



Article

Young Women, Employment and Precarity: The Face of Two Periods of Crisis in Spain (2008–2021)

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Abstract: Youth employment in Spain is characterised by temporary contracts, part-time jobs, and low wages, a long-standing situation that has been further accentuated since the 2008 crisis, placing young people, especially women, in a position of vulnerability at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through different data, this article argues that young women's working conditions have deteriorated in comparison to those of previous generations and young men, in a period in which there have been two crises that have affected youth employment. Linking the results with the main youth employment policies allows us to observe why the precarisation of Spanish youth has not been stopped.

Keywords: precarity; gender; youth; generation; labour market; employment policies



Citation: Cabasés, M. Àngels, and Miquel Úbeda. 2022. Young Women, Employment and Precarity: The Face of Two Periods of Crisis in Spain (2008–2021). *Social Sciences* 11: 264. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11060264>

Academic Editors: Maria Helena Santos and Carla Cerqueira

Received: 16 May 2022

Accepted: 15 June 2022

Published: 17 June 2022

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1. Introduction

Youth labour precariousness is not something new in Europe. Numerous studies have warned of the deterioration of working conditions for young people, as well as their difficulty with becoming inserted into a labour market characterised by flexibility, individualisation, temporality, and low wages (O'Reilly et al. 2015; Podmenik and Gorišek 2020; Úbeda et al. 2020a). The impact of the 2008 economic crisis and the structural adjustment of the policies applied have caused, especially in southern European countries, serious consequences for the autonomy and future pathways of young people.

In Spain, nowadays, a model of precarious employment has become consolidated, which affects young people especially and is characterised by temporary status, involuntary partiality, overqualification, and low wages (Alonso 2014; Cabasés et al. 2016; Vanea and Utzet 2018; Úbeda et al. 2020b).

This situation of greater precariousness has affected young women more intensely. In spite of having increased their participation in the labour market, the female population has not yet reached the employment rate goal of 75% set in the 2020 European Strategy (COM 2020). Gender segregation in the labour market limits opportunities in life for women and enhances inequality beyond the labour sphere, and it can affect subjective well-being, health, and reproduce inequalities (Kamerāde and Richardson 2018; Hearn et al. 2020).

This paper establishes a comparative framework between generations of young women to show that their work conditions have deteriorated throughout the last decade, placing them in a situation of great vulnerability at the onset of the pandemic. After an initial theoretical framework about youth precarity, generation, and intersectionality, the analysis considers several variables and is carried out using data obtained from the Continuous Professional Life Sample (CPLS) of 2012 and 2018. At the same time, we analyse the newly available data on the impact of this new crisis in the youth labour market during 2020 and the first trimester of 2021 and the measures implemented that may affect young people. In the discussion, how our results are related to the current political debates on implemented youth employability policies and how the latter are failing to mitigate gender inequalities in Spain are examined.

2. Precarity, Gender, and Generation in an Intersectional Way

Uncertainty is growing in the capitalist economies of the Global North, coinciding with the dismantling of the standard employment model associated with the so-called Fordist regime, based on full-time and long-term work that provides security and stable livelihoods through employment and expansionist policies (Harvey 1989). This so-called standard model was never universal and, in fact, has occupied a short period of time. The standards of safety and labour rights were selective, generally applicable to men (excluding women), local citizens (excluding migrants and racialised people) and those with normalised trajectories (excluding marginalised people) (Vosko 2010). In this process, precarious work has been present within broad economic sectors of advanced capitalist countries, in sectors with low added value or not considered work, such as caretaking jobs—in fact, access to standard employment has often been limited to selected sectors and groups (Kalleberg 2009). In general, young people are especially affected. The poor quality of the work offered to them makes it difficult to establish solid life trajectories, forcing young people to develop uncertain life patterns. The generalisation of this pattern represents a change respective to previous generations, who had more continuity and stability in employment (Leccardi 2005; O'Reilly et al. 2019; Symeonaki et al. 2019; Yeung and Yang 2020).

In this article, precarity is conceived as a process in which individuals are subject to strong pressures as well as experiences that lead them to live an uncertain existence (Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Bessant 2018). At different levels, precarity involves the socio-economic sphere (labour crisis and poor quality of work), but also the socio-structural sphere (end of security and social cohesion provided by the welfare state) and the experiential sphere (uncertainty, mobility, and insecurity) (Santamaria 2010). This approach of precarity as a process allows for a critical analysis of the redefinition of work, employability, activation, and unemployment in our societies. In short, in the rearticulation of the employability policies the lack of decent job opportunities due to structural political-economic causes is transformed into a lack of skills for individual reasons. In this way, all the weight is placed on young people and their attitudes and capacities, regardless of the agency (Irwin 2021).

Precarity is specifically an important aspect of young Spanish women's lives. The advent of two crises (2008 and the one caused by COVID-19) has profoundly affected the different generations of young women, impacting job opportunities and future pathways. From a generational and gendered perspective, it is necessary to consider that there are different structures that cut across experiences of flexibility and identities. Despite changes and transformations in recent decades, structures such as care and reproductive work, "obligatory" maternity, and marriage remain rigid for many women (Fantone 2007). The existence of such ideological continuities allows for the persistence of unequal power relations that promote the difference between two "gender natures" (Aboim 2010). This double "nature" of gender that places men in a privileged position in the public sphere, while women remain in the private sphere and busy with domestic work and family and childcare responsibilities, is transferred to the work sphere.

In this context, generational and intergenerational relationships and mechanisms are made visible. For example, experiences of inequality such as "double presence" (Balbo 1979) are experienced differently by younger generations of women. Precariousness makes it difficult for them to emancipate themselves or to carry out family projects, often forcing them to choose between professional careers and other areas of life. Following Woodman and Wyn (2015), the generation is used in this article to understand how social inequalities operate, and in particular, the impact that youth precariousness is having in relation to gender to understand how old and new forms of instability and precariousness among women are connected.

Finally, it is necessary to recognise that these structures affect people's lives differently. As it is often used, the concept of precariousness—from a Eurocentric, androcentric, and middle-class perspective—masks different experiences and subjectivities of women, such as experiences related to migration and low-income neighbourhoods, racial discrimination,

discrimination based on sexual orientation, etc. Hence, this entire theoretical construct is only operative if we pay attention to the way in which the different social conditions intersect, something that we point out as one of the errors of youth employment policies as well as of many studies. We use the feminist notion of intersectionality to understand how social categorisations—such as gender, generation, social class, ethnicity, and ability, among others—and social inequalities are experienced simultaneously in a dynamic process, where structure and agency are interrelated (Crenshaw 1989). This process has mainly affected the working classes, migrants, and excluded people in our societies, causing impoverishment and a lack of future perspectives.

3. Methodology

The study is based on a mixed-methods research approach (Brady et al. 2006; Wolf 2010) that allowed the deterioration of working conditions for young women over the last decade to be analysed. Different quantitative data from public sources were analysed, allowing this reality to be contrasted with the main measures implemented in the field of youth employment by public administrations to understand the transformation of the labour market for young women and the persistence of gender inequalities in the labour market.

To begin with, starting from the 2012 and 2018 Spanish CPLS—anonymised longitudinal and individual data extracts from Social Security databases, the Municipal Census of Inhabitants from the National Statistics Institute (INE), and the annual summary of deductions and advancements on personal income taxes (Model 190) by the State Tax Administration—we analysed whether in 2018 young women's labour conditions had deteriorated compared to those of their predecessors at the same age and whether as a result they found themselves in a more fragile situation at the onset of the pandemic. It is worth noting that the size of the Spanish CPLS in 2012 was 1,187,962 people and the CPLS in 2018 was 1,248,050 people (the data are made available to researchers who request them from the Spanish Social Security. See <http://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/EstadisticasPresupuestosEstudios/Estadisticas/EST211/1429> (accessed on 1 May 2022)).

For the study, we considered the following variables: average annual wages (we used the variable “contribution bases”, as it provides the real monthly salary, without overtime) and number of days contributed (see Appendix A). With the aim of observing the difference between the beginning of a period and that period's mean, we obtained the ratio (salaries corrected by Consumer Price Index) corresponding to the quotient between the mean of these variables in a 10-year period and the value of the first year. In particular, we studied the ratio evolution corresponding to people aged 20 to 30, from retrospective information provided by the continuous samples between 1992 and 2012 and between 1998 and 2018; that is, in two 20-year periods under an intersectional perspective, considering variables such as gender, nationality of origin, and level of education. Median values of the variables “salaries” and “days contributed” corresponding to 2012 and 2018 were also calculated (For similar studies that use the database, see García and Arranz 2013; Puente and Regil 2020; Úbeda et al. 2020a).

To obtain the results, a programming code was developed (it was developed in Python programming language (v.3.7) and uses open-source Numpy (v.1.18.1), Pandas (v.1.0.3), and Matplotlib (v.3.2.0) libraries), structured into different modules (Figure 1): (a) file-loading functions; (b) a filter for people in the sample by age, gender, level of education, and nationality; (c) a module for calculating ratios and medians of the variables “salary” and “days contributed”; and (d) the generation of tables of results.



Figure 1. Simplified flow chart of code 1 execution. Source: our own elaboration.

At the general level, data-loading functions led the execution and, through the filters established for the sample applied to the variables “salaries” and “days contributed”, the tables of results were obtained.

In addition, other types of statistical data were considered, such as different public databases from the Tax Agency, the Active Population Survey (EPA)—a quarterly survey designed to offer different data on the Spanish labour market—and Eurostat, which allowed the CPLS data to be contextualised and the situation of young women at the end of the decade to be analysed. In addition, although not all the data are yet available that would allow for a comprehensive analysis of the consequences of the 2020 global pandemic on youth employment, information on young women was obtained through the EPA’s microdata from the last year (2020 and the first term of 2021). We must bear in mind that the statistics we used hide different biases that shape the way we interpret social reality. The dominant quantitative research still does not incorporate concepts and variables of diversity and intersectionality (Heilmann 2021). The different types of statistics discussed in this article employ, for example, a binary concept of gender that excludes identities and experiences. Although it has its limitations, the large number of data and the fact that they can be compared across generations helps to understand how gender inequalities persist.

Finally, these two types of data will allow us to contrast in the Discussion section the results obtained with the main youth employment policies. These are analysed through the different evaluations of the Youth Guarantee strategy carried out by the European Union and the Spanish government.

In conclusion, the triangulation of the different results allows significant information to be obtained on the employment situation of young women during a decade in which there was a serious economic crisis, in addition to another crisis of a different type, derived from the pandemic caused by COVID-19. As will be seen, it is affecting employment opportunities and therefore the lifestyles of women, perpetuating structural gender inequalities that have not been mitigated by the different policies implemented.

4. Results

4.1. Young Women Compared to Their Predecessors in the Spanish Labour Market

Using 2012 and 2018 longitudinal samples, we obtained the ratios of salaries and days contributed over 20 years of people aged 20 to 30. In Figure 2 we can observe how the variation in the mean salary in 10-year periods (deflated) has decreased and, consequently, how people under 30 years of age have seen their salary expectations decrease relative to previous generations. The lower growth started with the 2008 economic crisis, although in recent years a slight pickup can be observed among the male population. Moreover, the tendency in the mean salary growth of young women changed relative to that of men from 1998 onwards, coinciding with the greater incorporation of women into the labour market. These conclusions are along the same lines as those obtained in a study by the Bank of Spain (Puente and Regil 2020).

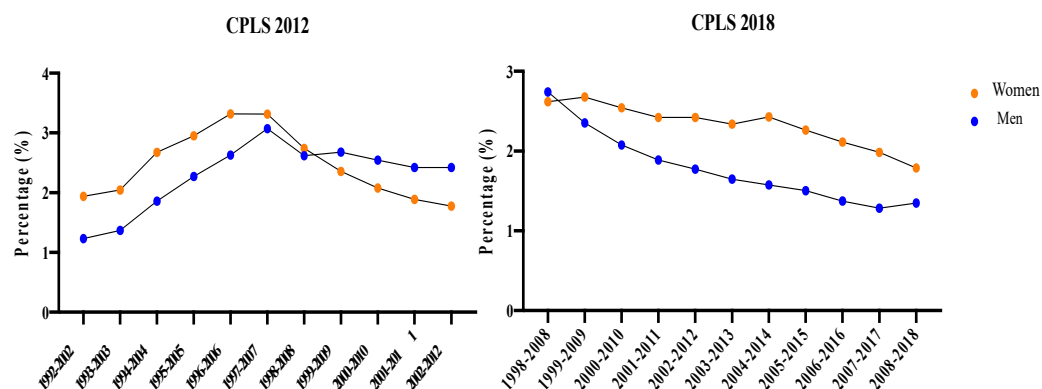


Figure 2. Variation of the mean salary in 10-year periods in people aged 20 to 30 years in Spain, (1992–2018). Source: Our own elaboration from the Spanish CPLS 2012 and 2018.

Figure 3 shows that the trend of the average growth of contributed days was very similar to that of wages, although less pronounced. Again, over the past 10 years, there was less growth in the number of days that people under 30 contributed compared to previous generations, with a higher incidence in the male population.

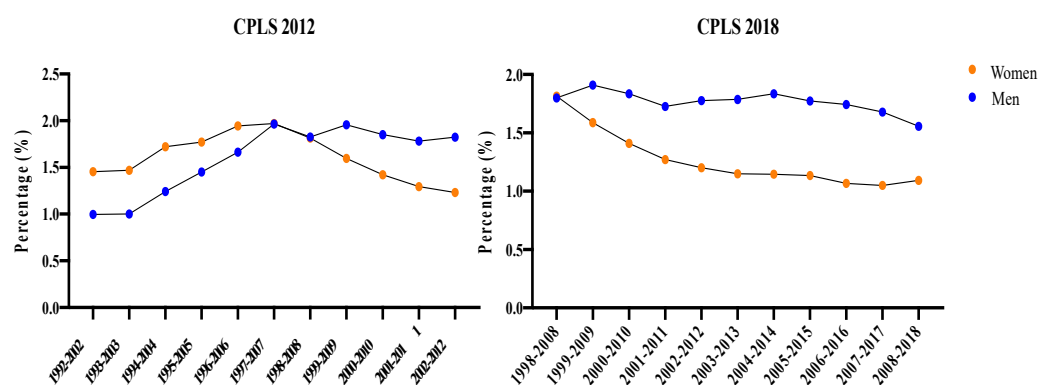


Figure 3. Variation in the average days contributed by periods of 10 years in people aged 20 to 30 years, Spain (1992–2018). Source: Our own elaboration from the Spanish CPLS 2012 and 2018.

The analysis by level of education reveals interesting results (Figure 4). Comparing CPLS of 2012 to that of 2018, the persistence of a gender wage gap is noted in all educational levels among people under 30 years of age, although the gap between women with a higher education qualification is reduced. However, in 2018, 50% of young females with a university education did not even reach the minimum wage, as the median salary was just over 13,000 euro per year.

Considering monthly contributions, a reduction is observed between 2012 and 2018, coinciding with the trend of the previous analyses and maintaining the difference between men and women. In 2018, young people with university education did not reach a median of 12 months' contribution; in particular, 50% of young women contributed less than 10 months and men less than 11 months.

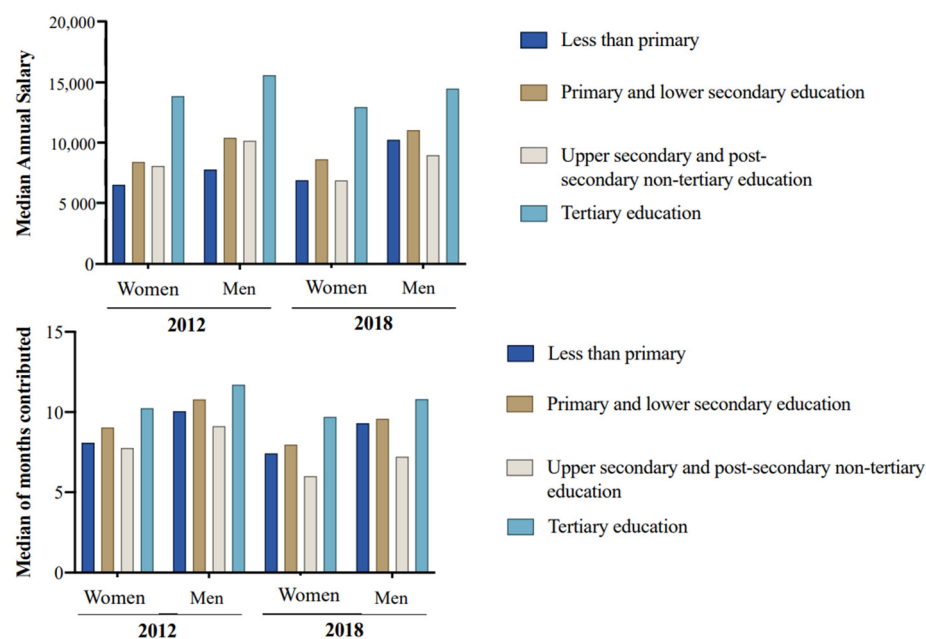


Figure 4. Median annual salary and of months contributed in people aged 20 to 30 years, Spain 2012 and 2018. Source: Our own elaboration from the Spanish CPLS 2012 and 2018.

Overall, there was higher growth in the average salary of young people with higher education compared to the rest, as shown in Figure 5. Moreover, from 2012 the salary trend was observed to decrease compared to previous generations, as the variation was reduced and was more pronounced in the female group.

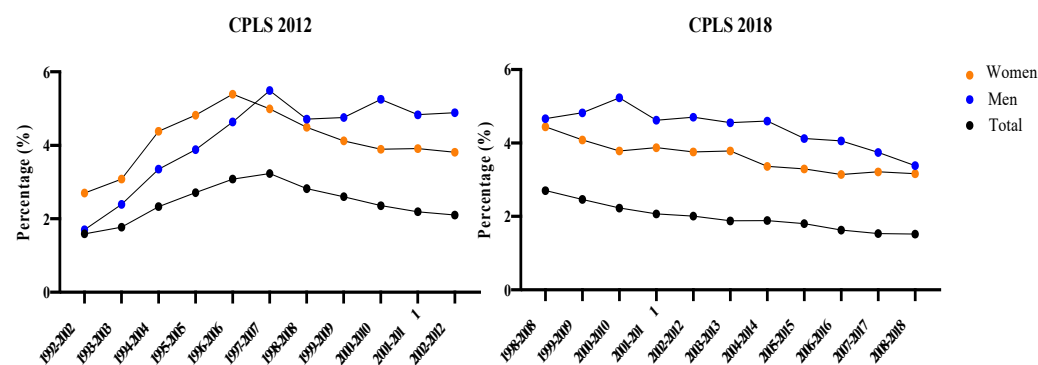


Figure 5. Variation in the average salary in 10-year periods in people aged 20 to 30 years who have reached higher education, Spain (1992–2018). Source: Our own elaboration from the Spanish CPLS 2012 and 2018.

According to Figure 6, grouping young people by nationality—Spanish, European, and the rest of the world—the salary divide increased for all of them, whereas the months contributed decreased. Non-European women presented the lowest salary levels and months contributed.

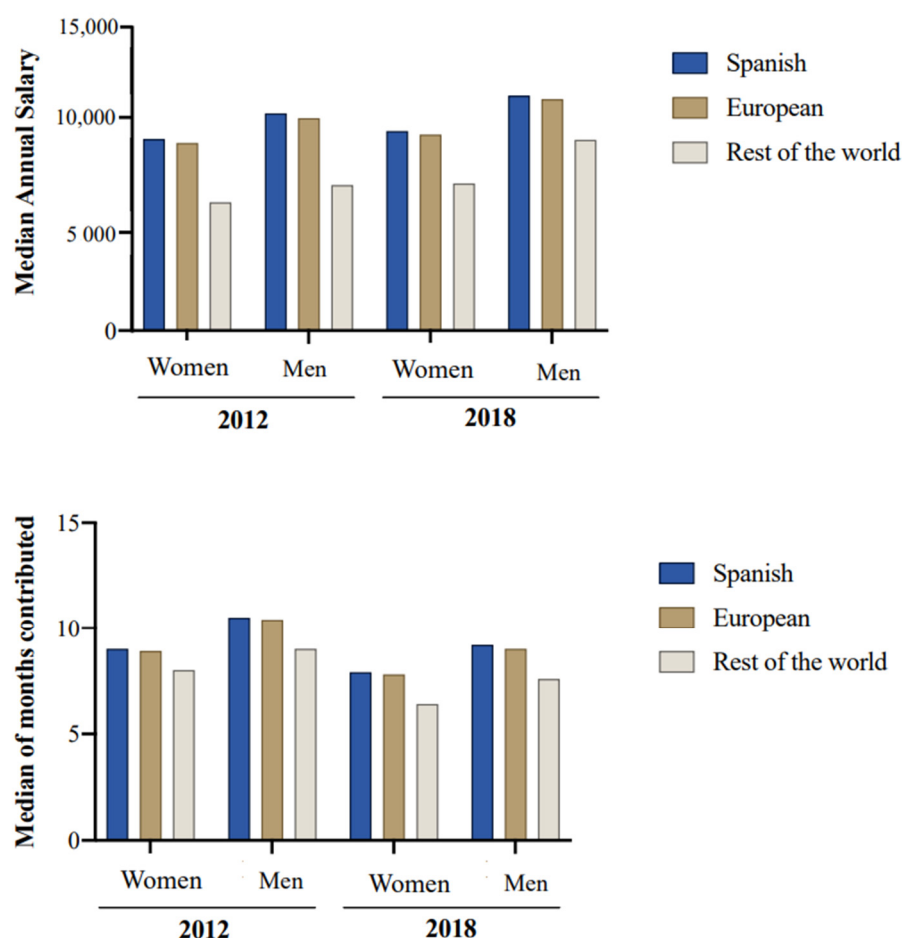


Figure 6. Median annual salary and month contributions of people aged 20 to 30 years by nationality, Spain 2012 and 2018. Source: Our own elaboration from the Spanish CPLS 2012 and 2018.

Overall, the data analysed show the deterioration of young people's working conditions over the last decade and make visible that the young population is not homogeneous, since, when considering an intersectional approach with the variables of gender, level of education, and nationality, different realities coexisted. Precarious employment, which has been dragging on for several decades, has intensified since the 2008 crisis, giving rise to a new employment model characterised by precariousness, lower wages, and shorter contribution periods.

The situation got worse when we analysed it by gender: Young women found themselves in a more vulnerable situation with less employment stability and lower wages, which indicates that gender inequality situations are being reproduced. Likewise, women of non-European nationality and those who had not completed their secondary education saw their labour precariousness situation aggravated.

This situation places young women at a more vulnerable departure point in the context of crisis, which may be unleashed in the coming months because of COVID-19.

4.2. The Situation of Young Women before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

After the results of CPLS 2012 and 2018, which allowed the process of precarisation of young people to be placed in a wide time frame, attention was paid to other types of data. The results provided by different databases (Eurostat, Tax Agency, Public Employment Service, and EPA) are presented, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the situation at the end of the decade. Despite the lack of data and the short timespan for an accurate evaluation of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the following section a series

of data is provided that helps understand the consequences of the pandemic for young people and especially for young women.

In 2018, as can be observed in Table 1, employment for women under 30 was more precarious than for men, and very far from the European Union (EU) average: Temporary employment was higher by 25 percentage points (pp), involuntary part-time hours by 30 pp, the unemployment rate was more than double, and average wages were 26% lower.

Table 1. Population by type of employment and by age in Spain and the EU-28, 2018.

	Spain				EU-28			
	Under 30 Years of Age		25–54		Under 30 Years of Age		25–54	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employment rate (%)	37.8	35.3	80.8	68.6	52.4	47	86.2	74.6
Temporary employment (% total employment)	54.3	58.1	25.2	22.2	30.7	33.2	12.1	14.1
Part-time employment (%total employment)	20	33.8	5.8	23.1	16.5	30.6	6.4	29.3
Involuntary part-time employment (% total part-time employment)	55.8	59.5	70.2	54.4	28.8	27.2	40.3	22.6 *
Unemployment rate	25.6	25.7	12.1	16.2	11.7	11.3	5.9	6.8
Not in education, employment, or training (NEET) (%)	14.7	16	<i>nc</i>	<i>nc</i>	10.9	15	<i>nc</i>	<i>nc</i>
People at risk of poverty and social exclusion (%)	30.5	37.2	26.1	27.8	25.2	27.4	20.2	21.2
Average income (EUR) **	13,285	12,272	15,388	14,933	16,462	15,537	18,619	18,062

Source: Eurostat. * Corresponding to the age range 25–59. ** The first age range is 16–24.

Based on the information provided by the Tax Agency, as can be seen in Table 2, the percentage of salaried people under 35 years of age, the total earnings accumulated, and the average salary all decreased between 2008 and 2018, with men aged 26 to 35 suffering a greater loss. Throughout this period the gender pay gap in both age ranges reduced until 2015. However, from 2016 onwards, the gender pay gap was growing, so in 2018 the average wage of men under 25 was 21.6% higher than that of women, and the average wage of men aged 26 to 35 was 17.8% higher.

Table 2. Salaried people, total earnings, and average salary by gender, Spain 2008–2018.

Age	Year	Men			Women		
		Salaried People	Salary Mass	Average Salary	Salaried People	Salary Mass	Average Salary
16–25	2008	7.7	3.8	9402	6.5	2.5	7432
	2018	5.7	2.1	7336	5.0	1.5	6031
26–35	2008	16.3	15.7	18,349	13.8	10.9	15,041
	2018	11.1	9.5	16,967	10.3	7.5	14,400

Source: Labour Market and Pensions, Tax Agency.

According to Figure 7, in the last 10 years analysed there was a growing tendency for women under 30 to take up scientific and intellectual careers (according to the National Employment Classification, NEC-11), and a decreasing tendency for women to be accountants and administrative workers. In 2019, three out of 10 young women worked in hospitality, personal care services, and sales and two out of 10 had a career in science, whereas 20.5% of young men worked in hospitality, personal care services, and sales; 15.1% were artisans

or industrial and construction workers; and 17% worked in elementary jobs. Throughout the first semester of 2020, according to the Public Employment Service (PES), the jobs with the greatest negative impact caused by the pandemic were those in hospitality and sales and, consequently, the female population was the worst affected.

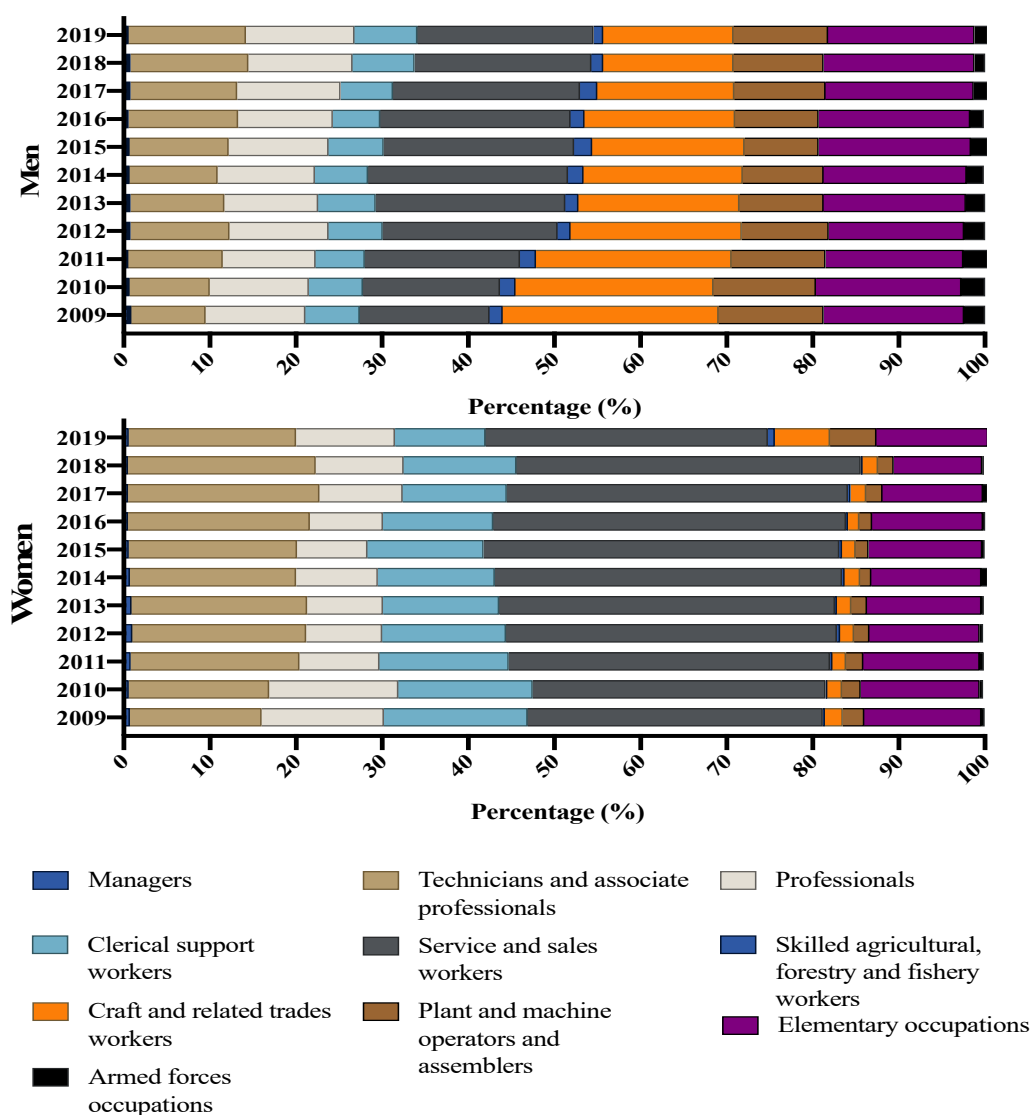


Figure 7. Employed people under 30 by gender and occupation, 2008–2019. Source: Eurostat.

The pandemic that hit the world in 2020 caused the situation of dependency and insecurity for young people to worsen in the case of Spain. During the first semester of 2020, the number of contracts signed by people under 30 decreased more than those signed by the rest of the population. It is worth keeping in mind that this period included the economic standstill caused by the pandemic. According to PES data, temporary hiring of people under 30 between January and June 2020, in comparison to the same period in 2019, was reduced by 35.3% in the male population and 42.5% in the female population, and temporary hiring of people over 30 decreased by 30.3% and 39.9%, respectively. Regarding permanent hiring, the reduction in the same period was lower: 32% and 3.5% compared to 27.4% and 27.4%, respectively. Women under 30 lost the most contracts during this health crisis period, mainly in the service sector, one of the worst hit by the crisis. Figure 8 shows the evolution between 2019 and the second semester of 2020 of unemployment rates, temporary and part-time jobs, and NEET situations among people under 30, showing how, for both the female and the male populations, the rate of temporary jobs decreased during

the second semester of 2020, as it was easy not to renew temporary contracts because of furloughs, which avoided more redundancies during the first semester of 2020. Greater vulnerability was observed among the female population, and there were more males in a “NEET” situation.

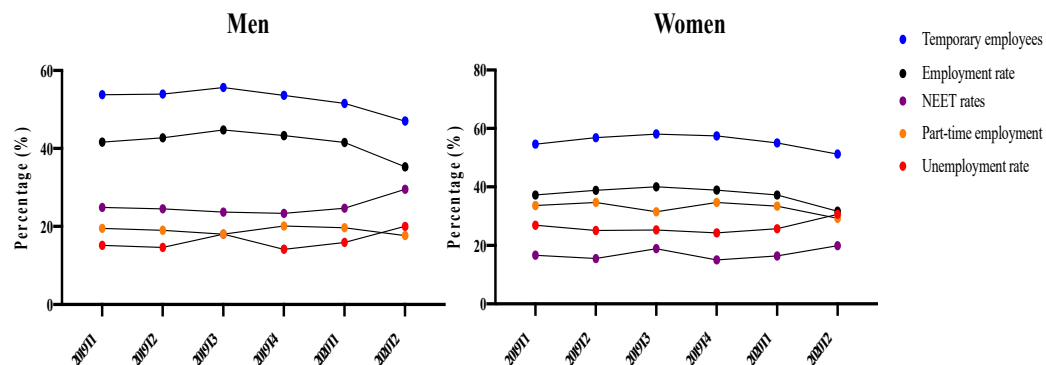


Figure 8. Evolution of the population according to the type of employment by gender, Spain 2019–second semester of 2020. Source: Our own elaboration through EPA microdata.

Considering the participation of young people in the labour market, that is, the activity rate (Figure 9), it was observed that until 2013, the work activity of young people in Spain exceeded that of all the countries of the European Union. Since then, it progressively declined in such a way that, in the second trimester of 2020, only Italy, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro registered values lower than those of Spain (44.6% and 46.4% in the male group and 42.5% in the female group).

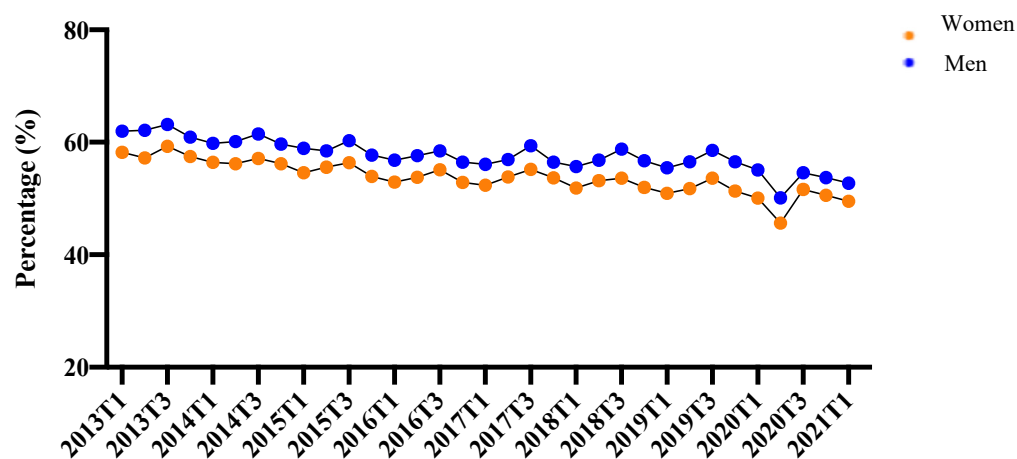


Figure 9. Activity rate by terms, Spain 2013–1st trimester of 2021. Source: Our own elaboration through EPA microdata.

At the same time, there was an increase in unemployment (Figure 10). In the third trimester of 2020, the unemployment rate of women under 34 years of age increased to a greater extent than that of men. In this trimester, unemployment among women under 30 was double the rate of women between 35 and 65 years of age and exceeded that of those between 30 and 34 years of age by 12.6 percentage points.

The unemployment rate of women with higher education increased by 2.3 pp compared to the second trimester, above the general rate for this group, which increased by 1.9 pp. However, the unemployment rate for women of foreign nationality under 30 years of age decreased slightly in said trimester, although in the following trimesters it increased to a greater extent.

In the first trimester of 2021 the unemployment rate was higher than in the same trimester of 2020.

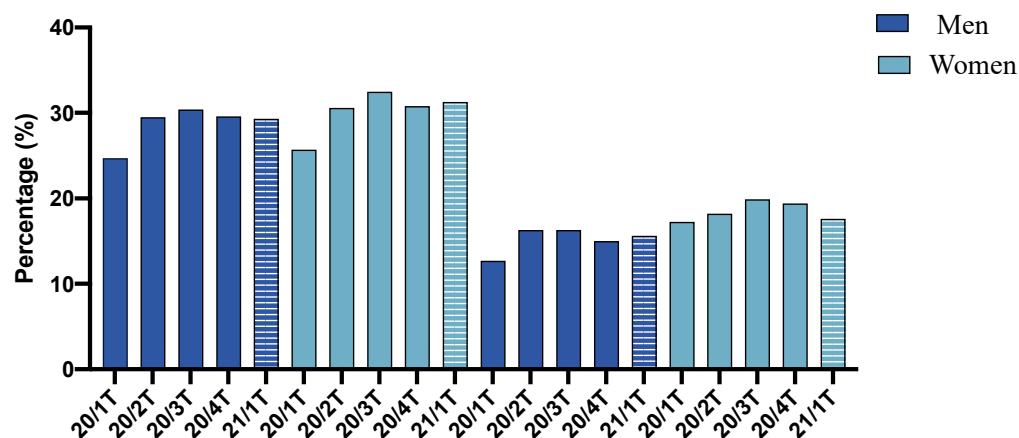


Figure 10. Unemployment rate by terms, Spain 2020–1st trimester of 2021. Source: Our own elaboration through EPA microdata.

Among the urgent measures taken to deal with the economic and social impact, those adopted regarding temporary suspension of contracts and temporary reduction of working hours (ERTE), which sought to prevent a temporary situation from having a negative structural impact on employment, stand out. However, it is only possible to analyse the impact of these measures on the youth group based on an estimate of the data from the EPA, since the statistics provided by the government do not include aspects such as gender, age, or type of hiring. That estimate, according to the following table, indicates that the number of employed persons under 30 years of age who worked fewer hours due to employment regulation records and partial unemployment processes for technical or economic reasons reached the maximum figure in the second trimester of 2020, coinciding with the period of strict confinement and affecting more than 327,000 women under 30 years of age.

The impact of ERTes in the second trimester was as follows (Table 3): 31.1% of women, 34.0% of women with foreign nationality, 33.6% of women having completed compulsory secondary education, and 34.0% of women with post-compulsory secondary education, with over 60% of the population employed in hospitality or in activities related to art and entertainment and 46.6% in restaurants and commerce. It is estimated that more than 644,000 people under the age of 30 were in this situation at the end of the second half of 2020, of which 327,739 were women.

Table 3. Estimation of ERTes, 2020–1st trimester of 2021.

Period	Men	Women	Non-Spanish Women	Women with Higher Education
20/1T	4.5	4.2	7	3
20/2T	25.9	31.1	19.7	24.5
20/3T	3.7	4.4	5.1	3.5
20/4T	4	4.2	9.4	2.6
21/1T	4.5	5.2	9.3	2.4

Source: Our own elaboration from EPA microdata.

In the first trimester of 2020, as can be seen in Table 4, before the start of the pandemic, the employment of women under 30 years of age was of lower quality than that of men, with a higher rate of unemployment, temporary employment, and part-time jobs and a lower employment rate. If this woman was, in turn, of non-Spanish nationality, the unemployment rate was higher, and the high rate of people in a NEET situation stood out in this group at 34%. However, young women with higher education had better values, especially in employment rates, although the temporality was still very high.

Table 4. Employment, unemployment, and temporality rates, first term of 2020.

	Men	Women	Non-Spanish Women	Women with Higher Education
Employment rate	42	37	40	65
Unemployment rate	25	26	29	18
Alternative unemployment rate	32	35	38	28
NEET rate	16	16	34	14
Part-time	20	33	30	26
Part-time and temporary	14	22	18	17
Temporality	52	55	48	53
Contract, for a specific task	40	33	32	31
Contract duration, up to 6 months	67	66	72	61

Source: Our own elaboration from EPA microdata.

With the arrival of the pandemic in the second trimester of 2020 (Table 5) the temporality was reduced in all groups, whereas the unemployment rate and the alternative unemployment rate increased. This indicated an increase in young women being underemployed due to insufficient hours and those who were inactive and “discouraged” or those who were potentially active who were not looking for a job, although they wanted to find one. It should be noted that, faced with confinement, the difficulties in the search for employment were greater, with the appearance of new obstacles to their incorporation into the labour market, since the sectors that usually allow young people to take their first steps in the working world (retail and hospitality, among others) were the most affected by social distancing measures. The higher rate of temporary employment in the public sector in the female group with higher education stands out.

Table 5. Employment, unemployment, and temporality rates, second term of 2020.

	Men	Women	Non-Spanish Women	Women with Higher Education
Employment rate	35	32	35	58
Unemployment rate	30	31	35	23
Alternative unemployment rate	41	43	49	35
NEET rate	20	20	38	19
Part-time	18	29	26	24
Part-time and temporary	11	17	15	14
Temporality	47	51	45	51
Contract, for a specific task	39	34	47	31
Contract duration, up to 6 months	66	78	72	62

Source: Our own elaboration from EPA microdata.

In the fourth trimester of 2020, with a combination of social distancing measures and the reopening of certain activities, the data showed a worsening in the employment situation of young people. A decrease in the employment rate in all groups and a growth in the alternative unemployment rate, especially in women of non-Spanish nationality, which reached 48%, was observed; at the same time, there was an increase in the NEET rate. In general, the temporary employment of young women also increased, especially in the service sector and in the public sector (84% in women with higher education), the duration of their contracts was reduced, and there was an upturn in apprenticeships.

5. Discussion

The last decade coincides in time with the emergence of an economic crisis and a health and social crisis derived from the pandemic caused by COVID-19, as it has been observed that women of the younger generations were more likely to experience precarious situations. Paradoxically, despite having more training, young women were lower than their male counterparts in all the variables analysed. The data showed greater temporality, higher unemployment rates, lower wages, and less activity. Hence, we can affirm that

the structural conditions that place women, from an early age, below men continue to be perpetuated in the Spanish labour market.

Why are women of the younger generations most affected in this process? After analysing the data and in line with qualitative studies that have analysed the experiences of young women in the face of the precariousness of livelihoods, we can assert that in the last 30 years, the presence of women in the labour market has maintained an upward trend, not only because of the economic growth rate of these years (despite the recessions of the 1990s) but also as a consequence of the incorporation of women into the labour market and the higher level of training that they have been achieving as a strategy to improve their employability in an unequal labour market. At the end of 2020, after two crises, 56.9% of women between the ages of 25 and 29 had reached a higher education level compared to 45.8% of men of the same age group. However, women's commitment to greater training and presence in the labour market has not been accompanied by a reduction in inequality with respect to the male group, even at higher education levels. In the period of economic boom between 1997 and 2007, the employment rate of young women increased by 20 pp and 24 pp if they had attained a higher education level. However, occupational segregation by gender also grew. The concentration of women in certain occupations—those with low levels of qualification, shorter hours, and lower wages—indicates that young women, although in different ways, continue to be affected by similar dynamics of precariousness as women of previous generations. However, after years of crisis, the contraction of the labour market is noticeable. If at the end of 2008, 45% of young women were employed, of which 41.5% had higher education, at the end of 2020, only 29.9% were employed, of which 58.2% had higher education, 19.7% were underemployed, and 55.6% had temporary contracts. We are therefore faced with a labour market that relegates women to lower-paid jobs—those in the low-value-added service sector, and caretaking work—whereas men have more professional options and job mobility. One of the main reasons women earn less, on average, than men is that patriarchal structures relegate women to reproductive and caretaking work, making it difficult for them to move between occupations and to pursue specialised careers that would be more rewarding for them. The pandemic has exacerbated this situation, as women assumed most unpaid care during confinement. This means that many have chosen to reduce their working hours and sacrifice their career advancement.

As has already been said, precariousness has consequences beyond work ([Bessant et al. 2017](#)) and impacts people, affecting their entire lives and contexts. From an intersectional perspective ([Crenshaw 1989](#)), this fact implies recognising that work is having effects on other forms of oppression and violence on women ([Hearn et al. 2020](#)). Precarity has taken root in Spain and has been normalised through the implementation of public policies and austerity measures. Understanding it from an intersectional perspective means recognising that there are differences in the way it affects different social groups of young people. For middle-class young women it has meant serious difficulties with emancipation, access to housing, good jobs, and economic autonomy. For structurally vulnerable populations it has meant the deprivation of livelihoods and increased dependence on the state. Although in different ways, precariousness for young women implies a rupture in the narrative constructed around life projects and has an impact on health and, specifically, on mental health, by making it impossible to lead what they subjectively consider to be a “good life.”

The worrying situation experienced during the last decade has tried to be contained by national and international public administrations that have worked to alleviate the problem of youth unemployment. These measures must be addressed and discussed for a correct interpretation of the data and the situation experienced in Spain.

In response to the 2008 crisis, national Youth Guarantee (YG) schemes were implemented in the member states of the European Union. The European initiative on youth employment targeted young people between 16 and 25 years of age, in particular young people in a NEET situation, to guarantee them a “good” job offer or training within four months from their unemployment situation or completion of their education and/or training. This initiative was launched in the different member states of the European Union

in 2013, and under its logic different initiatives have been developed. As was observed through the data, this has not achieved the desired effects in all countries (Cabasés and Úbeda 2021; Milana and Vatrella 2020).

Spain approved the National Youth Guarantee System (NYGS) in 2014 and extended the age of participation to 30 years. Between 2013 and 2019, the young population in a NEET situation fell, particularly among the unemployed (592,000 fewer people). This was due to:

- An increase of 349,000 young people in employment;
- An decrease in the youth group (441,000 fewer people);
- An increase in inactive young people in training (279,000 more people).

Different evaluations of its implementation have shown that the objectives initially set have not been achieved in Spain. It was revealed that a high percentage of young people who were YG beneficiaries returned to their NEET situation. In particular, the European Commission in its 2018 report (EC 2018) noted that half of the young beneficiaries in 2016 and 2017 had already received an action in the past and, consequently, had not left the YG circuit. According to the report, young workers with subsidised permanent contracts were more likely to leave employment within two years than those employed with unsubsidised contracts, questioning the effectiveness of these subsidies.

The II Evaluation Report of the Youth Employment Initiative of the Spanish Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security (2018) warned that young women with certain disadvantaged profiles such as being inactive, having a low level of education, having disabilities, being of immigrant origin, or belonging to an ethnic minority, homeless or in a situation of housing exclusion, were underrepresented in the design of the measures contemplated in the NYGS. The same report also questioned the quality of the hiring offers that young people received within the framework of the YG, thus questioning the impact of the YG on the labour market.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has further aggravated the employment situation of young people under 30 years of age, especially those who started from a weaker position. They have lost the few existing opportunities and have stated that they are more afraid of the uncertainty than of the pandemic. New obstacles have appeared for their incorporation into the labour market.

As of March 2020, a set of regulations was approved to respond to the health, economic, and social crisis caused by the virus. However, the measures aimed at the youth population were rather scarce and those that have been applied lack a gender perspective.

The sectors that usually allow young people to take their first steps in the working world—mainly precarious jobs in retail and hospitality—have been affected the most by the pandemic.

Among the urgent measures taken to deal with the economic and social impact, as has been seen, are those adopted regarding temporary suspension of contracts and temporary reduction of working hours (ERTE). These measures were faced with serious management problems, and by December 2020 a high number of beneficiaries had not yet been paid. For its part, the statistics provided by the government do not include aspects such as gender, age, or type of hiring, making it impossible to carry out an assessment of the impact of these measures for those under 30 years according to these variables. However, the conditions of access to the ERTes were especially favourable for young people, since to acquire the right to this benefit, a prior contribution period (360 days) was not necessary when the income was less than 75% of the minimum wage; they only had to register with the Public Employment Service. This provided some relief from the sustained job insecurity that had occurred previously.

In April 2020 the number of new job seekers under 30 years of age doubled in comparison to the previous month, a much higher figure than the registered unemployment, perhaps as a strategy to get into the social welfare system and access the minimum subsistence amount, rather than hoping to get a job, even a precarious one. Considering the

characteristics of youth employment, many young people in ERTes may become unemployed if companies do not regain full capacity, making them a more vulnerable population.

Why have policies facilitated and even encouraged the degradation of working conditions for the young generation of women and therefore their livelihoods? Most of the actions foreseen in the NYGS were designed either by considering the level of education or the level of professional qualification, or according to the need of the young people benefiting from the YG to acquire certain competences and abilities. In addition, policies are not aligned with economic, social, and labour market challenges and were designed from an individualistic perspective without considering how the crisis was affecting different generations and different types of young people. Its design did not consider an intersectional approach. Moreover, many of the measures made young people responsible for their lack of skills and abilities, turning the lack of employability due to structural reasons, as shown by the data, into the personal responsibility of the young people themselves.

If the results offered are contrasted with the measures implemented, it can be observed that at the beginning of the decade certain tendencies of the precariousness process of young people could already be intuited (low salaries, temporary employment, etc.). Finally, many of the courses offered have a significant gender bias based on classic stereotypes that keep women in lower-paid jobs and in lower positions of responsibility. In the data it can be clearly observed how young women had fewer job opportunities than men, which has an impact on women's rights and reproduces gender inequalities (Hearn et al. 2020; Kamerāde and Richardson 2018).

6. Conclusions

Youth labour precariousness in Spain is more structural than circumstantial. Since the 1980s, the labour market has progressively increased its flexibility, which has entailed worse working conditions for young people in terms of temporary jobs, labour precariousness, and lack of social protection.

An analysis of the wage conditions and contract duration of people under 30 revealed that since the 2008 crisis, young people's labour expectations have worsened compared to those of previous generations at a similar age, especially for women: There has been a loss in purchasing power, an increase in temporary contracts, and a weaker presence of young people in the labour market, as the main causes. The wages of 50% of the people under 30 years of age in 2018 did not reach the minimum wage on a yearly calculation. The average duration of contracts has shortened since 2012, especially among women. Higher education is a factor that has increased wages among people under 30 years of age, but again, to a lesser extent than in previous generations. Women's job instability translates into a worrying pay gap. Although the gap between the salaries of young women and men has tended to narrow in recent years, it is still present, and it is particularly evident in professions requiring higher education. Young women with higher levels of education end up receiving higher salaries, but contract instability persists. In 2018, 50% of female university graduates did not reach the status of "mileuristas" (earning EUR 1000 per month) and the average duration of their contracts had shortened compared to 2012, achieving an average of 10 months. Moreover, the analysis carried out allows us to conclude that the gender pay gap is perpetuated over time; women receive lower salaries than men, saw permanent contracts reduced by 6.8 percentage points during the 2008–2019 period, and temporary contracts have increased compared to the total number of contracts since 2015.

The data analysed suggest that being a young woman of non-European nationality in Spain increases the chances of being in a vulnerable situation, as salaries are lower and contracts are shorter. In 2018, 50% of this group had worked fewer than six months. Situations in which different positions of vulnerability and precariousness intersect reinforce patriarchal structures that hold women down, preventing their autonomy and making it impossible for them to work on dignified life projects.

Considering the young population as a homogeneous and uniform group helps to hide existing social inequalities and to take unfortunate measures when it is decided to take

measures to appease the residential and labour exclusion that affects many young people. In Spain, the measures that have been implemented since 2013 with the aim of improving the employability of young people, such as the Youth Guarantee, show limited success. As described above, after years of implementation, job precarity has not been reduced, and an intersectional approach in the design of proposals that seek to reduce inequalities has also not been considered.

With the new situation after the COVID-19 pandemic, it can easily be seen that the employment situation of young people will not improve in the short or medium term, although it cannot yet be evaluated to what extent. The future of young people receiving ERTes depends on the economic recovery of the companies that employed them. Moreover, the pandemic has increased the use of new technologies in all areas, making social inequalities more obvious. Before the pandemic, there was a consensus that the use of technologies was a factor changing employment. The most pessimistic opinions considered that inequalities in the labour market would increase between workers involved in technological development, who are well paid and have labour rights, and workers with lower wages and fewer rights. In today's digital climate, with people working in a more flexible, collaborative way, there is a risk not only of widening the inequality gap but also of infringing on labour rights. Young women are less present in the technological sector, partly because of gender stereotypes. If they are not taken into account in this sector and are not decisively involved in the generation of knowledge in new technologies, inequalities may deepen (Schiebinger 2021).

In the face of this situation, a new framework is being sought for labour relations that recovers the principle of employment stability, reducing the use of temporary contract models, ensuring quality in employment offers, and raising the salaries of young people. In order to improve women's working and living conditions, it is urgent to take a gender perspective in the practice of employment policies and labour relations. In a labour context dominated by production, a gender and feminist perspective implies an acknowledgement that production depends on social reproduction (Fraser 2009). Recognise women's historical work in social reproduction must be translated into the valorisation of caretaking work and better job opportunities that allow for greater personal freedom and stability in women's lives. It is also necessary that policymakers consider a holistic intervention that addresses other needs that can also be considered basic, such as housing, the right to leisure and sports, and access to communication technologies and political participation, beyond economic subsidies. Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge from an intergenerational perspective that young people occupy a central role in shaping future societies and maintaining the welfare state of society.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.Ú.; methodology, M.À.C. and M.Ú.; software, M.À.C.; validation, M.À.C.; formal analysis, M.À.C. and M.Ú.; investigation, M.À.C.; resources, M.À.C.; data curation, M.À.C.; writing—original draft preparation, M.À.C.; writing—review and editing, M.À.C. and M.Ú.; visualization, M.À.C.; supervision, M.À.C.; project administration, M.À.C.; funding acquisition, M.À.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received funding from CRUE-CSIC-SANTANDER, Grant FONDO SUPERA COVID: 2020–2021.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: Economically Active Population Survey (https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176918&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976595) (accessed on 1 May 2022) and Continuous Sample of Working Lives (<http://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/EstadisticasPresupuestosEstudios/Estadisticas/EST211?changeLanguage=en>) (accessed on 1 May 2022)).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

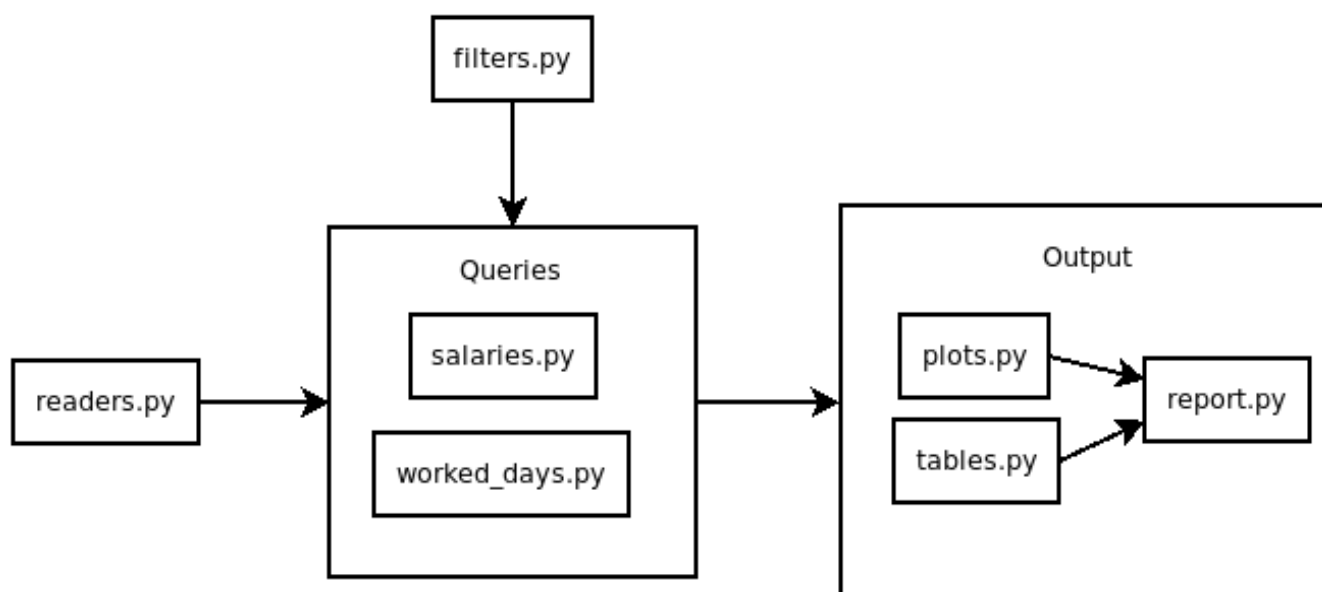
Appendix A. Methodological Annex

The variables considered from the 2012 and 2018 Spanish CPLS were:

- Personal information: date of birth, gender, nationality, country of birth, and educational level;
- Affiliation: type of contract and economic activity;
- Quotation: contribution basis.

The code was developed in the Python programming language (v.3.7) and made extensive use of the open-source libraries Numpy (v.1.18.1), Pandas (v.1.0.3), and Matplotlib (v.3.2.0). The code was organised into different modules, according to functionality. We included the following blocks:

- Readers: data-loading functions from the CPLS files;
- Filters: functions to filter the Persons table according to gender, studies, nationality, etc.;
- Queries:
 - Salaries (Salaries): module for calculating ratios and salary values according to age;
 - Worked_days (days quoted): module for calculating ratios and values of days worked according to age;
- Output:
 - Tables: generation of tables according to the results of the Queries modules;
 - Plots: generation of graphs according to the results of the Queries modules, previously processed by the Tables submodule;
 - Report: Auto-generation of report documents from the tables and graphs of the two previous submodules.



To perform the computing tasks associated with this project, the V3 computing cluster of the LOG group was used. V3 is a cluster consisting of 12 Dell R740 servers, each equipped with 2×8 -core Intel Xeon 4110 at a frequency of 2.1 GHz, 96 GB of DDR4 memory, and 120 GB of SSD secondary memory. Additionally, one of the servers is equipped with two NVIDIA Titan Xp. The management node is a Dell R230 server equipped with 1 Intel Xeon E3-1220 v6 4 core at a frequency of 3.0 GHz and with 16 GB of DDR4 memory and an H330 disk controller. The same controller node also provides the shared file system with a capacity of 4 TB (in RAID 10). The various components communicate via a 1Gb/s Ethernet switch.

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