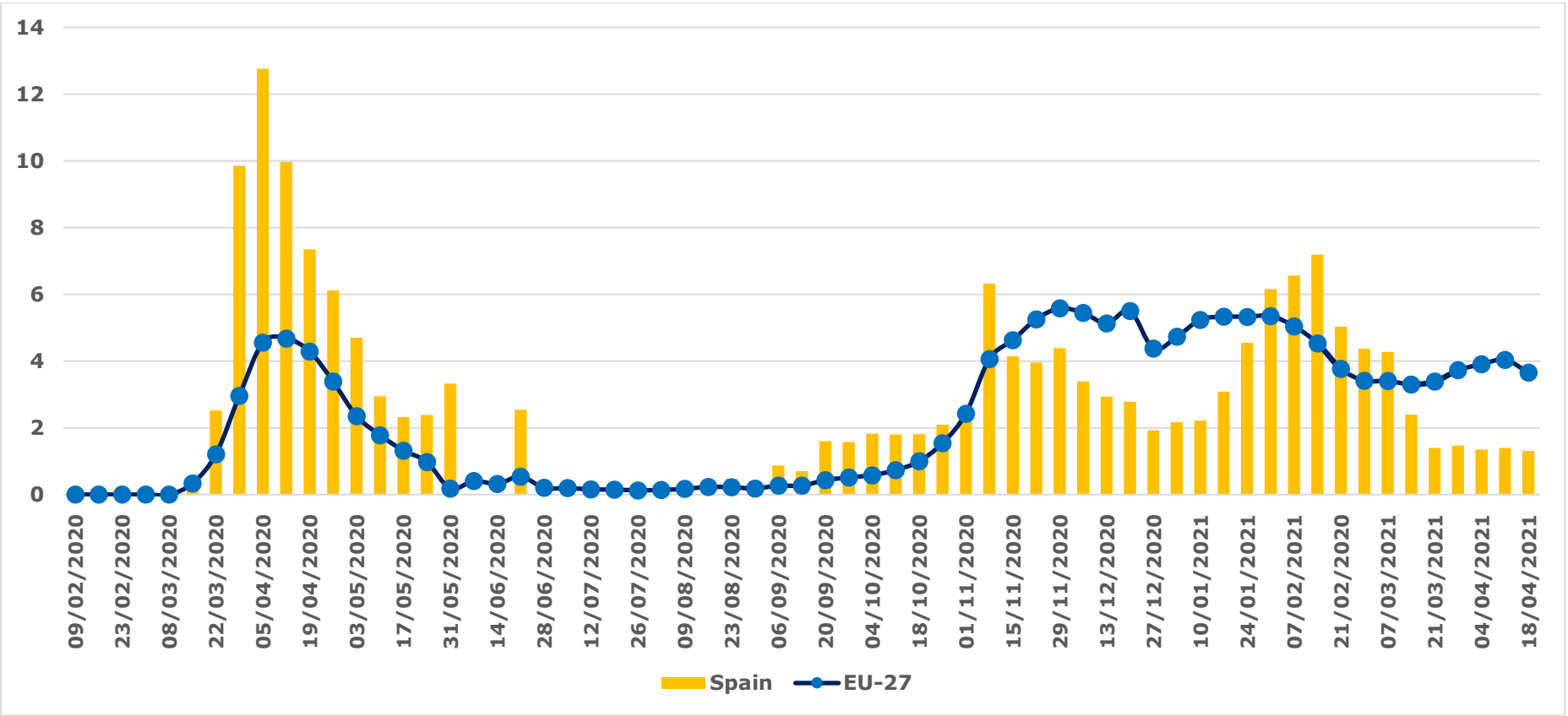
Figure 2: Weekly evolution - Number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Spain)



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 Spain, it was 1.30.

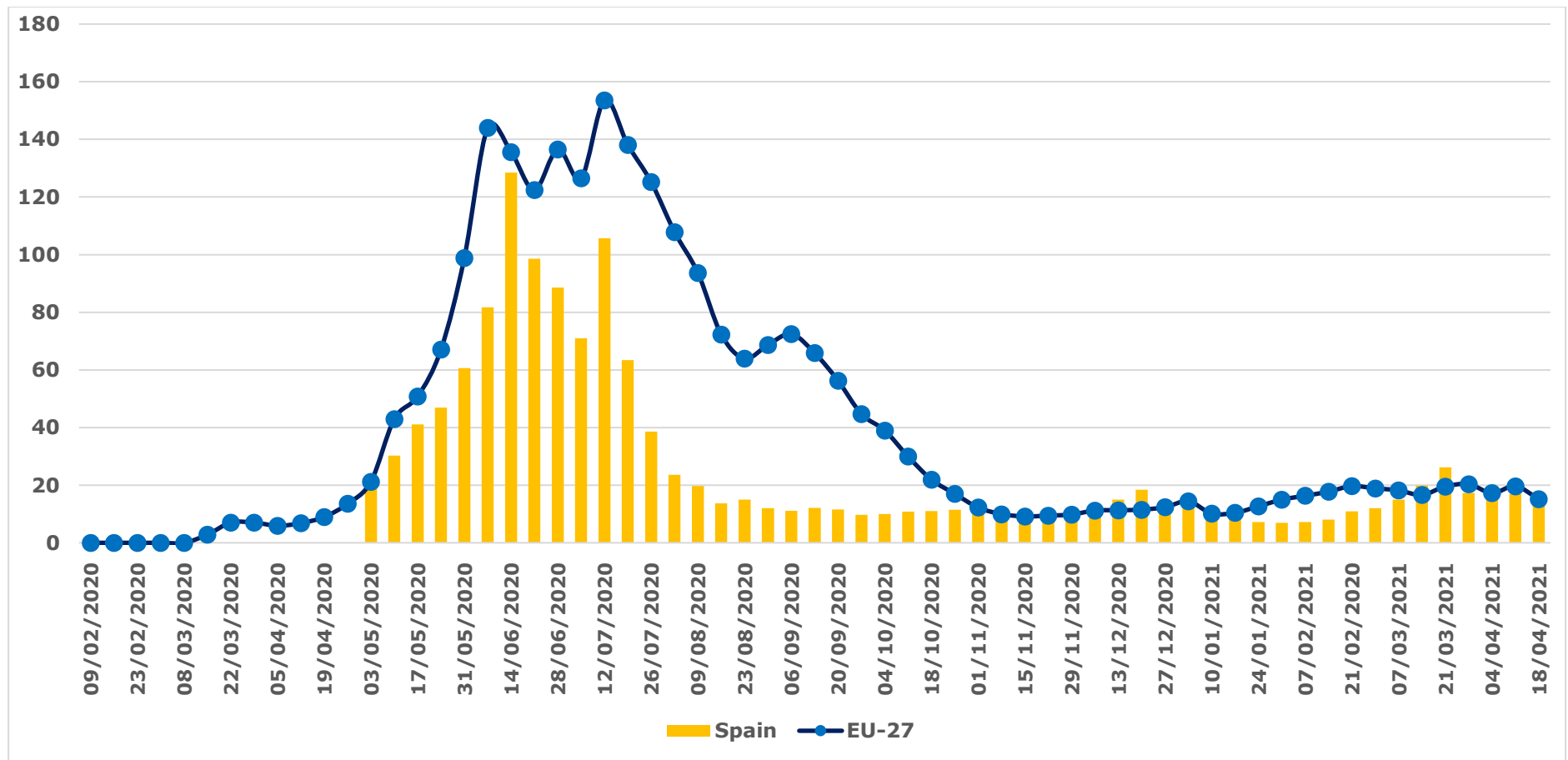
Figure 3: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Spain)



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 Spain, it was 15.5.

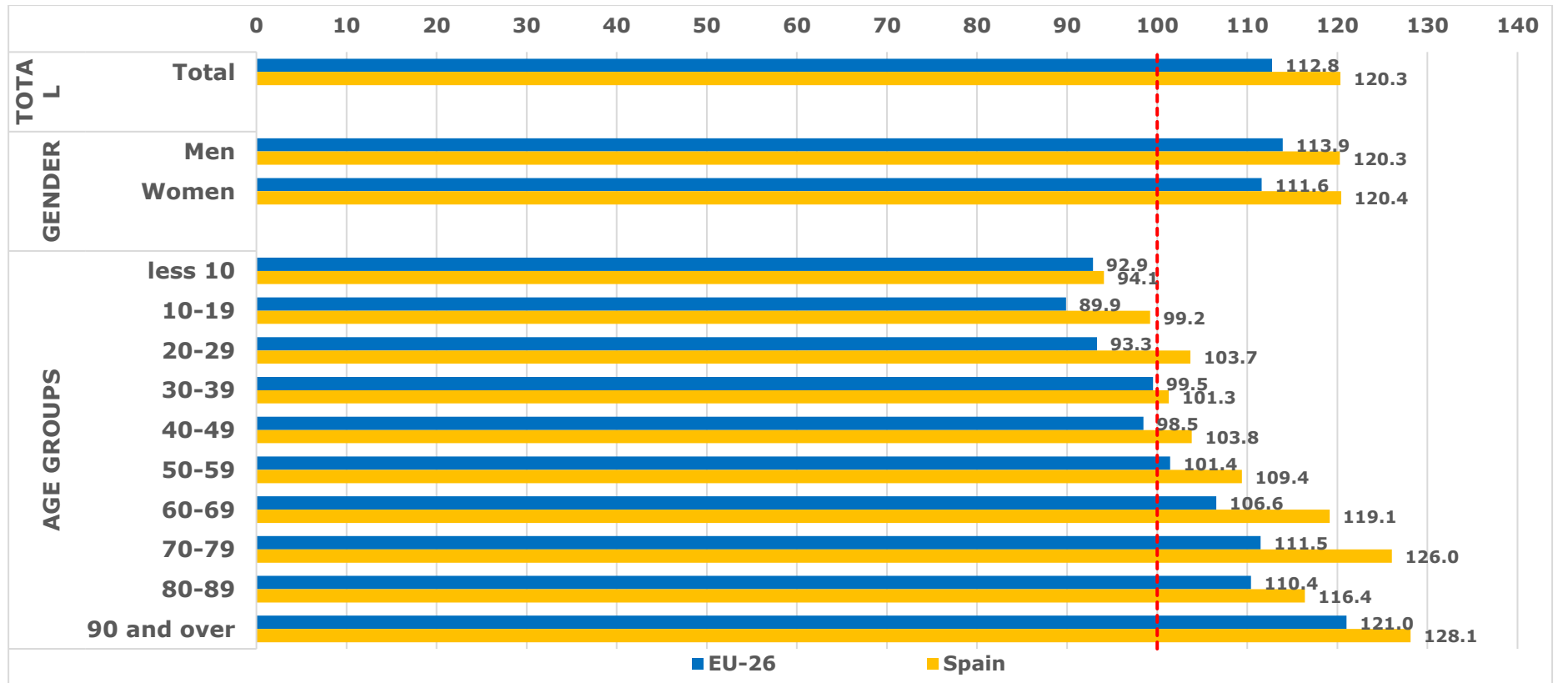
Figure 4: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 case, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Spain)



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 120.3% in Spain. For the EU-26, it is 113.9% for men and 111.6% for women. In Spain, these gendered ratios are 120.3% and 120.4% respectively. Excess mortality is higher among older age groups. For those aged 90 years and more it reaches 121.0% for EU-26 and 128.1% for Spain.

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 Spain))

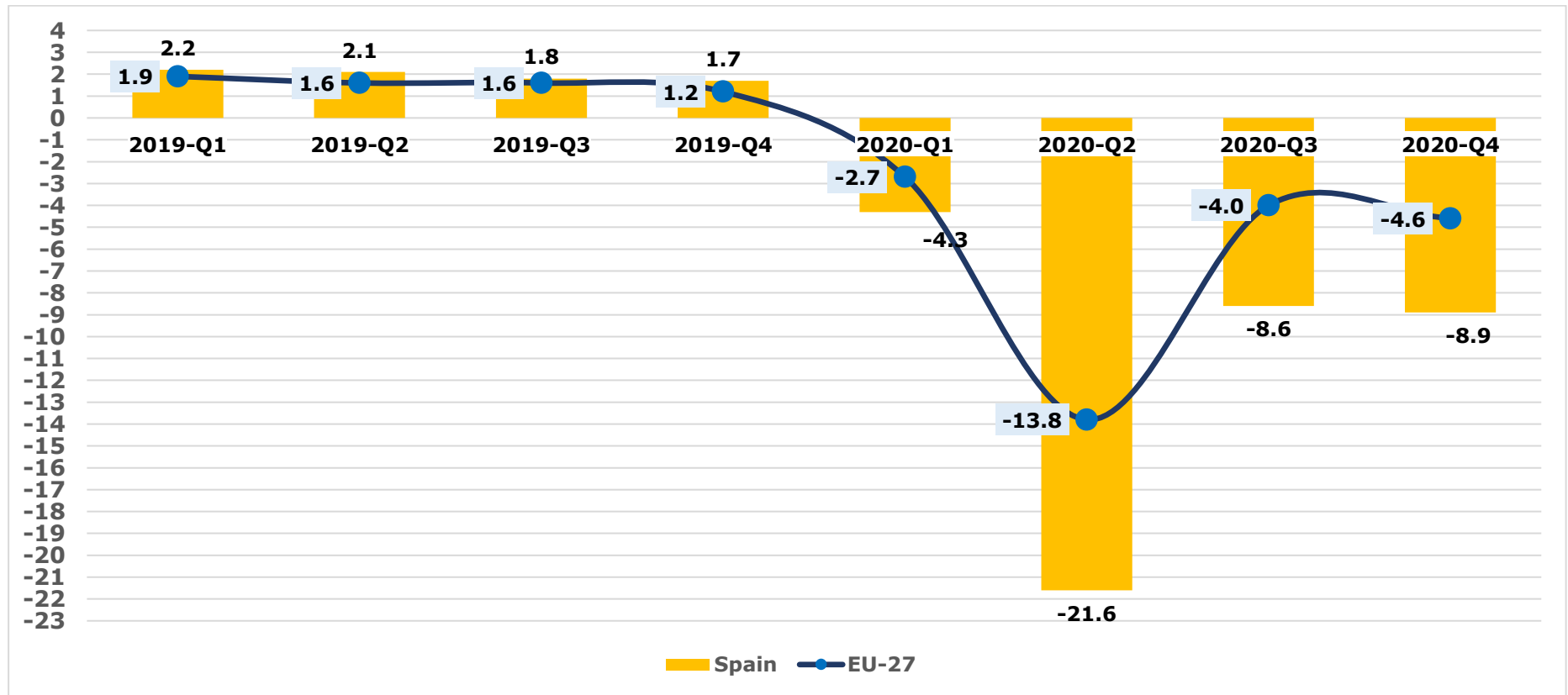


Source: Eurostat - indicator [DEMO_R_MWK_10__custom_560457] Deaths by week, sex and 10-year age groups - downloaded 26 April 2021. For Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (data received upon request on 19 April 2021).

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 Spain, the decrease was 8.9% for the same period.

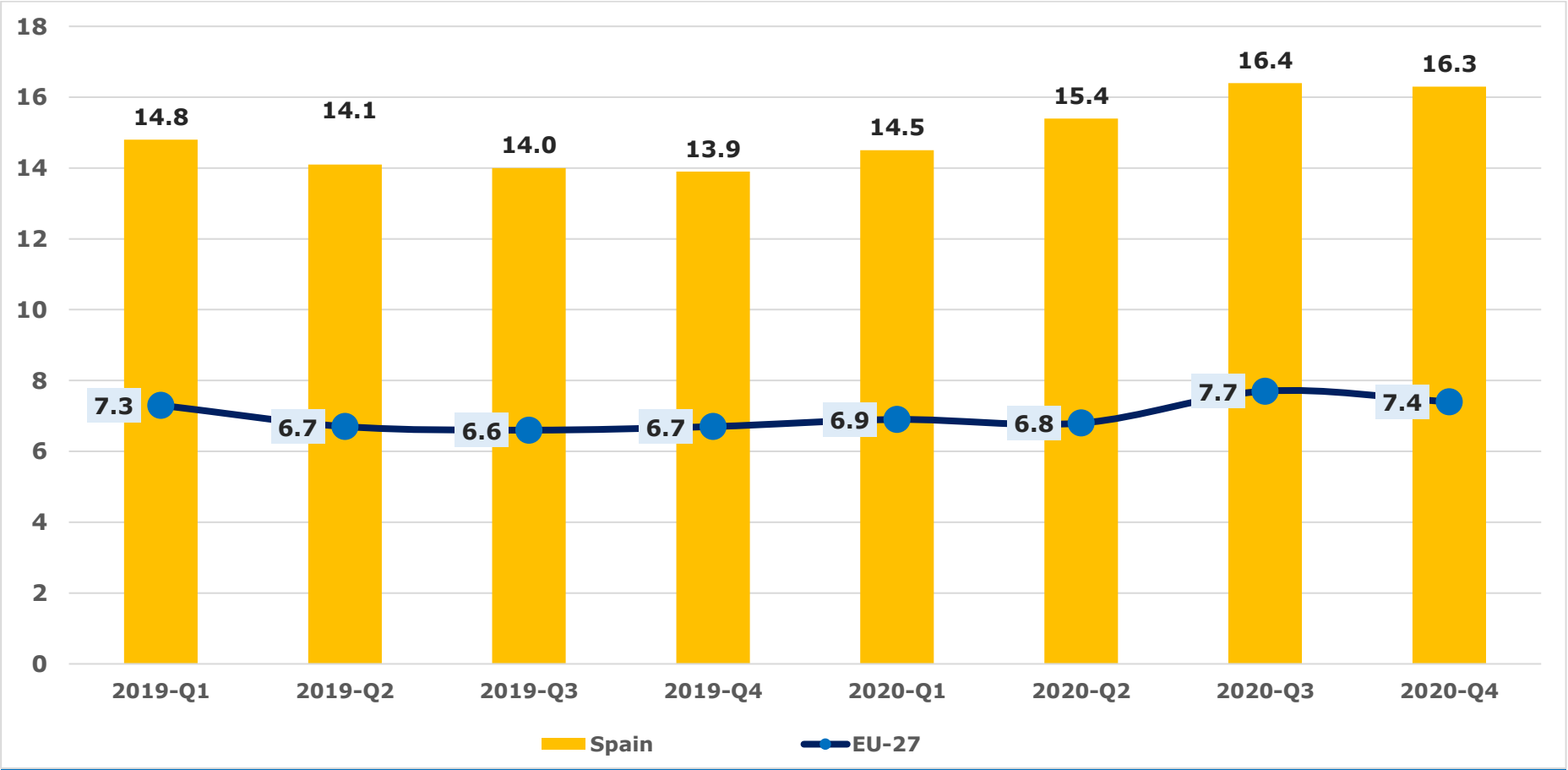
Figure 6: Gross domestic product at market prices, chain-linked volumes prices adjusted, percentage changes in quarter compared with same quarter in previous year (2019-2020, EU-27 and Spain, %)



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 Spain, it is 16.3%.

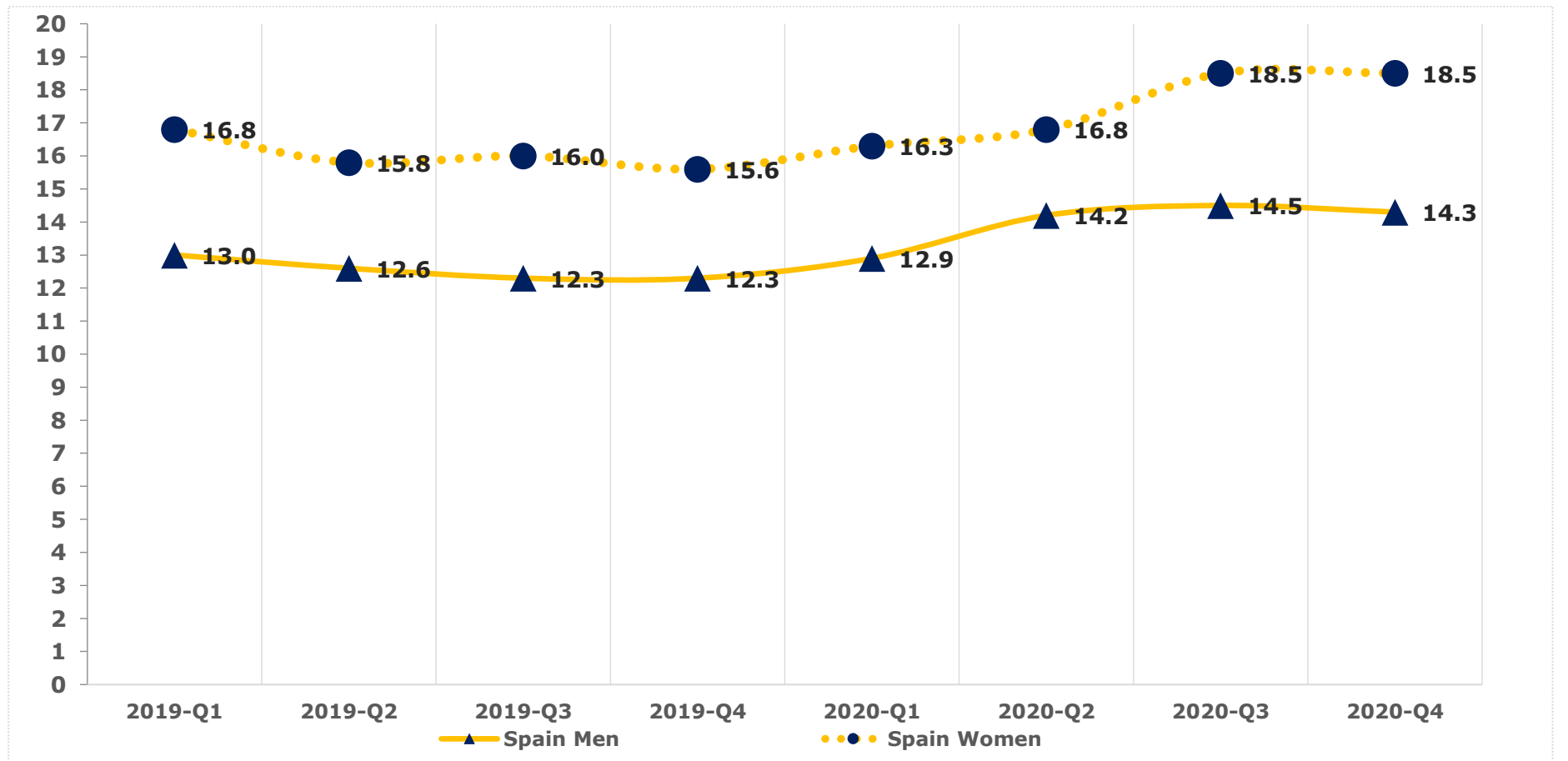
Figure 7a: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Spain, %)



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 Spain, these figures are 14.3% and 18.5% respectively.

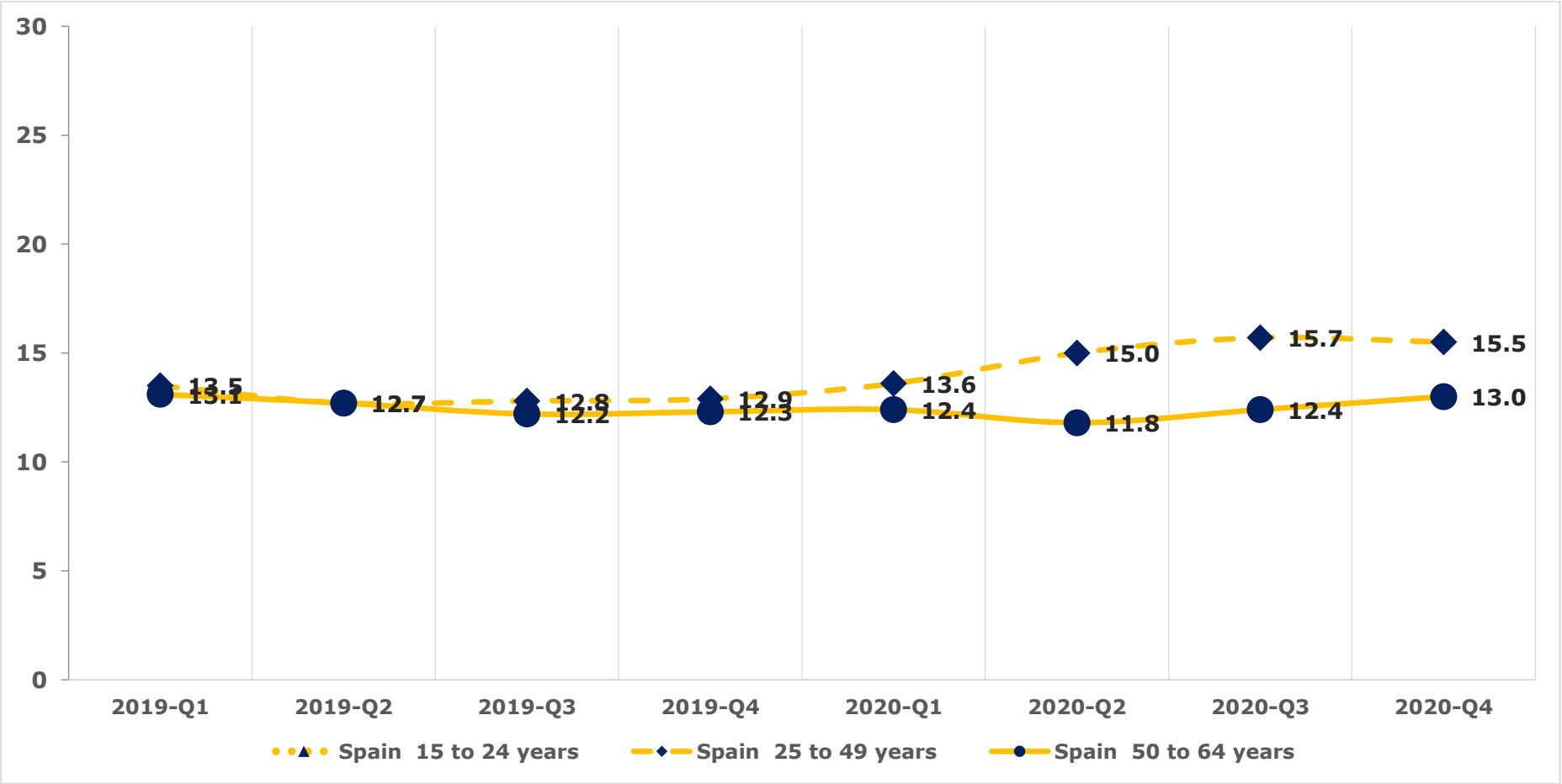
Figure 7b: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Spain, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_organ] - 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 Spain, it is 40.1%.

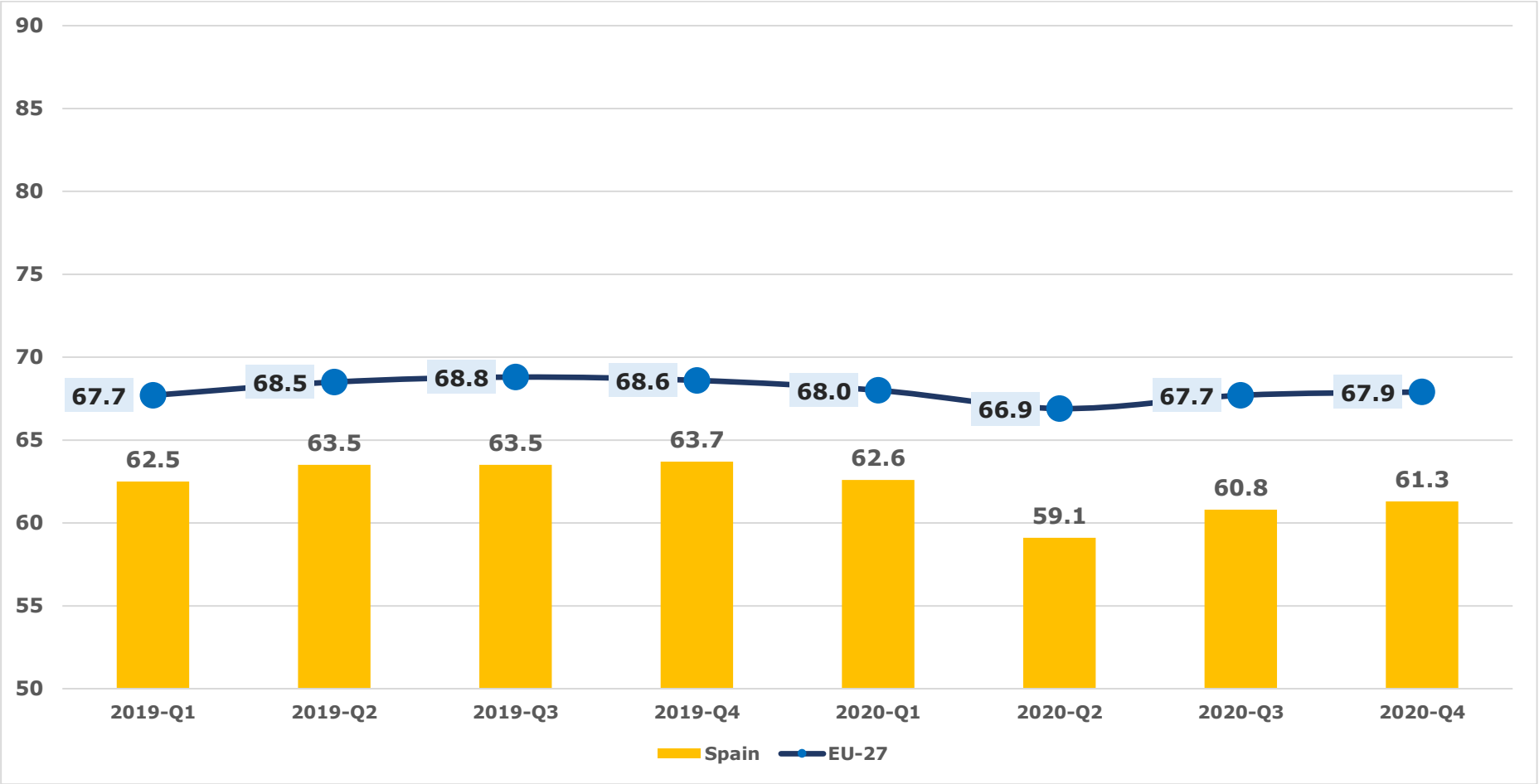
Figure 7c: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Spain, %)



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - 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 Spain, it is 61.3%.

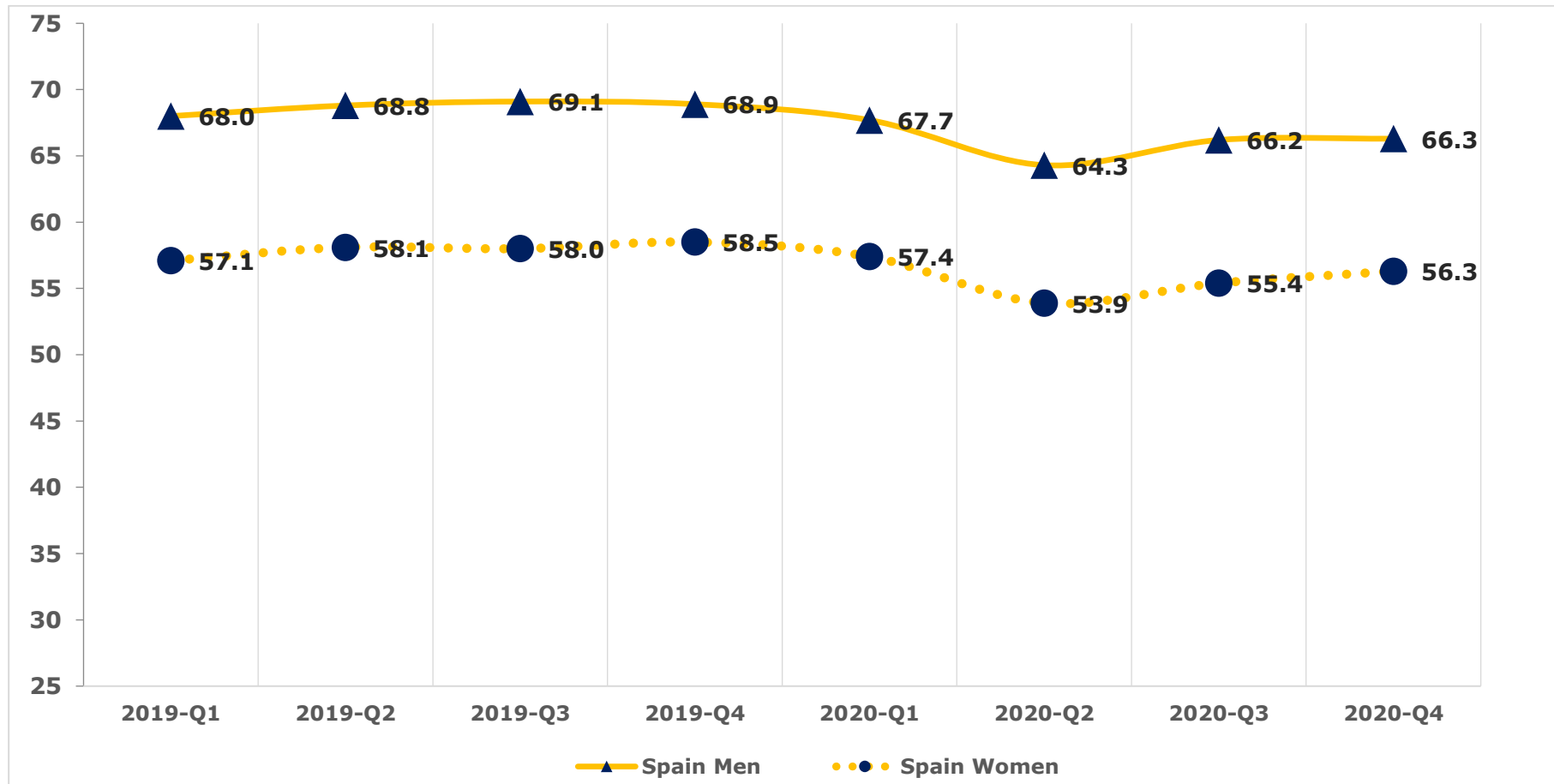
Figure 8a: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Spain, %)



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 Spain, these figures are 66.3% and 56.3% respectively.

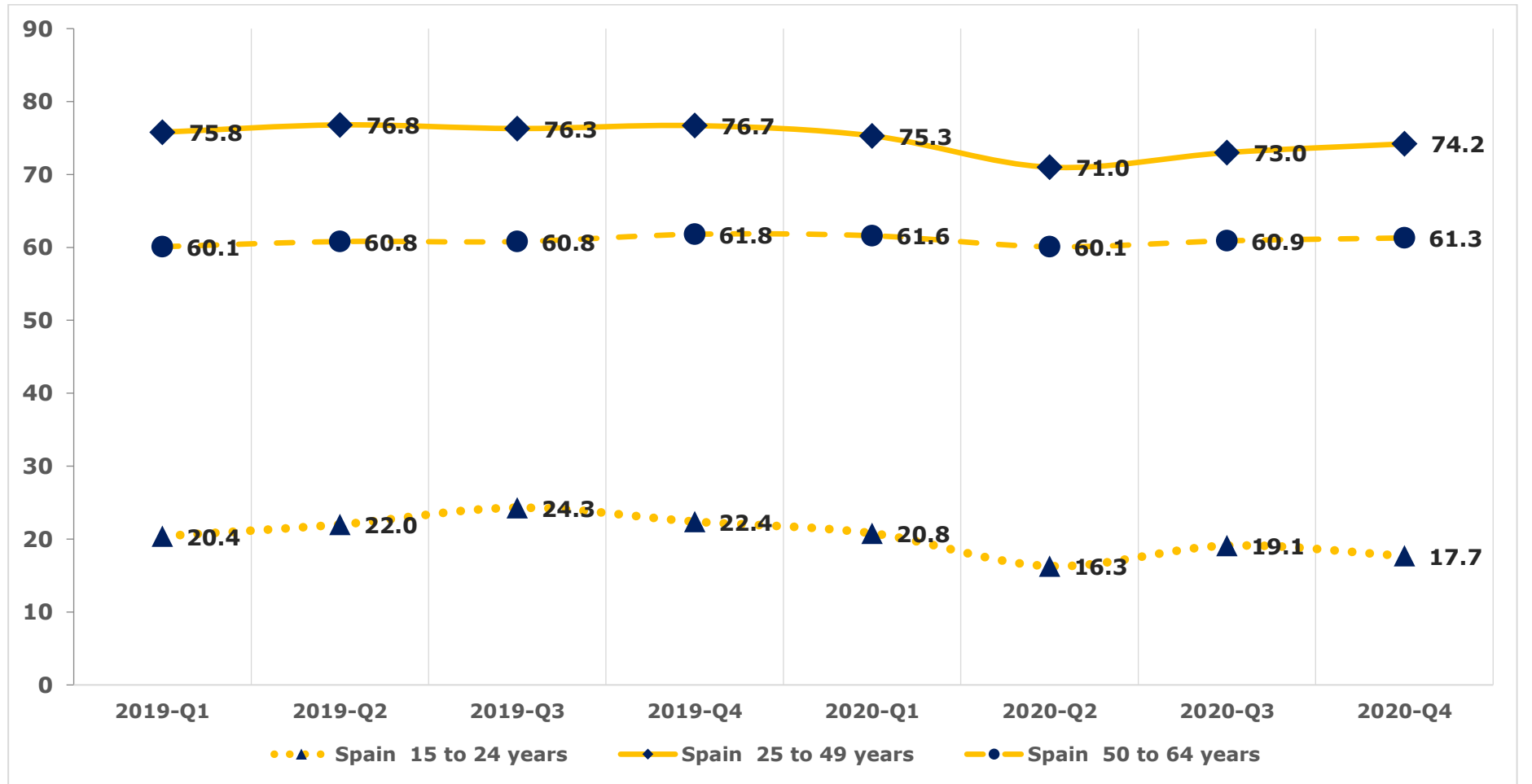
Figure 8b: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Spain, %)



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 Spain, it is 17.7%.

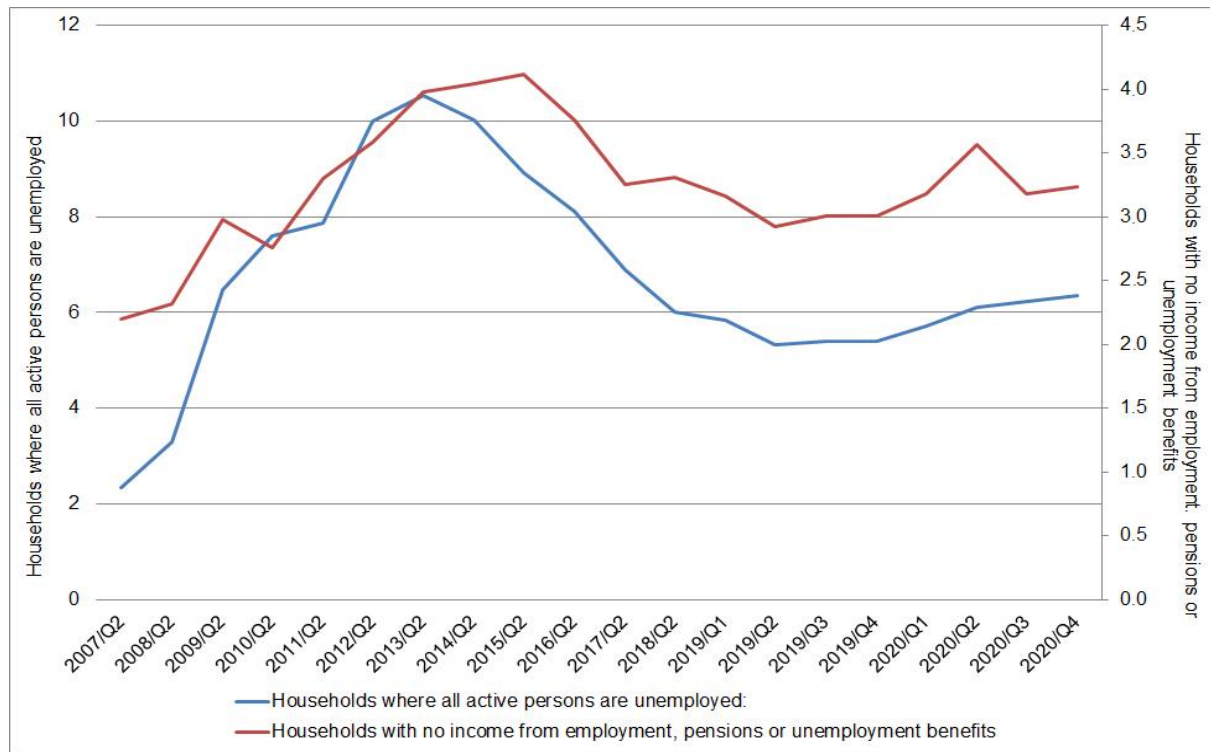
Figure 8c: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Spain, %)



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

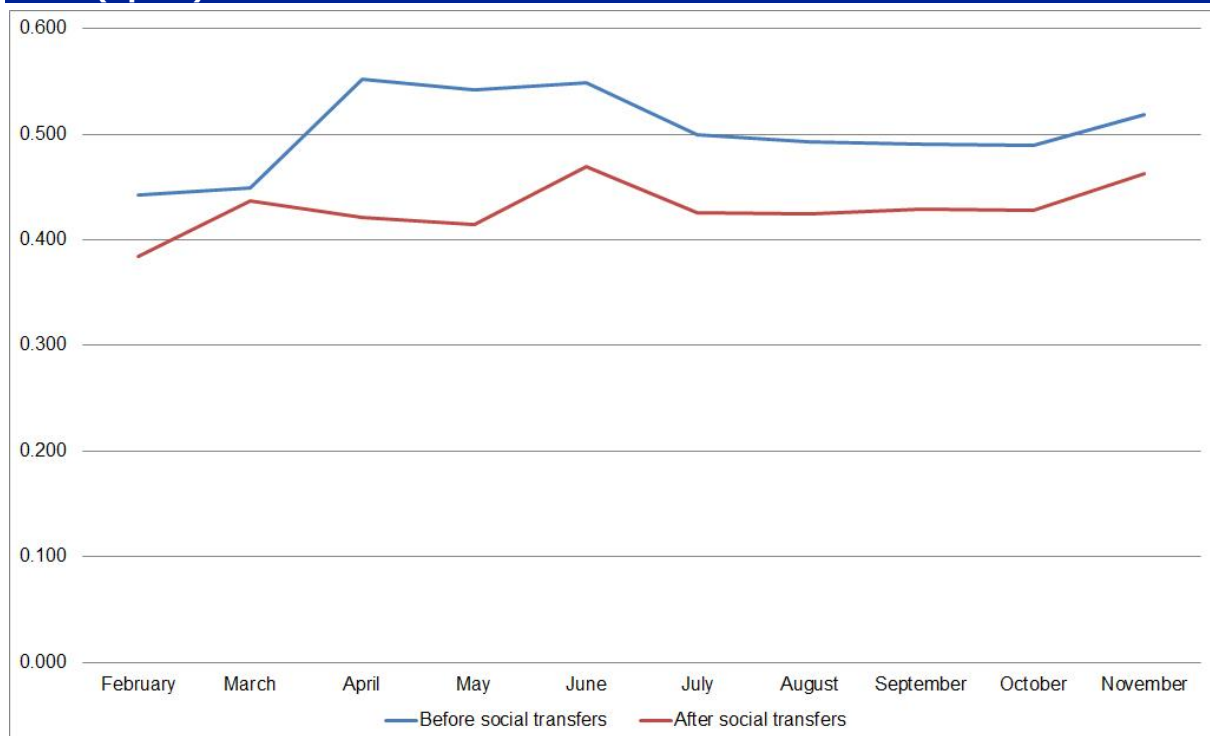
1.3 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion situation

Figure 9: Proportion of households in which all members are unemployed and proportion of households with no income, 2007–2020 (% , Spain)



Source: 2007–2020 Spanish Labour Force Survey (LFS), National Institute of Statistics (INE).

Figure 10: Wage inequality, Gini index, monthly evolution, February–November 2020 (Spain)



Source: La Caixa (2020) (<https://www.caixabankresearch.com>).

2 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC²

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:

- 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).
 - Range (minimum-maximum), duration and conditionality (thresholds) (for conditional measures).

If the measure is neither flat nor conditional, this is 'Not applicable'.
- e) Targeted population: what is/are the target(s), i.e. the parts of the population/labour force/sectors targeted by the measure? If data and evidence are readily available, estimated number of people targeted and/or applicants.
- f) Beneficiaries: How many recipients of the measure are there (if relevant and available)?
- g) Novelty: Was the measure new or an already existing one that was adapted?

2.1 Measures related to unemployment benefits

2.1.1 Prestaciones extraordinarias por cese de actividad para trabajadores autónomos (Extraordinary unemployment schemes for self-employed people)

- a) Short description of the measure: An extraordinary self-employed cessation of activity (CA) benefit of limited duration with exceptional conditions. It was exempt from conditions related to the claimant's insurance record, was not deducted from the accumulated protection entitlements, did not require a prior contribution period and was exempt from social contributions. Applicants had to show a drop of at least 75% in turnover in the previous month, compared to the average for the half-year prior to the state of emergency. The duration of the benefit was 1 month, which could be extended until the end of the state of emergency. Since March 2020, several CA benefits have been introduced, with a progressive tightening of their conditions of access and entitlement (i.e. reduced amounts, reduction in social contribution exemptions, higher level of drop in turnover and/or lower level of income).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: In March 2020 (RDL 8/2020, art. 17) the first extraordinary CA benefit was introduced; from July 2020, recipients were able to claim a CA ordinary benefit compatible with self-employment in the event of a drop in turnover (RDL 24/2020, art. 9) – this measure was due to run until 30 September 2020, but was then extended until 31 January 2021 (RDL 30/2020, DA4^a). In October 2020 (RDL 30/2020, art. 13), a new extraordinary benefit was introduced for self-employed workers who had to suspend their activity completely or who were unable to access other unemployment

² The temporary measures mentioned in this report refer to the situation as of 15 April 2021. Their duration may have been extended since then.

benefits. This benefit was extended until 31 May 2021 (RDL 2/2021, DT2^a). February 2021 saw the introduction of three new benefits for self-employed workers: a) an extraordinary benefit for self-employed workers affected by a temporary suspension of activity; b) an ordinary benefit for the reduction of income compatible with self-employment; and c) an extraordinary benefit for the reduction of income for those who could not access other benefits (RDL 2/2021, arts. 5–7). In July 2020 (RDL 24/2020, art. 10), an extraordinary benefit for seasonal workers was included, which was reintroduced in October 2020 (RDL 30/2020, art. 14) and February 2021 (RDL 2/2021, art. 8). This benefit could be received for a maximum of 4 months and expired on 31 May 2021.³

- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount of the extraordinary benefit in March 2020 was 70% of the regulatory base (calculated as the average of the last 180 days) or of the corresponding minimum contribution bases, in the event of insufficient contributions. Since June 2020, the extraordinary benefits have amounted to 50% of the corresponding minimum contribution base (except for temporary workers, for whom the figure is 70%). The amount of ordinary benefit is established in accordance with the rules of the General Social Security Law (RDL 8/2015).

The duration varies according to the benefit. The extraordinary benefit established in March 2020 lasted until the last day of the month in which the state of emergency ended. The benefits for seasonal workers and some of the extraordinary measures have been paid for a maximum of 4 months. Other benefits, in particular ordinary benefits, end on the effective date specified in the regulation.

Access to these benefits in the event of a reduction of income is subject to the condition that turnover should be 75% lower than in a certain period of the previous year. Since 30 September 2020, the reduction in turnover must be of 50%.

From July 2020, the recipients of the extraordinary CA were able to claim an ordinary CA benefit compatible with self-employment in the event of a drop in turnover (in Q3/2020, net income had to be 75% lower than in Q3/2019, and must not have exceeded EUR 5,818.75). This access to ordinary CA benefit was extended until 31 January 2021.

In October 2020, a new extraordinary CA benefit was introduced for self-employed workers who had to suspend their activity completely (until the end of the suspension of activity for self-employed registered for at least 30 days and with income from employment of less than 1.25 times the minimum wage; it was not deducted from the accumulated protection entitlements) or who were unable to access other CA benefits (with a maximum duration of 4 months for self-employed registered since 1 April 2020 and whose income was less than 50% of the minimum wage in Q4/2020). This extraordinary CA benefit did not depend on previous contributions. This extraordinary CA benefit was extended until 31 May 2021.

February 2021 saw the introduction of three new benefits for self-employed workers registered since 1 January 2021:

a) An extraordinary CA benefit for self-employed workers affected by a temporary suspension of activity (maximum duration of 4 months; income from employment had to be less than 1.25 times the minimum wage; the benefit was not deducted from the accumulated protection entitlements).

b) An extraordinary CA benefit in the event of a reduction in income for those unable to access other benefits (maximum duration of 4 months; net income in the first half of 2021 must be lower than EUR 6,650 and lower than Q1/2020; income from employment must be less than 1.25 times the minimum wage).

³ All those benefits have been extended until 30 September 2021 (RDL 11/2021, arts. 5-9).

c) An ordinary CA benefit in the event of a reduction of income compatible with self-employment (whose net income in the first half of 2021 must be lower than EUR 7,980 and lower of Q2/2019).

Targeted population: Self-employed workers, including seasonal workers,⁴ whose activity has been suspended or who have suffered a drop in turnover.

- e) Beneficiaries: Over 1 million self-employed workers received the special unemployment benefit between April and June 2020 (the peak came in June 2020, with 1,466,123 beneficiaries, 45.1% of the average number of self-employed registered on 30 June 2020). The end of the extraordinary benefits reduced the volume of recipients significantly (140,500 recipients in July 2020, 4.3% of the average number of self-employed registered on July 2020); but following the introduction of the new measures, the volume increased again (355,364 recipients in November 2020), 10.8% of the average number of self-employed registered on December 2020 (see Annex, Table A2).⁵
- f) Novelty: The cessation of activity benefit already existed. The new benefits were extensions of the existing cessation of activity benefit that exceptionally relaxed the eligibility, compatibility and contribution requirements.

2.1.2 *Subsidio excepcional por fin de contrato temporal* (Exceptional unemployment benefit at the end of a fixed-term contract)

- a) Short description of the measure: Exceptional unemployment assistance benefit to protect people who did not have access to unemployment benefits, either ordinary or extraordinary, at a time when access to employment (or job search) was impossible, due to the restrictions or self-isolation.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: It was introduced in March 2020 (RDL 11/2020, art. 33). No application possible from 21 July 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount of this extraordinary allowance was EUR 430.27 (80% of the IPREM).⁶ Its duration was 1 month.
- e) Targeted population: Unemployed whose fixed-term contract (over 2 months), including the probationary period, ended during the state of emergency. Requirements included jobseeker registration, income under 75% of the minimum wage and lack of access to other types of benefits.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: It provided exceptional access to already existing unemployment assistance of limited duration.

2.1.3 *Subsidio extraordinario para personas empleadas de hogar* (Extraordinary allowance for domestic workers)

- a) Short description of the measure: Exceptional unemployment assistance benefit to protect domestic workers who had lost their jobs or been obliged to stop work

⁴ Workers whose only work in a given period of time has been carried out as self-employed workers for a minimum number of months, during which they have been registered (and have paid contributions) on the Self-Employed Workers' Scheme.

⁵ Sources: Social Security (press releases April 2020 to January 2021), available at: <https://bit.ly/379yrhg>; and statistics on self-employed workers 2020, Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, available at: <http://bit.ly/3eyzJH3>

⁶ IPREM: official income indicator Public Income Indicator of Multiple Effects, which was EUR 537.84 per month between 2017 and 2020. In 2021, the amount has increased to EUR 564.90 per month.

temporarily (or to reduce the number of hours worked) due to the restrictions or self-isolation.

- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: It was introduced in March 2020 (RDL 11/2020, arts. 30–32). No application possible from 21 July 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount of the benefit was 70% of the regulatory base (calculated as the average of the last months) with a maximum amount of EUR 950. The benefit could be claimed until the last day of the month in which the state of emergency ended.
- e) Targeted population: Domestic workers registered in the Social Security Special Regime for domestic workers. The common requirement for the beneficiaries was a lack of access to other types of benefits.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available. Access to this benefit was very restrictive, due to the small proportion of the population registered in the Social Security Special Regime for domestic workers (working as informal employees). It is calculated that almost three quarters of domestic workers are not registered, and so they could not apply for the allowance (Caritas, 2020).
- g) Novelty: This measure entails the exceptional recognition of entitlements for a group that did not have such entitlements.

2.1.4 Acceso extraordinario a la prestación por desempleo de los artistas (Extraordinary access to unemployment protection for artists in public performances)

- a) Short description of the measure: Extraordinary access to unemployment benefit, introduced on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time to protect those artists who had to stop working due to the restrictions on activities.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: In May 2020 (RDL 17/2020, art. 2), extraordinary access to unemployment protection for artists in public performances was established. In November 2020 (RDL 32/2020, art. 2) and January 2021 (RDL 2/2021, DF6^a), the duration of the unemployment protection for artists was extended to 31 May 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount was 70% of the corresponding minimum social security contribution base (EUR 775.83). The benefit for artists could be for 3 or 6 months, depending on the period worked in the previous year.
- e) Targeted population: The target group was artists with lack of access to other types of unemployment benefits.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This measure provided exceptional access to already existing unemployment benefit.

2.1.5 Acceso extraordinario a la prestación por desempleo de los profesionales taurinos (Extraordinary access to unemployment protection for bullfighting professionals)

- a) Short description of the measure: Extraordinary access to unemployment benefit, introduced on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time to protect those bullfighting professionals who had to stop working due to the restrictions on activities.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.

- c) Timing: This extraordinary access to unemployment benefit was granted in November 2020 (RDL 32/2020, art. 4) and was extended in January 2021 (RDL 2/2021, DF6^a). The entitlement to access the unemployment benefit expired on 31 May 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The amount was 70% of the corresponding minimum social security contribution base (EUR 775.83). The benefit for bullfighting professionals expired on 31 May 2021.
- e) Targeted population: Bullfighting professionals registered in the Social Security Special Regime on 31 December 2019, who did not receive any other type of unemployment benefit.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This measure provide exceptional access to already existing unemployment benefit.

2.1.6 Subsidio por desempleo excepcional para personal técnico y auxiliar del sector de la cultura (Exceptional allowance for the technical and auxiliary staff in the cultural sector)

- a) Short description of the measure: Unemployment assistance benefit introduced on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time to protect technical and auxiliary staff in the cultural sector who had to stop working due to the restrictions on activities.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was introduced in November 2020 (RDL 32/2020, art. 3) and was extended in January 2021 (RDL 2/2021, DF6^a). It expired on 31 May 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: The amount for this extraordinary allowance was EUR 430.27 (80% of the IPREM). The extraordinary benefit expired on 31 May 2021.
- e) Targeted population: Unemployed technical and auxiliary staff in the cultural sector. The beneficiaries had to be registered as job seekers; lack access to other types of unemployment benefits (including extraordinary ERTE or CA unemployment benefits); and have a previous record of contributions to the General Regime of Social Security of at least 35 days, not consumed through any other benefit.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This measure entailed the exceptional recognition of entitlements for a group that did not have such entitlements.

2.1.7 Subsidio especial por desempleo para las personas que han agotado su prestación entre el 14 de marzo y el 30 de junio de 2020 (Special unemployment assistance benefit for people who exhausted their benefit between 14 March and 30 June 2020)

- a) Short description of the measure: Exceptional unemployment assistance benefit, introduced on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time, to protect those unemployed who exhausted their unemployment benefit between 14 March and 30 June 2020, and who did not have access to other unemployment benefits at a time when access to employment (or job search) was impossible, due to the restrictions or self-isolation.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was introduced in November (RDL 32/2020, art. 1) and could be claimed between 25 December 2020 and 25 January 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: The amount of this extraordinary unemployment assistance benefit was EUR 430.27 (80% of the IPREM) and had a duration of 3 months.

- e) Targeted population: Unemployed people who exhausted their benefit between 14 March and 30 June 2020 and who lacked access to other types of benefits.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This measure entailed the exceptional and temporary extension of entitlements.

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

2.2.1 Expediente Temporal de Regulación del Empleo (ERTE) (Programme of Temporary Adjustment of Employment)

- a) Short description of the measure: ERTE⁷ is a measure of job protection that allows companies (or self-employed people with employees) to cut working hours (between 10% and 70% of working hours) or temporarily suspend the employment contract because of COVID-19, thus reducing their labour costs (social contributions). Employees affected by ERTE have access to unemployment benefits paid by Social Security from day one, regardless of their previous contributions and without any reduction in their accumulated unemployment protection entitlements (RDL 8/2020, art. 25). From 1 October 2020 (RDL 30/2020, art. 8), any days for which this benefit is received will be deducted from the entitlement to future contributory unemployment protection, except in exceptional circumstances: a) if unemployment benefit is claimed after 1 October 2026; b) if it is claimed before 1 January 2022 due to loss of employment, the end of a temporary contract, individual or collective dismissal for economic, technical, organisational or production reasons or any dismissal declared unfair.

During ERTE, it is not possible to dismiss or terminate the employment contract (RDL 9/2020). There are exemptions from the social contributions of workers covered by an ERTE that range from 100% to 70%, depending on the cause of the ERTE and the number of employees in the company, provided the company maintains employment for 6 months after the resumption of activity.⁸

- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Since 14 March 2020, the ERTEs have been extended several times: until 30 June 2020 (RDL 8/2020), 30 September 2020 (RDL 24/2020), 31 January 2021 (RDL 30/2020) and 31 May 2021 (RDL 2/2021). The extensions of the ERTE deadlines were previously agreed between employers, trade unions and the government.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Unemployment benefit: the amount is 70% of the regulatory base (calculated as the average of the contribution base over the last 180 days); duration: until the end of the ERTE. There is a maximum amount to be paid, which is calculated by taking a percentage of the IPREM⁹ (in 2021, between EUR 1,153, or 175% of IPREM, for people without children; EUR 1,483 for people with two or more children).

⁷ There are two main grounds for an ERTE: 1) *force majeure* – e.g. the declaration of a state of emergency that restricts or impedes activities, or a fresh outbreak of COVID-19 (ERTE due to the activity being impeded, ERTE due to the activity being restricted, and ERTE due to a fresh outbreak); and 2) for objective reasons of an economic, technical, organisational or productive nature related to COVID-19 (ERTE ETOP). The ERTEs are regulated under Article 47 of the Workers' Statute of 1980 (updated in RDL 2/2015), RDL 8/2020, RDL 24/2020, RDL 30/2020 and RDL 2/2021.

⁸ More details in art. 1.4 of RDL 2/2021.

⁹ The percentage varies according to the number of children. The IPREM (Public Income Indicator of Multiple Effects) is the official income indicator used by Spanish public administrations to determine access to a series of social protection schemes.

- e) Targeted population: In general, access to an ERTE is available to all sectors that have activity difficulties for COVID-related reasons and to all employees (including non-standard workers).¹⁰ All employees are covered by contributory benefit (including fixed-discontinuous workers), as are worker-members of worker-owned companies and worker cooperatives affected by an ERTE.
- f) Beneficiaries: At the end of December 2020, 175,864 companies and 755,613 employees were covered by ERTes. These figures had remained stable since September 2020. In March 2021, the number of people on ERTE has fallen by 2.8 million (81.1%), compared to the peak of the crisis (end of April 2020: 3,386,785 workers on ERTE). By sector, the hospitality and catering industry (food and beverage services), which accounts for 36% of companies and 33% of workers on ERTE, has been the worst affected.¹¹ Employees on ERTE represent 5.2% of those affiliated to the general Social Security scheme and 19.8% of the unemployed population (based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for the fourth quarter of 2020).

In April 2020, the number of beneficiaries of contributory benefit was 3,386,785 (15.4% of the total labour force in Q2/2020, according LFS data). By December 2020, the figure had dropped to 755,613 beneficiaries (3.3% of the total labour force in Q4/2020, according to LFS data) (see Annex, Table A1).

- g) Novelty: ERTes in general were already regulated by the 1980 Workers' Statute. Unlike ERTes in general, the ERTes due to COVID-19 include a relaxation of the requirements by reducing the processing time (from 15 days to 5 or 12, depending on the type of ERTE) and simplifying the procedure (a report by the labour inspectorate is optional). The ERTE extensions have featured an adjustment of the exemptions from contributions, depending on the cause of the ERTE (RDL 30/2020, RDL 2/2021). Concerning contributory benefits, it is an extraordinary extension of existing contributory unemployment benefits that relaxes access requirements and does not reduce the accumulated entitlements for a period of time.

2.2.2 Permiso retribuido recuperable (Recoverable paid leave)

- a) Short description of the measure: This was paid leave that was recoverable and was compulsory for employees who did not provide essential services. It was approved by RDL 10/2020. The aim was to reduce the mobility of workers, in order to avoid contagion and to comply with the confinement decreed in March 2020 (RDL 463/2020) without harming employment. During the leave, employees kept their usual pay and employers could recover the hours lost up to the end of 2020, by negotiation with the employees.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The leave was limited to the period from 30 March to 9 April 2020 (inclusive). It was permitted to provide services on Monday, 30 March 2020 if it was impossible to cease the activity immediately.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: It was aimed at employees who provided non-essential services in public- or private-sector companies or entities. Employees whose contracts were

¹⁰ Temporary workers on ERTE have their contracts suspended; they resume when the workers are no longer on ERTE. The contract cannot be terminated prematurely or in the 6 months during which the company undertakes to maintain employment by taking advantage of social contributions. Permanent discontinuous workers must be included in the ERTE, if applicable, when they are scheduled to be incorporated again into the company.

¹¹ Data revised up to 1 March 2021. More details in <https://bit.ly/3rReAeZ>. Based on experimental statistics from the National Statistics Institute (INE), it was found that, of the companies in existence on 1 July 2020, the survival rate of those that used an ERTE was three points higher (97.7%) than of those that did not (94.6%) (<https://bit.ly/3jrmxnR>).

suspended, those who could continue to provide remote services and those who worked in the essential services listed in RDL 10/2020 were excluded.

- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This was a new and exceptional measure.

2.3 Measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay

2.3.1 *Incapacidad temporal (IT) asimilada a baja laboral por accidente de trabajo por COVID-19 (Temporary incapacity (TI) caused by COVID-19 assimilated into sick leave due to an accident at work)*

- a) Short description of the measure: Since March 2020, those employees and self-employed workers forced to stay at home and unable to work (unless working from home is possible) because they are (self-)isolating¹² or are infected, or because of mobility restrictions in the municipalities where they reside or work are considered to be temporarily incapacitated by an accident at work (RDL 6/2020). Having COVID-19 treated as an accident at work, rather than as a common illness, is more advantageous for both the company and the worker, as the temporary incapacity is paid for by Social Security (or another competent institution) from the day following the day on which the leave is granted (the employer only pays the full salary for the day on which the leave is granted) and 75% of salary is received from the day following the start of the leave.¹³
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was approved in March 2020 and is still in effect today. The benefit is paid for the duration of the sick leave. The regulation was retroactive and applied to those persons who were infected before 12 March 2020.¹⁴
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Temporary incapacity caused by COVID-19 is treated similarly to an accident at work, exclusively for the economic benefit of temporary disability. Workers receive 75% of their salary from the day following the start of the leave. The benefit lasts for as long as the worker is on sick leave due to COVID-19. It is necessary to demonstrate that the person has COVID-19 and is registered with Social Security. It is not necessary to prove a minimum period of paid contributions.¹⁵
- e) Targeted population: It is targeted at employees and self-employed workers who are registered with Social Security. There are as yet no estimates of the number of people targeted by the measure, as the evolution of COVID-19 infections is unpredictable.
- f) Beneficiaries: Up to February 2021, there were 3,769,798 TI processes due to COVID-19 (19.8% of the total number of workers affiliated to Social Security and 19.6% of the total employed population in 2021) and expenditure had reached EUR 1.8 billion (0.14% of GDP in 2019).¹⁶
- g) Novelty: Temporary incapacity due to an accident at work already existed before COVID-19. The main novelty is that the COVID-19 infection is regarded as an

¹² It also applies when the worker is self-isolating because he/she is living with someone with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis.

¹³ When it is a common illness, the employee receives no benefit for the first 3 days; between the 4th and the 15th day, it is paid by the company; and from the 16th day by Social Security or other competent institution. Between the 4th and the 20th day of sick leave, 60% of the salary is received; and from the 21st day – 75%.

¹⁴ This measure was extended to public administration personnel (RDL 7/2020) and to those who cannot go to work due to restrictions in the municipalities where they reside (RDL 13/2020).

¹⁵ More details on the Social Security website: <https://bit.ly/3tL6F4r>

¹⁶ More details in the Government Presidency press release: <https://bit.ly/3vMRt6O>

accident at work, rather than a common illness (as was customary, for example, with common flu).

2.4 Measures related to health insurance

2.4.1 *Reorganización interna del sistema sanitario* (Internal reorganisation of the healthcare system)

- a) Short description of the measure: Following its universalistic eligibility logic, the SNS provides medical treatment and hospitalisation for COVID-19 to everyone residing in the country (including undocumented migrants). The national vaccination strategy implies the gradual provision (free of charge) of the vaccine to different social groups, based on their estimated priority.¹⁷ Hospitals rearranged their structures (expanding the number of beds, notably of intensive care units – ICUs), and healthcare professionals from primary care centres moved to non-face-to-face interaction with patients (including those chronically ill).¹⁸ Outpatient services cut back their activities and moved to non-face-to-face systems. Non-priority appointments were largely cancelled, and home hospitalisation units stepped up their activity.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Vaccination started on 27 December 2020 and has been gaining momentum as vaccines have arrived in the country. Adjustments to the internal organisation of hospitals and primary care centres have been going on since the early stages of the pandemic, taking account of the changing epidemiological situation at various moments in time in the different territories.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The whole of society. Vaccination has progressed following a sequence previously agreed between the Ministry of Health and the regions.¹⁹ Health professionals and patients (notably the chronically ill) were directly affected by the reorganisation measures taken by the management of healthcare centres to cope with the overwhelming demand for medical treatment.
- f) Beneficiaries: As of 12 March 2021, 3.2% of the population in Spain had received the two doses of the vaccines distributed, and 5.3 million doses had been given.²⁰ Potentially all patients being treated by the SNS may have been affected by the internal reorganisation of the SNS. In the high-incidence areas, during the peaks of the pandemic up to 80% of patients in hospital were there for COVID-19 related reasons (and up to 85% in ICUs).²¹
- g) Novelty: Measures radically altered the normal functioning of the SNS, decreasing the follow-up of patients and increasing waiting times for non-COVID-19 treatment.

¹⁷ <https://bit.ly/3eFFXF0>

¹⁸ <http://bit.ly/3996RCw>

¹⁹ Vaccination started with care home workers and the residents of care homes for the elderly. It followed with front-line health and care personnel. In third position were the remaining health and care personnel, as well as prison workers. In the fourth group were highly dependent people (Grade III of the long-term care system). Group 5 was essentially the eldest cohorts (first those over 80, followed by those over 70, and those over 60). Group 6 were essential workers (police, the military and emergency services, followed by teachers in secondary and primary schools and early learning). Group 7 are people under 60 with an underlying medical condition. Group 8 are people aged 56–59. Group 9 – people aged 45–55.

²⁰ <http://bit.ly/3vjZgRA>

²¹ <https://bit.ly/3l1uCPc>

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

2.5.1 *Ingreso Mínimo Vital* (Minimum Living Income)

- a) Short description of the measure: The minimum income scheme Minimum Living Income (MLI) is a national, non-contributory social security benefit (RDL 20/2020). It offers entitlement to a cash transfer and is expected to boost social and labour inclusion opportunities; it is run and controlled by the National Social Security Institute (Arriba and Rodríguez Cabrero, 2021).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: After the decision was taken in December 2019 to include the creation of MLI in the left-wing coalition government's programme, the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic saw implementation of MLI brought forward to May 2020. In September 2020, important amendments were made to improve coverage (RDL 28/2020, DF11th; RDL 30/2020, DF5th). New amendments were included in February 2021 to introduce less strict requirements governing cohabitation and the involvement of third parties (such social services or third sector entities) in the certification of specific requirements (RDL 3/2021, art. 3). Proposals for new amendments to the MLI legislation have been submitted to the Spanish parliament.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Means testing is based on the overall income received by the household in the previous fiscal year. The MLI for a one-person household is EUR 469.93 in 2021, and 30% is added to this amount for each additional member; single-parent households receive an uplift of 22% (irrespective of the number of children). The maximum amount that can be received by a household is 220% of the basic MLI amount. The benefit is paid for as long as the need persists.
- e) Targeted population: Households (including one-person households) that have insufficient economic resources to cover their basic needs. A household is considered to have insufficient economic resources when its monthly average income in the previous fiscal year was lower than the monthly income guaranteed by the MLI. The labour income of all members of the household is considered, together with other benefits or pensions, both contributory and non-contributory (except regional minimum income schemes). Also, the value of resources and assets owned by the beneficiaries, excluding the main residence, must be less than three times the annual amount of MLI. Beneficiaries of this new scheme must live independently (those under 30 must prove 3 years of independent living and 12 months of social security contributions) and have had legal and effective residence in Spain for at least 1 year prior to application (with some exceptions). Primary beneficiaries must be 23 or over (or younger, with dependent children) and 65 or under. The initial estimates were that it would reach at least 850,000 households. In March 2021, 1,159,504 households had applied for the benefit.
- f) Beneficiaries: In March 2021, only 203,838 households were receiving the benefit.²²
- g) Novelty: The MLI provides a new common basis for more integrated and comprehensive social assistance protection.

²² MISSI (18 March 2021), <https://bit.ly/3uL3BFI>

2.6 Measures related to housing support

2.6.1 *Medidas sobre impago de hipoteca (Measures related to mortgage default)*²³

- a) Short description of the measure: The suspension of evictions has been prolonged, the coverage of the population at risk has been increased and the income requirements for someone to benefit from the measure have been reduced (RDL 6/2020). The measure extends the period of coverage (by 4 years), extends the protection to single-parent families with at least one dependent child, and makes the income requirement of Law 1/2013 more flexible, by increasing the maximum income limit of the family unit. The total income of all the members of the family unit must generally not exceed three times the annual IPREM (which includes 14 payments). In very specific cases, that indicator may be multiplied by four or five.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The deadline has been extended from May 2020 (as envisaged in Law 1/2013) to May 2024. Until then, eviction cannot occur if particularly vulnerable persons are affected by the judicial or extrajudicial mortgage foreclosure process. The additional group includes single-parent families with only one dependent child.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The coverage of the beneficiary population has been extended to especially vulnerable groups, such as single-parent families, even if they have only one dependent child. Between 2017 and March 2020, protection was given to large families, single-parent families with dependent children, people with at least 33% disability, unemployed people with mortgage arrears and those in arrears who are over 60. A total of 14,193 people were affected in 2019.²⁴
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: The measure is not a new initiative in housing policy, but is an improvement on the existing legislation.

2.6.2 *Medidas sobre impago de alquiler de vivienda (Measures related to non-payment of housing rents)*²⁵

- a) Short description of the measure: Implementation of two measures: 1) In March 2020, a measure to help tenants affected by the economic downturn to reduce (by up to 50%) or postpone the payment of rent for the duration of the state of emergency, for up to 4 months; 2) In December 2020, this measure was reintroduced. It extended the coverage period, during which evictions for rent arrears were halted.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: In cases of the non-payment of rent, a contract could be extended until 31 January 2021; an additional extraordinary extension of 6 months could be approved at the request of the tenant and if accepted by the landlord (until 31 July 2021). Finally, the ban on evictions was extended up to the end of the state of emergency on 9 May 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The income of the tenant had to be less than three times the IPREM, which was increased by a factor of 0.1 for each dependent child in

²³ Law 1/2013, RDL 5/2017 modifying Law 1/2013, RDL 7/2019.

²⁴ The information for 2020 is not yet available.

²⁵ RDL 11/2020 amends Law 29/1994. Subsequently, RDL 11/2020 was amended by RDL 37/2020 (known as the anti-eviction decree), which has improved the protection of groups unable to pay rent while financially compensating the landlord. This measure was reinforced by RDL 1/2021.

the family unit. The increase per dependent child is 0.15 times the IPREM for each child in a single-parent family unit, or who is living with a dependent person or a victim of violence against women, or in cases where a dependent person or minor is living in the same dwelling. In the case of persons with a disability of at least 33%, a situation of dependency or serious illness, the limit was four times the IPREM.

- e) Targeted population: Vulnerable households with no proven housing alternative. As a requirement, the person obliged to pay the rent had to be unemployed, on ERTE or have suffered a substantial loss of income as a result of the pandemic. It covered 36,467 people in 2019.²⁶
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: The reform of March 2017 (RDL 5/2017) extended the moratorium period for evictions following mortgage foreclosure until March 2020, improved access to housing rental during the process of foreclosure, and extended the economic conditions of protection, debt restructuring and social rent for vulnerable groups; meanwhile, the government committed itself to developing, within 8 months (from 18 March 2017), a regulation to facilitate the recovery of homeownership by mortgage defaulters. Both measures are innovative, particularly the second one, which was the subject of demands from tenants' associations. Currently, the protection is provided not only to people affected by COVID-19, but to everyone in a vulnerable situation. This is a new measure, since the current Law 29/1994 on Urban Leases does not provide for any exemption from the payment of rent due to *force majeure* or the declaration of a state of emergency or any other reason, except with regard to habitability. At the same time, the interests of large landlords or persons owning 10 or more apartments are protected.

2.6.3 Medidas sobre ayudas financieras para el pago de alquiler de la vivienda (Measures on financial aid for the payment of renting housing)

- a) Short description of the measure: A microcredit programme to help tenants pay all or part of the rent on their usual home. The amount of the financial aid may be up to EUR 900 per month and can cover 100% of the rent. It may be granted for up to 6 months and could be used for a first monthly payment in April 2020. The maximum total credit is EUR 5,400 per tenant at 0% interest. It is a financial programme worth EUR 1.2 billion and supported by the Official Credit Institute. The management of the programme is carried out by the Autonomous Communities.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Measure initially extended until 31 December 2020 and then finally until 31 December 2021 (Order 930/2020, 29 September 2020).
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The rent, plus basic expenses and utilities (water and energy) must be greater than or equal to 35% of the net income received by all members of the household. Household income must be less than three times the IPREM, which is increased by a factor of 0.1 for each dependent child in the family unit. The increase per dependent child is 0.15 times the IPREM for each child in a single-parent family unit, or who lives with a dependent person or a victim of violence against women, or in cases where a dependent person or minor lives in the same dwelling. In the case of persons with a disability of at least 33%, a situation of dependency or serious illness, the limit is four times the IPREM.
- e) Targeted population: Tenants who find themselves economically and socially vulnerable as a consequence of COVID-19. This is estimated to affect 450,000 households.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.

²⁶ The information for 2020 is not yet available.

- g) Novelty: It is a measure that extends the protection provided by RDL 11/2020 and RDL 15/2020 through Order 336/2020 of 9 April 2020. It is also part of the 2018–2021 housing plan.²⁷

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

2.7.1 Plan MECUIDA ('Taking Care of Me' Plan)

- a) Short description of the measure: The *Mecuida* Plan, approved under RDL 8/2020, aims at allowing salaried workers whose underage children are unable to attend school or a childcare centre due to the pandemic (because they are ill, are required to be confined, or because their school is closed) to adjust their work schedule accordingly. This could include a variety of options (changing work-shift, altering schedules, flexible hours, working from home, etc.), depending on the nature of the job and the possibilities open to the company. It does not constitute paid leave, since the salary is reduced in proportion to the hours not worked (including the option of 100% reduction).
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The scheme is due to be in place between 18 March 2020 and 31 May 2021.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The target population are salaried workers (including those on non-standard contracts, public employees and civil servants) with underage children (or other dependent relatives who – for reasons of age, illness or disability – require personal attention due to COVID-19) who are unable to attend school or a childcare centre because of the pandemic. Self-employed workers cannot benefit from this scheme, but they may benefit from the TI scheme described in Section 2.3.1.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data available.
- g) Novelty: This scheme, part of a larger framework of initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of the pandemic on the workforce and the economy, constitutes a variation of pre-existing legislation that already covers working parents who have to care for a seriously ill child (RD 1148/2011), although under the existing legislation the parental leave is financed by the Social Security system.

2.8 Other important temporary social protection/inclusion measures adopted in the context of the pandemic, which do not fall into any of the categories listed in the previous sections

2.8.1 Garantía de suministro de agua y energía a consumidores vulnerables (Access to basic energy services)

- a) Short description of the measure: Access to energy in Spain is guaranteed through the social discount on electricity (*bono social eléctrico*). The supply of electricity, natural gas and water to those consumers who are vulnerable, severely vulnerable or at risk of social exclusion²⁸ may not be suspended (RDL 8/2020, art. 4).
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure provides for the automatic extension until 30 September 2022 of all energy vouchers that expired before 15 September 2020.

²⁷ Art. 2, Financial support to housing rental programme (State Housing Plan 2018–2021).

²⁸ This typology is defined in RD 897/2017, which regulates the figure of vulnerable consumers.

- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: Consumers who are vulnerable, severely vulnerable or at risk of social exclusion. Those whose energy vouchers expired before 15 September 2020.
- f) Beneficiaries: January 2020: 1,227,357; May 2020: 1,269,565; July 2020: 1,306,957 (see Annex, Table A3). The beneficiary population increased by 6.4% between January and July 2020. This increase was around 9% among households with children. The population protected by the COVID-19 legislation is, according to the attached table (Annex, Table A3), insignificant in terms of volume.
- g) Novelty: The measure is not new, but it reinforces the measures included in Royal Decree 897/2017 for the protection of vulnerable consumers (Marbán Gallego and Rodríguez Cabrero, 2018; Rodríguez Cabrero and Marbán Gallego, 2020).

2.8.2 Aumento del gasto, reducción del copago y refuerzo de la Sanidad Pública en los Presupuestos Generales del Estado de 2021 (2021 State Budget expanding healthcare expenditure, reducing co-payments and reinforcing Public Health)

- a) Short description of the measure: The passing of the 2021 State Budget on 22 December 2020 implied the opening of funding lines for a series of measures that profoundly affect the SNS and that have to be normatively deployed during the year. Although they have not as yet (at the time of writing) been elaborated and implemented, they are important enough for them to be listed in this section (Law 11/2020). The budget of the Ministry of Health for 2021 increases to EUR 3,421 million, EUR 257 million of which has been allocated to the gradual phasing out of co-payments for pharmaceutical products – a measure introduced in 2012, in the context of the fiscal consolidation measures associated with the financial crisis.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Some of the health-related measures included in the State Budget came into force on 1 January 2021 (like the elimination of pharmaceutical co-payments for certain groups), while others require further legislative work (like the passing of the new Law on Equity, Universality and Cohesion of the SNS; at the time of writing, this was out for public consultation, prior to being discussed in parliament, along with many of the other initiatives included in the 2021 Budget).
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: No information is available regarding some of the programmes (such as increased resources for dental care). As for the phasing out of co-payments for pharmaceutical products, the scheme should apply to families who benefit from child benefits, pensioners with income of less than EUR 11,200 per year, and minors with at least 33% disability recognised by the Social Services.
- e) Targeted population: While the whole population should benefit from some of the decisions (COVID-19 vaccines, improvement in public health measures, primary and community care, health technology equipment, e-Health, etc.), others are more directed at certain groups (children in underprivileged families and retirees on low pensions will be the main beneficiaries of the scrapping of pharmaceutical co-payments). In relation to the elimination of co-payments for pharmaceutical products, an estimated 6 million people should benefit from this scheme (3.56 million pensioners, 2.35 million people from households claiming child benefits, and around 138,000 minors with disability).²⁹
- f) Beneficiaries: The package was introduced on 1 January 2021, and so no data are yet available.

²⁹ <https://bit.ly/2NbKOSW>

- g) Novelty: The desire to strengthen the SNS after a decade of budget cuts and the huge impact of the pandemic on the public healthcare system, together with the availability of funds (to a large extent linked to the Next Generation EU funds), constitute an opportunity to develop certain initiatives in relation to the SNS that had long been under discussion (creation of a Public Health Agency, elimination of pharmaceutical co-payments for vulnerable groups, strengthening of the primary and community care sectors, etc.).

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 a section (3.4) on debates and recommendations.

3.1 Expected cost of social protection and inclusion measures

The current public expenditure on the package of measures to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, according to the 2020 state budget execution³⁰ and taking into consideration GDP in 2019, amounts to €44.91 billion (3.61% of GDP). It should be noted that this estimate does not include expenditure on vaccines, which will be financed with funds from the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (*Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia*). The impact of the crisis has been very uneven, with a particular concentration in the retail, transport, hospitality and catering services, as well as in the arts and recreation sectors.

In January 2021 (RDL 2/2021), as a consequence of the ongoing pandemic, the government extended unemployment benefits and job protection support measures to employees (ERTE) and the self-employed until 31 May 2021.

The main measures are aimed at maintaining the income of those workers and self-employed who, due to the restrictions on economic activity decreed by the government during the state of emergency, have had to cease or reduce their activity. These comprise the Programme of Temporary Adjustment of Employment (ERTE) and the extraordinary benefit for the cessation of activity for self-employed workers, plus certain extraordinary subsidies for those workers who do not contribute to Social Security for their unemployment benefits (domestic workers and others). The cost of the ERTes is EUR 15.55 billion (1.25% of GDP) and the cost of the self-employed and other extraordinary subsidies is EUR 3.86 billion (0.31% of GDP). Complementary measures include the job protection measures to support employers and the self-employed by means of waiving social security contributions. These amount to EUR 5.54 billion (0.45% of GDP) for the ERTes plus the cost of waiving the contributions of the self-employed and other extraordinary subsidies – EUR 2.25 billion (0.18% of GDP) (See Annex table A4).

The health system expenditure on the reinforcement of healthcare personnel and on the COVID-19 prevention and protection teams accounts for EUR 8.28 billion (0.67% of GDP), and spending on sickness benefits and sick pay for workers who have been infected or who must be isolated as a preventive measure is EUR 2.11 billion (0.17% of GDP). As a result of COVID-19, some structural deficiencies in the health system have been highlighted, especially in the need to increase the personnel ratio in primary care centres.

Other key measures aim to maintain household incomes, including for those at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This includes the Minimum Living Income (MLI) and other forms of social assistance aimed at preventing rent arrears and the eviction of people who have no other housing available; avoiding the disconnection of basic utilities (water, electricity and gas); providing help for the homeless and assistance for women victims of gender violence; safeguarding child nutrition; and supplying other basic needs of the people. The cost of the MLI from June to December 2020 was about EUR 0.52 billion (0.04% of GDP). MLI was approved in May 2020 and started to run in June. The extraordinary social assistance measures have reached EUR 5.72 billion (0.46% of GDP), plus the reinforcement

³⁰ 2020 Budget execution of Public Administration, March 2021.

<https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/hacienda/Paginas/2021/290321-ejecuci-n-2020.aspx>

of basic social protection of EUR 0.33 billion (0.03% of GDP) and EUR 0.45 billion (0.04% of GDP) for housing support (see Annex, Table A4).

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

The income maintenance measures for workers and the support measures for employers and the self-employed are temporary measures, whose duration depends on the restrictions on the normal development of the economy. According to a report from Intermon-Oxfam,³¹ ERTes may have prevented more than 710,000 people from falling into poverty. They have been essential in limiting the rise in poverty and inequality: they are estimated to have kept the Gini inequality index 1.17 points lower than it would have been had the ERTes not been in place.

MLI is suited to reducing the risk of poverty over time, due to its permanent nature. In 2020, its impact was somewhat lower, as it had not been in existence for long. The rest of the measures to support vulnerable families are in the hands of local government.

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

Some of the most relevant gaps are described here:

- a) There is a percentage of the population – generally migrants – who do not have access to job contracts, as they do not have a residence permit. They work in 'informal jobs', without access to social protection benefits. So, almost three quarters of domestic workers could not apply for the domestic workers' allowance, as they were not registered with Social Security.
- b) The low coverage of the MLI is due to various factors. The conditions for accessing the benefit are very restrictive (household definition, age, residence and a means test based on the income of the household in the previous year). Other major challenges include the demanding and complex bureaucratic apparatus of MLI and its integration into the guaranteed income system, particularly the Regional MIS. Moreover, the gradual phasing-out of the main Child Benefit scheme (*Prestaciones por Hijo a Cargo – PFHC*) may result in families whose incomes lie between the MLI and the PFHC thresholds missing out.
- c) The digital divide is becoming a barrier to finding employment, to applying for benefits and to accessing online training. During the lockdown, underperformance at school has increased, due to the lack of computer resources among the poorest families.
- d) The slow development of working from home means there is a greater probability of infection among the most vulnerable people.
- e) The shortage of social housing and the lack of regulation of domestic rents have led to an increase in substandard housing (small flats with large families, flats shared by several families, rooms rented by the hour, housing without the necessary sanitation, etc.).
- f) Legislation is in place that hinders the regularisation of residence and/or work permits for migrants, which – among other limitations – prevents them from applying for social benefits.

³¹ www.oxfamintermon.org (dated 25 January 2021).

3.4 Debates and recommendations

The main debates that have emerged from the COVID-19 health crisis include the jump in unemployment that can occur when the ERTes and the other unemployment protection measures come to an end, the increase in poverty and the increase in income inequality.

The government should stimulate the economy, while promoting policies to protect both workers and the unemployed and ensuring the functioning of poverty risk reduction mechanisms. Some of the suggested measures would be: reducing the high rate of fixed-term contracts, as well as the number of non-standard jobs and informal work, narrowing the gender gap and the digital divide, and at the same time ensuring decent salaries, adequate coverage for unemployment protection and the effectiveness of the protection of vulnerable families through the MIS.

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ANNEX**Table A1: COVID-19 contributory benefit recipients, last day of the month: April 2020–April 2021**

	ERTE pre-RDL 30/2020	ERTE RDL 30/2020 and subsequent	ERTE total
April 2020	3,386,785		3,386,785
May 2020	2,998,970		2,998,970
June 2020	1,830,664		1,830,664
July 2020	1,118,542		1,118,542
August 2020	812,438		812,438
September 2020	728,909		728,909
October 2020	336,793	391,528	728,321
November 2020	326,296	420,604	746,900
December 2020	295,914	459,699	755,613
January 2021	252,637	486,332	738,969
February 2021	253,639	645,744	899,383
March 2021	215,530	528,098	743,628
April 2021	191,020	447,263	638,283

Source: Social Security (press releases, April 2020–May 2021), <https://bit.ly/379yrhg>

Table A2: Recipients of the cessation of activity benefits created to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

	Number of beneficiaries
April 2020	1,154,195
May 2020	1,412,605
June 2020	1,466,123
July 2020	140,500
August 2020	148,067
September 2020	151,442
October 2020	256,809
November 2020	355,364
December 2020	349,342
January 2021	314,884
February 2021	511,331
March 2021	469,320
April 2021	453,801

Source: Social Security (press releases, April 2020–May 2021), <https://bit.ly/379yrhg>

Table A3: Beneficiary population of the social discount on electricity (*bono social eléctrico*) (January 2020–July 2020)

Beneficiary population	January	May	July	Increase January–July 2020 (%)
Vulnerable consumers	628,386	671,091	682,269	8.6
Pensioners	98,113	94,824	95,087	-3.1
Large households	205,174	228,917	235,299	14.7
Household units without children	287,555	303,261	305,582	6.2
Household units with one child	20,799	22,315	22,915	10.2
Household units with two children	16,745	17,994	18,426	10.0
COVID-19 (Art. 28 RDL 11/2020)		3,780	4,960	31.2
Severely vulnerable consumers	598,971	598,474	624,688	4.3
Pensioners	71,176	63,058	63,349	-11.0
Large households	80,435	85,165	88,254	9.7
Household units without children	345,405	356,310	361,762	4.7
Household units with one child	62,737	66,780	68,561	9.3
Household units with two children	39,227	41,643	42,762	9.0
Total vulnerable and severely vulnerable consumers	1,227,357	1,269,565	1,306,957	6.4

Source: Boletín Indicadores Eléctricos (Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia, CNMC 2020).

Table A4: Expenditure – impact on the social protection system and social inclusion policies, 2020

		Billion EUR	% GDP
Unemployment benefits	Unemployment benefits people in ERTES	19.41	1.56%
	Extraordinary benefit cessation of self-employed activity		
Job protection support for employers, employees, self-employed	Waiving of social security contributions (ERTES)	7.79	0.63%
	Waiving of social security contributions self-employed worker		
Sickness benefits and sick pay	Isolated or infected workers protection (ILT)	2.11	0.17%
Health insurance	Protection and health system reinforcement	8.58	0.69%
	Health benefits and pharmacy		
Minimum income and other forms of social assistance	Minimum Income Support	6.56	0.53%
	Reinforcement of basic social protection		
	Extraordinary social expenses		
Housing support	COVID-19 impact of rent aid	0.45	0.04%
	Additional contribution to state housing plan		
Leave for parents	Not applicable		
Cost of social protection and inclusion measures COVID-19		44.91	3.61%

Source: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/hacienda/Paginas/2021/290321-ejecuci-n-2020.aspx>

GDP 2019: EUR 1,244.75 billion. Source: <https://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco4214/cntr0419a.pdf>

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