



# **Understanding the barriers and enablers for women's progression from low-paid and low-skill work**

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Literature Review, April 2022

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The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is a global social purpose company that generates and applies behavioural insights to inform policy, improve public services and deliver results for citizens and society.

## About this report

This project is supported by JPMorgan Chase as part of their \$350 million, five-year global commitment to prepare people around the world for the future of work. This commitment will focus on creating economic mobility and career pathways for underserved populations and the firm's employees, by collaborating with educational and research institutions to forecast emerging skillsets in the financial services industry and enable new training programs to prepare the firm's workforce for changes in technology and business.

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# 1. Executive summary

Low-paid and low-skill women in the UK, France, Spain and South Africa face significant barriers to progression to higher quality work, and evidence suggests these have persisted despite gains made in educational attainment.<sup>1</sup> To enable women to progress from low-paid and low-skill roles, it is important that these barriers are identified and interventions are designed to address them. This literature review centres on the UK, South Africa, France and Spain, and first outlines the barriers and enablers faced by low-paid and low-skill women, and subsequently, identifies a range of promising behavioural interventions.

## Barriers & enablers

### Employee or individual level

- **[Domestic responsibilities.](#)** Women are disproportionately responsible for unpaid domestic responsibilities such as childcare, which contributes to penalties in terms of pay and progression, particularly around childbirth. Low-paid and low-skill women may rely on informal networks to help with childcare.
- **[Transport & geography.](#)** Low-paid and low-skill women are disproportionately reliant on public transport. This can be an impediment to progression where women may turn down opportunities due to their location, often due to domestic responsibilities. Harassment on public transport, particularly at night, affects low-paid and low-skill women who frequently work night shifts.
- **[Shift patterns.](#)** Night shifts can increase the chance of illness. Women are more likely to work more than one job than men. Multiple jobs may involve difficult commutes, lack of employment protections and precarious working conditions. Shifts can be unpredictable and volatile which result in precarity, pay instability and issues with childcare.
- **[Financial challenges.](#)** Managing (often) scarce household finances can also act as a barrier to women, increasing stress. This is particularly the case in South Africa where there is a high proportion of female-only households. Lack of access to formal credit is attributed to women's inability to progress in South Africa's informal economy.

### Employer level

- **[Flexible working practices.](#)** The ability to work flexibly is seen as a key enabler for low-paid and low-skill women in the labour market. However, flexibility can propagate gender stereotypes and is frequently associated with an earnings trade-off. The right to request flexible working arrangements is not available to employees from their first day of employment, disincentivising women to move to new jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> [Mind the gap: Gender differences in higher education.](#) (2020, March 7). HEPI. ; [Education at a Glance 2021: OECD indicators - France.](#) (2021). OECD.; [Education at a Glance 2021: OECD indicators - Spain.](#) (2021). OECD; [Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators - South Africa. \(2019\).](#) OECD. .

- **Organisational culture.** Gender norms dampen progression opportunities for women. Gender-related harassment may limit the number of women in managerial positions and women may be required to internalise male-oriented culture in order to progress.
- **Training & skills development.** Training may be seen as an enabler for low-paid and low-skill women. However, women are often overqualified, putting into question the role of training.
- **Recruitment processes.** Recruitment practices may favour men over women, even where skills are the same, demonstrating discrimination.

### Policy and society level

- **Education.** The rise in educational attainment for women compared to men has improved outcomes. However, evidence suggests that women receive lower pay for the same level of education as men. Additionally, there are still inequalities in entry to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, with these courses disproportionately filled by men.
- **Labour market.** The type of employment may act as a barrier, as temporary work is often fraught with precarity. Collective bargaining agreements are less available to low-paid and low-skill women. While the informal economy in South Africa can offer greater flexibility and access to work for those with less education, it can also act as a barrier due to the increased precarity and marginalisation. Unemployment is among the highest in the world in South Africa and women are disproportionately unemployed.
- **Gender norms & stereotyping.** Women are perceived to be ill-suited for leadership positions and well suited to less well paid care work. In addition, care work is perceived as similar to work traditionally done unpaid by women in the household, and is, therefore, undervalued.

## Promising interventions

### Employer level

#### *Increase workplace flexibility*

- **Enable shift swapping & scheduling.** This may better enable women to balance domestic responsibilities with work. Initial evidence is promising, but further studies are needed.
- **Default job advertisements to include flexible working statements.** Advertising positions as open to flexible working has improved the number of female applicants for positions. There is strong evidence on effectiveness.

#### *Reduce bias in organisational processes*

- **Increase organisational transparency in career pathways.** Improving transparency may increase accountability for managers, which may result in greater

parity between men and women. Evidence is promising but not specific to the target countries.

- **[Reduce bias in recruitment](#)**. Bias in recruitment can be addressed through specifically targeting women to apply for jobs. Anonymising applications helps women to progress through the application process. By excluding dates on CVs, women are not unduly penalised for gaps in employment. Structured interviews ensure a standardised procedure is followed for both men and women.

#### *Improve workplace training*

- **[Improve the provision of workplace training](#)**. More work is needed to understand the specific types of training that can be effective for low-paid and low-skill women, particularly given that women are typically overqualified for their role.

#### *Increase pay frequency*

- **[Increase pay frequency](#)**. Paying employees more frequently may reduce financial stress and enable individuals greater capability to consider progression. US-based evidence suggests this is a promising area for future research.

### **Policy level**

#### *Reduce women's domestic responsibilities burden*

- **[Improve access to child-related support](#)**. Reducing the difficulties with accessing child-related support services and funding may be a promising avenue for further exploration. Behavioural insights may be used to improve access to services by making it clearer what parents need to do.
- **[Increase men's uptake of parental leave](#)**. If men were to increase uptake of parental leave, this would result in less gendered norms regarding childbirth and would help to share the burden of childcare more equitably between men and women.

#### *Encourage gender-balanced procurement practices*

- **[Encourage gender-balanced procurement practices](#)**. Procurement practices can encourage private businesses to include social value requirements in their HR practices. Evidence from South Africa's preferential procurement for Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment demonstrates the potential for success, while also outlining some of the potential pitfalls such as corruption and lack of enforcement.

#### *Improve the value of low-paid and low-skill women's occupations*

- **[Encourage men into female-dominated occupations](#)**. Increasing the proportion of men in these occupations may counteract the devaluation of these fields and combat traditional gender norms. Encouraging universities to target male applicants and remove gendered terminology appears promising. Similarly, encouraging employers

to frame the benefits of female-dominated occupations in a way appealing to men may encourage more male entry into these roles.

- [Use signalling devices to promote professional qualifications](#). Standardising certification of skills may allow merit-based assessments of the capabilities of potential employees. This is under-researched at present.

## Further research

This literature review concludes by summarising the most promising interventions identified: increasing pay frequency, defaulting job advertisements to include flexible working statements and encouraging gender-balanced procurement practices.

A significant finding of the review is the interlinkage between barriers and enablers. For example, domestic responsibilities affect where women choose to work, their shift patterns and their requirement for flexible working arrangements. Therefore, when considering interventions, it is important that a holistic approach is taken, rather than focussing on specific barriers.



## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background to the review

Globally, women are underrepresented in the workforce<sup>2</sup> and are often disproportionately represented in low-paid and low-skill work.<sup>3</sup> Supporting women towards higher quality work is imperative, and would result in benefits to women, employers and the economy.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, academic enquiry has focussed either solely on low-paid and low-skill work or on gender imbalance in the workplace, ignoring the intersection between the two. This review brings these components together, providing explanations for the barriers women face in progressing from these positions and offering interventions for addressing this.

In the remainder of this section, we define low-paid and low-skill work and provide a current overview of the position in the countries of interest: the UK, France, Spain and South Africa. In Section 3, we establish the barriers for low-paid & low-skill women to progression. Subsequently, in Section 4 we review interventions designed to overcome these barriers, before concluding in Section 5, offering recommendations for future research.

### 2.2 Definitions

#### Low-paid

Within this paper, we use the OECD definition of “low-pay” work, defined as workers earning less than two-thirds of median earnings.<sup>5</sup> This allows better comparability across the countries of interest, as opposed to using absolute markers.

Low pay can be defined in terms of two-thirds of **hourly** or **weekly** earnings. The Resolution Foundation notes that “hourly pay captures workers’ earning power, and their position in the labour market; while weekly pay matters for living standards”.<sup>6</sup> They also note that for the UK, the percentage of people in low weekly pay is double that of people in low hourly pay. Typically, where low-paid work is defined in the literature, hourly wages are used. Therefore, a significant proportion of those experiencing low weekly pay may be excluded from the literature.

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<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization (2020) [Policy Brief: A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer](#)

<sup>3</sup> Ortiz-Ospina, E., & Roser, M. (2018). Economic inequality by gender. Our World in Data.

<sup>4</sup> Morais Maceira, H. (2017). Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU. *Intereconomics*, 52(3), 178–183 ;

<sup>5</sup> OECD. (2021). [Wage Levels](#)

<sup>6</sup> Resolution Foundation. (2021). [Low Pay Britain 2021](#).

## Low-skill

An OECD publication identifies adults as low-skill if they have either: low educational attainment, where their highest qualification is at lower secondary school level; low scoring in either literacy or numeracy tests, or; low digital skills.<sup>7</sup> The UK and South Africa align with these definitions. In practice, most authors focus on educational attainment (for example, in some studies in the UK, the National Vocational Qualification, or NVQ is used as the benchmark for low-skilled with anything less than NVQ Level 2 classed as low-skilled).<sup>8</sup> In this literature review we are not prescriptive on the level of education literacy or numeracy, to account for variations between the countries of interest. Notably, this definition does not exclude work that requires basic training, thus even those women who have received on the job training may still be considered low-skill.

The French definition of low-skill employment differs from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISOC) in that it includes both “ouvriers non qualifiés” (translated as unskilled workers) and “employés non qualifiés” (or unskilled employees).<sup>9</sup> Most (80%) unskilled “workers” are men who work as craftsmen, industry workers, drivers, etc. in relatively secure positions, since 78% of these workers hold a permanent contract.<sup>10</sup> This is in contrast with unskilled “employees” who are mainly women.<sup>11</sup> In France, employees are said to be “unskilled” when they do not hold qualifications in relation to their occupation.<sup>12</sup> However, this does not mean that the job holders are unskilled as such, as they may still hold qualifications (unrelated to the job they are in) and have experience in other domains. For the purposes of this review, we will refer to 'low-skill' where in France the used term is 'unskilled'.

In Spain too, the definition of low-skill work used by the Spanish National Statistics Institution (INE<sup>13</sup>) differs from the International standards (ISOC). It includes “*trabajadores no cualificados*” (translated as “non-skilled” workers), and “*trabajadores/as de los servicios de restauración, personales, protección y vendedores/as*” (translated as service in the restaurants and food industry, domestic services, retail services). The first is defined by not needing any previous knowledge to work in those occupations. The latter is defined in terms of occupations whose main tasks require the knowledge and experience necessary for the provision of retail customer or support services.

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<sup>7</sup> OECD. (2019). [Getting Skills Right: Engaging low-skilled adults in learning](#).

<sup>8</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills. (2012). Engaging low skilled employees in workplace learning.

<sup>9</sup> Policy brief. (2021) [Labour market polarisation: are there more low-skilled jobs in France?](#)

<sup>10</sup> Virginie Forment, Joëlle Vidalenc (2020) INSEE [Les ouvriers : des professions toujours largement masculine](#)

<sup>11</sup> Gadrey, N., Jany-Catrice, F., & Pernod-Lemattre, M. (2004). Genre et emplois non qualifiés. *D. Meda, F. Vennat, Le travail non qualifié, permanences et paradoxes, Paris, La Découverte.*

<sup>12</sup> INSEE (2016), Emploi non qualifié (nomenclature des PCS) / Emploi qualifié. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/metadonnees/definition/c1904>

<sup>13</sup> INE Database. [Clasificación Nacional de Ocupaciones. CNO-11](#)

## Higher quality work

Rather than focusing on progression as achieving higher pay, we use the term progression to mean attaining higher quality work. This acknowledges that increasing pay alone is not a panacea for achieving higher quality work.<sup>14</sup> The UK Good Work Plan sets out five principles for higher quality work: satisfaction; fair pay; participation and progression; wellbeing, safety and security; and voice and autonomy.<sup>15</sup> These principles are ideals, however in practice the literature typically addresses pay, skills and security, thus the primary focus is on these three areas.

## 2.3 Country overview

Table 1 presents the proportions of women in low-paid work within each country, alongside the average wage based on the latest information available:

*Table 1: Low-paid and low-skill statistics by country*

Category	UK (2021) <sup>16</sup>	South Africa (2019) <sup>17</sup>	France (2022) <sup>18</sup>	Spain (2020) <sup>19</sup>
Proportion women	17.1%	35.5%	23.5%	16.0%
Proportion men	11.3%	24.1%	14.3%	10.0%
Median (before tax) wage for all employees	£14.10 /hour	R3,800 /month	€1,837 /month	€1,706 /month

## UK

In recent years there has been a general downward trend in the proportion of employees in low-paid work, which may be attributed to increases in the minimum wage (see Figure 1),

<sup>14</sup> Rubery, J., & Grimshaw, D. (2011). Gender and the Minimum Wage. In S. Lee & D. McCann (Eds.), *Regulating for Decent Work: New Directions in Labour Market Regulation* (pp. 226–254). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, M. (2017). [Good work: The Taylor review of modern working practices](#).

<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2021). [Low and high pay in the UK: 2021](#).

<sup>17</sup> Statistics South Africa. (2019). [Labour market dynamics in South Africa, 2019](#).

<sup>18</sup> INSEE Références database (2022) [Femmes et hommes, l'égalité en question](#);

INSEE Références database (2021) [En 2019, le niveau de vie médian augmente nettement et le taux de pauvreté diminue](#)

<sup>19</sup> INE Database, (2020), [Decil de salarios del empleo principal. Encuesta de Población Activa \(EPA\), año 2020](#)

INE Database, (2020), [Encuesta anual de estructura salarial, año 2019](#)

however a gender gap persists, with 17.1% of female employees in low-paid work compared to 11.3% of male employees.<sup>20</sup>

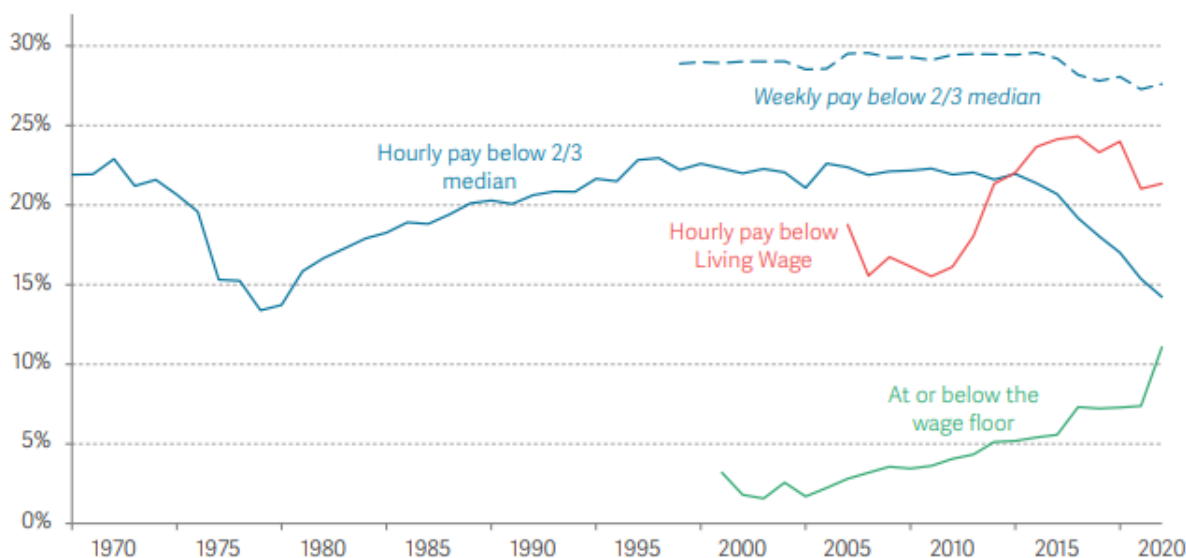


Figure 1: UK trends in the proportion of employees in low-paid work<sup>21</sup>

Despite improvements in overall job security since the introduction of the National Minimum Wage in 1998 and the subsequent National Living Wage in 2016, there is widespread evidence that these have had an adverse effect on women working part-time.<sup>22</sup> One study estimated that the National Living Wage reduced employment retention by 6.3% for women working part-time and these effects were particularly concentrated within the retail industry in the North East of England.<sup>23</sup> However these studies do not offer explanations for this negative trend for part-time women.

Within the UK, 62% of low-paid jobs were held by women in a 2019 survey.<sup>24</sup> The only sector where women make up fewer low-paid jobs than men is in manufacturing. Geographically, the proportion of low-paid roles are particularly high in Northern Ireland, the East Midlands, the North East and Yorkshire. Hospitality, retail and social care have the highest proportions of low-paid roles. Women in these three industries make up 35% of all low-paid employees in the UK.

Regarding education, the Department for Education states that “females outperform males in the main measures of attainment across the UK, make up a greater share of higher

<sup>20</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2021). [Low and high pay in the UK: 2021](#).

<sup>21</sup> Taken from: Resolution Foundation. (2021). [Low Pay Britain 2021](#).

<sup>22</sup> Aitken, A, Dolton, P and Riley, R. (2018). The Impact of the Introduction of the National Living Wage on Employment, Hours and Wages. NIESR;

Dickens, R., Riley, R., & Wilkinson, D. (2015). A Re-examination of the Impact of the UK National Minimum Wage on Employment. *Economica*, 82(328), 841–864.

<sup>23</sup> Aitken, A, Dolton, P and Riley, R. (2018). The Impact of the Introduction of the National Living Wage on Employment, Hours and Wages. NIESR

<sup>24</sup> Department for Work & Pensions. (2021). [Supporting progression out of low pay: a call to action](#).

education students and have a higher level of qualification among 19-64 year olds”.<sup>25</sup> Thus, at first blush, education does not appear a barrier to progression for low-paid and low-skill women in the UK.

## France

In France 30 years ago, the majority of low-skill jobs were done by male industry workers. As previously described, France differentiates between low-skill “workers” and low-skill “employees”. Today, with the shift to a service economy, the number of low-skill “workers” has decreased, while the population of low-skill “employees” has grown significantly.<sup>26</sup> While most low-skill “workers” are men, the majority of low-skill “employees” are women: 24% of employed women are in a low-skill position, compared to 14% of men in 2020.<sup>27</sup> These jobs are mainly concentrated in three sectors: sales, hospitality and in care and domestic services.<sup>28</sup>

## Spain

In Spain, women make up a disproportionate percentage of those in low-skill, low-paid jobs: 16% of women are in low-paid work compared to 10% of men.<sup>29</sup> Low-paid roles are more likely to be part-time or flexible jobs, and women are less likely to work full-time than men: 78% of women vs. 93% of men.<sup>30</sup> For women, “involuntary” part-time jobs (where individuals would like to work more hours) represent 15% of total employment, against 5.5% for men.<sup>31</sup> The service sector is heavily female-dominated, with 81% of employees in this sector being women, and it is also the lower paid segment of the Spanish economy (€13 - €15K average annual pay in 2019).<sup>32</sup>

## South Africa

Women’s participation in the labour force has increased, following the ‘feminisation’ of the labour force post-Apartheid, increasing from 40% in 1994 to 54% in 2019.<sup>33</sup> The rise in female participation is attributed to: the removal of Apartheid laws allowing African women to enter the labour market; changing cultural norms; and reduced fertility rates. However, much

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Education (2019). [Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom](#).

<sup>26</sup> INSEE Database. (2020) [Les ouvriers: Des professions toujours largement masculines—Insee Focus—199. \(n.d.\)](#).

<sup>27</sup> INSEE Références database (2022) [Femmes et hommes, l'égalité en question](#).

<sup>28</sup> INSEE Références Database (2020) [Tableaux de l'économie française](#)

<sup>29</sup> INE Database, (2020), [Mercado laboral](#)

<sup>30</sup> Dancausa Millán, M., Millán Vázquez de la Torre, M., Hernández Rojas, R., & Jimber del Río, J. A. (2021). The Spanish Labor Market: A Gender Approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(5), 2742.

<sup>31</sup> OCDE (2016), [OECD Employment Outlook 2016](#).

<sup>32</sup> INE (2019), [Salarios, ingresos, cohesión social. Salario medio anual por sectores de actividad económica y periodo](#).

<sup>33</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

of this increased participation derives from “low-skilled jobs and self-employment in the informal sector, typically poorly paid and precarious work”.<sup>34</sup>

In South Africa, high-skill positions are predominantly held by men, with managerial positions held by 33.07% of women.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, low-skill positions are predominantly held by women, particularly domestic workers where 96.11% are women.

One paper finds that black women are more likely to hold lower paying jobs while other ethnicities and men are more likely to hold higher paying jobs, suggesting that progress in terms of mobility by ethnicity has stagnated.<sup>36</sup> The overrepresentation of black women in low-paid roles is likely driven by their systematic exclusion during Apartheid from education.<sup>37</sup> Evidently, this must be taken into consideration when assessing the barriers to progression for low-paid women in South Africa, and subsequently when designing solutions.

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<sup>34</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>35</sup> Summary of data for Apr-Jun 2021 taken from: Department of Statistics South Africa. 2021. Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

<sup>36</sup> Gradín, C. (2021). Occupational Gender Segregation in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Feminist Economics*, 27(3), 102–133.

<sup>37</sup> Department for Women. (2015). [The Status of Women in the South African Economy](#).

## 3. Barriers & Enablers

In this section, we outline the key barriers and enablers for low-paid and low-skill women to progress into higher quality work at the individual, employer and policy levels. Within each sub-section, we address both behavioural and structural barriers and enablers as they are often interlinked. However, we give greater weight to behavioural factors as we will focus on behaviour change interventions later in the programme. Any country-specific factors are also highlighted within each sub-section.

### 3.1 Employee or individual level

#### 3.1.1 Domestic responsibilities

##### *Household & caring responsibilities*

One of the most significant barriers for low-paid and low-skill women is the significant responsibilities women face outside of the workplace. Women are disproportionately responsible for caring responsibilities compared to their male counterparts and undertake the majority of housework.<sup>38</sup> Childcare is “prohibitively expensive” for low-paid women, meaning they must rely on informal arrangements, state-funded provision and reducing their working hours.<sup>39</sup> Given that low-paid women are more likely to be subject to unpredictable and precarious work than their male counterparts, this exacerbates the issues of childcare access.

These commitments act as barriers to progression, as women are more limited in how much time they can work compared to men. Where employers expect constant availability from their workforce, women are at a disadvantage.<sup>40</sup> Male counterparts may be able to use their additional presence at work to access promotion opportunities.<sup>41</sup>

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that women carry out 60% more unpaid work than men, on average.<sup>42</sup> French women spend an extra 1 hour 30 minutes on unpaid work compared to their male counterparts every day.<sup>43</sup> In Spain, it’s an extra 2 hours and 23 minutes.<sup>44</sup> In South Africa, women spend on average 2 hours 20 minutes more per

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<sup>38</sup> For unpaid care responsibilities, see cross-country comparison for the EU: 2020. [Gender inequalities in care and pay in the EU](#). European Institute for Gender Inequality.

For household work, see cross-country comparisons for the EU: Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19*, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>39</sup> Warren, T. (2019). [The problems faced by low income women in the labour market](#). Briefing paper for the Women’s Budget Group.

<sup>40</sup> Piasna, A., & Drahokoupil, J. (2017). Gender inequalities in the new world of work. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 23(3), 313–332.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, L. (2019). [Women’s Progression in the Workplace](#). King’s College London.

<sup>42</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2016). [Women shoulder the responsibility of ‘unpaid work’](#).

<sup>43</sup> That is 2 hours and 45 minutes (or 224 minutes for women compared to 135 minutes for men).

<sup>44</sup> OECD (2022), [Employment : Time spent in paid and unpaid work, by sex, data extracted on 30 March 2022](#).

day than men on household work.<sup>45</sup> In all countries, men have more leisure time than women.<sup>46</sup>

Women may rely on informal networks, such as family, to support them with childcare responsibilities. A survey of 247 new mothers in KwaZulu-Natal found that mothers who do not take their children to work rely on family members to look after children, particularly grandmothers.<sup>47</sup> For only 22% of respondents, the father looked after the child while the mother was away. The presence of informal networks, especially female relatives, may, therefore, act as an enabler for low-paid and low-skill women. Interestingly, the results of the survey found that domestic workers were less likely to take their child to work than trade workers in the informal economy. This suggests that different types of work may present greater barriers to managing care work than others.

### *The effects of childbirth*

Childbirth increases the pay gap between men and women. A UK study finds that the gap widens for each year following childbirth and evidence that by 12 years following childbirth women's pay per hour is 33% lower than men's, on average.<sup>48</sup> The study also notes that those women working fewer than 20 hours per week saw less growth in wages than those working greater than 20 hours.

Another long-term UK study corroborates these findings.<sup>49</sup> The careers of 929 mothers were followed for 10 years after the birth of their first child. The findings found that low-skill mothers, defined as those with GCSEs as their highest qualification (UK examinations for ages 14 to 16), who returned to work within three years of their child's birth were twice as likely to be managers or supervisors by the time the child turned 10 than those mothers who did not return to work within three years. Additionally, the study found that those with higher qualifications, such as A-levels or a university degree, had a greater increase in wage earnings when they returned to work within three years than for low-skill mothers returning in the same period. Thus, there are two findings from the study. Firstly, returning to work in a shorter period following childbirth acts as an enabler for low-skill women to reach managerial positions. Secondly, more-educated women see a greater increase in wages upon return to work than low-skill women. The factors influencing return to work include the employment

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<sup>45</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>46</sup> OECD (2018), [Balancing paid work, unpaid work and leisure](#).

<sup>47</sup> Horwood, C., Haskins, L., Alfors, L., Masango-Muzindutsi, Z., Dobson, R., & Rollins, N. (2019). A descriptive study to explore working conditions and childcare practices among informal women workers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: Identifying opportunities to support childcare for mothers in informal work. BMC Pediatrics

<sup>48</sup> Dias, M, Elming, W and Joyce, R. 2016. [The Gender Wage Gap](#). Institute for Fiscal Studies

<sup>49</sup> Stewart, K. (2011). Employment Trajectories and Later Employment Outcomes for Mothers in the British Household Panel Survey: An Analysis by Skill Level. Journal of Social Policy, 43.



status of the mother prior to childbirth, education level, and whether the mother's own mother was working when they were a child.<sup>50</sup>

In France, the return to employment after birth depends on several factors, including whether it is their first, second, third (or more) child, the type of job held and the level of education.<sup>51</sup> Women who don't have the *baccalauréat* (equivalent to A levels in the UK) generally return to work less quickly than women with a higher level of education, and this gap widens for subsequent children. France offers shorter paid maternity leave than the UK (16 weeks compared to 39 weeks for the UK).<sup>52</sup> Maternity pay is based on an employee's salary but it is capped, so it is likely that more highly educated women return to work more quickly if their maternity pay is much lower than their normal salary.

Women in France are more likely to work part-time and the gap widens as they have children.<sup>53</sup> A greater proportion of women without children (25%) in employment work part-time than men (9%). After the arrival of the first child, the gap increases to 28% vs. 6%. With the second child, it increases again to 33% vs. 5%. After the third child, 42% of women in employment work part-time compared to 6% of men.

In Spain, the employment rate strongly declines after motherhood. A study analysing the Spanish labour force survey states that, "by the end of the 2010s, women with children aged 0-15 are about 7.5 times more likely than men with children of the same age to work part-time, twice as likely to be unemployed and about 25% more likely to hold a temporary contract".<sup>54</sup> Similarly, earnings dip when women become mothers by an average of 28% ten years after birth.<sup>55</sup> Part-time and temporary work is common in Spain, but more so among women and at lower levels of education. According to the Spanish National Statistics Institution (INE), in 2021 32% of women without higher education were in part-time jobs compared with 14% of women with degrees, which is a much greater difference than for men (men 5.8% without higher education vs. 6.7% with a degree).<sup>56</sup>

A study conducted in Spain from 2010 to 2018 looked at when individuals leave employment around childbirth.<sup>57</sup> The study found a peak in mothers leaving employment around the 14th month after childbirth (140% more than for women with no children), which corresponds to the end of maternity leave in Spain. Although the study found that 82% of the time this was "voluntary", it showed that a number of firms actually dismissed their female employees around that time. While Spanish law protects parents from wrongful terminations, employers

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<sup>50</sup> Harkness, S, Borkowska, M and Pelikh, A. 2019. Employment pathways and occupational change after childbirth. *Government Equalities Office*.

<sup>51</sup> Pailhé, A. & Solaz, A. (2012). Durée et conditions de retour à l'emploi des mères après une naissance. *Retraite et société*, 63, 51-77.

<sup>52</sup> OECD Family Database. [PF2.1. Parental leave systems](#)

<sup>53</sup> Pailhé, A. & Solaz, A. (2012). Durée et conditions de retour à l'emploi des mères après une naissance. *Retraite et société*, 63, 51-77.

<sup>54</sup> Hupkau, C., & Ruiz-Valenzuela, J. (2021). Work and children in Spain: challenges and opportunities for equality between men and women. *SERIEs*, 1-26.

<sup>55</sup> Arolas et al. (2021) *The effect of childbirth on job separations*. CRES-UPF working paper.

<sup>56</sup> INE database (2022). [Encuesta de Población Activa \(EPA\) Cuarto trimestre de 2021](#).

<sup>57</sup> Arolas et al. (2021) *The effect of childbirth on job separations*. CRES-UPF working paper.

can still dismiss employees for “worker-related reasons”, such as not achieving their objectives or poor performance.

The study found that more highly educated women were less likely to be dismissed than women with lower levels of education. While employers most often stated that these terminations were due to problems unrelated to the employee, there was not the same peak of dismissal among fathers, suggesting that the underlying reason for these dismissals may be discrimination. Most mothers (94%) who are dismissed in the 13th month after pregnancy become economically inactive. The effects of these dismissals on employment are highly persistent: mothers are significantly more likely to remain economically inactive or unemployed for over two years following dismissal.

The study also found that there were no differences in post-birth employment trajectories for single mothers compared to women in couples. However, in the UK, the effects of childbirth on single parents are more pronounced; women are more likely to return to work after childbirth if they live with a partner than if they live alone.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Low uptake of parental leave among men*

While there is not enough evidence to fully understand the effects of paternity leave on the gender pay gap, increased uptake of paternity leave could reduce the motherhood penalty and gender gap in earnings in the next generation. However, state-subsidised and protected parental leave for fathers is typically very short or inaccessible by design.

In the UK, fathers and non-childbearing parents are eligible to take up to 2 weeks of paternity leave, and up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave (SPL). SPL policy aims to support a more equal division of childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers, as well as helping women who have had children to return to work faster. However, since the introduction of SPL in 2015, estimates for uptake vary from 0.5% to 8% among eligible fathers.<sup>59,60</sup> While men are often financially disincentivised from taking longer leave, there are a number of other behavioural barriers, such as the difficulty of making use of the policy and perceived gender and social norms.<sup>61,62</sup>

In France, paternity leave was only legislated in 2002, with 11 non-transferable days paid fully by the state. In 2018, 70% of fathers in France used their full paternity leave, but the proportion of men taking up the paternity leave is much lower among fathers with less education, lower pay and in temporary contracts. While 80% of fathers in permanent

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<sup>58</sup> Coram Family and Childcare. (2019) [What influences mothers' decisions about returning to work after having a baby?](#)

<sup>59</sup> Working Families (2017) [Shared Parental Leave in the UK: is it working?](#)

<sup>60</sup> BEIS (2013) [Modern workplaces: Shared parental leave and pay administration consultation - impact assessment](#)

<sup>61</sup> Burgess, Adrienne & Davies, Jeremy. (2017). Cash or Carry? fathers combining work and care in the UK

<sup>62</sup> Hacothen et al. (2018) [Return to work: parental decision making](#)

contracts took their entire leave, only 48% of fathers in temporary contracts did.<sup>63</sup> The two main reasons that fathers state for not taking their whole leave were a workload too important, and among low-paid workers, the unavailability of information concerning their rights to it.

### 3.1.2 Transport & geography

Logistical factors can act as barriers to progression. For example, in a study of 912 unemployed individuals in the UK, 77% did not have regular access to a car and the majority (58%) were reliant on buses, compared with only 8.5% in the employed population.<sup>64</sup> The study also found that dependence on buses was higher among women and the “lower skilled”. While the sample may not be representative of unemployed people in the UK as it targeted people attending Job Centres, wider evidence also finds that women in England are more likely to use the bus than men.<sup>65</sup> However, public transport can have issues with reliability and availability. In a study by the Institute for Transport Studies, 19% of those surveyed had turned down a job offer due to the quality of the bus service.<sup>66</sup>

Limited financial resources may also mean that low-paid women are constrained in their employment options to a geographical area where they can feasibly travel.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, as low-paid women are concentrated in part-time work and work irregular hours, season tickets or passes are often not financially viable, presenting a further financial constraint.<sup>68</sup> Further evidence suggests that women are more likely to make multiple trips en-route between their start and end destination (known as ‘trip-chaining’), often due to childcare reasons.<sup>69</sup> This further adds to the cost of transport for women.

Women may also favour roles with a smaller commute over higher-paying roles in order to be closer to home to carry out domestic responsibilities.<sup>70</sup> Men, conversely, have fewer domestic responsibilities and are therefore able to commute further, allowing them to access higher earnings.<sup>71</sup>

In South Africa, women in low-paid and low-skill work may live in informal settlements outside of main towns and cities. Thus, they face additional challenges with commuting to work, as public transport from these settlements often have issues of punctuality, overcrowding and

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<sup>63</sup>Inspection générale des affaires sociales, Gosselin et Carole Lepine (2018). [Évaluation du congé de paternité](#).

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, D and Mackie, P. 2013. Buses and the Economy II. *Institute for Transport Studies*

<sup>65</sup> Gill, R. 2018. [2018 WBG Briefing: Public Transport and Gender](#). *Women’s Budget Group*

<sup>66</sup> Mackie, P., Laird, J., & Johnson, D. (2012). *Buses and economic growth: Main report*. *Institute for Transport Studies*

<sup>67</sup> Crisp, R., Gore, T., & McCarthy, L. (2017). *Addressing transport barriers to work in low income neighbourhoods: A review of evidence and practice*. Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>68</sup> Gill, R. 2018. [2018 WBG Briefing: Public Transport and Gender](#). *Women’s Budget Group*

<sup>69</sup> International Transport Worker’s Federation. (2021). [Women in public transport](#).

<sup>70</sup> Bertrand, M., Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2010). Dynamics of the gender gap for young professionals in the financial and corporate sectors. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 2(3), 228–255.

<sup>71</sup> 2019. [Gender differences in commute time and pay](#). *Office for National Statistics*.

breakdowns.<sup>72</sup> Often, it is the worker's responsibility alone to arrange their transport to work, without assistance from the employer.

For women, logistical constraints are also related to violence or fear of violence. Women fear using public transport, particularly at night, and low-paid and low-skill jobs are more likely to involve night-time work.<sup>73</sup> For example, in France 56.3% of women are concerned with using public transport in Paris compared to 26.7% of men.<sup>74</sup> There are a plethora of international studies that have examined the link between public transport and the impact on women's travel, finding that women alter their travel behaviour due to fear of crime and feelings of safety. For example, women may choose not to travel late at night, or they may leave transport early to avoid harassment.<sup>75</sup> Evidently, this fear, as demonstrated by the experiences of harassment women face on public transport, constrains progression routes available for women, who may not take an opportunity if it is accompanied by late night travel.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.1.3 Shift patterns

Working night shifts may be detrimental to progression due to the possible health impacts and key female-dominated low-paid sectors have a high prevalence of night work, such as care work.<sup>77</sup> A large-scale study of nurses in the UK found that those working more than 75% of their shifts at night were more likely to experience absence due to sickness than those working day shifts only.<sup>78</sup> A suggestion offered in the study for this increased absence was that women were choosing to work night shifts so they could continue to undertake childcare and household commitments during the day. The authors, therefore, contend that these women may not be sleeping sufficiently, increasing their chance of illness. Therefore, while there are more men working night shifts than women,<sup>79</sup> there appear to be stronger impacts on women who are more likely to have to undertake additional responsibilities in the day alongside the night shift.

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<sup>72</sup> Kola, O. O. (2018). Widespread Information and Intensive Awareness on Welfare Common Shared Transportation System for the Working Poor in South Africa. *Global Media Journal*, 16(31)

<sup>73</sup> Crisp, R., Gore, T., & McCarthy, L. (2017). *Addressing transport barriers to work in low income neighbourhoods: A review of evidence and practice*. Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>74</sup> Zauberman, R., Robert, P., Névanen, S., & Bon, D. (2013). Victimation et insécurité en Île-de-France. *Revue française de sociologie*, 54(1), 111-153.

<sup>75</sup> See for example: Gardner, N., Cui, J., & Coiacetto, E. (2017). Harassment on public transport and its impacts on women's travel behaviour. *Australian Planner*, 54(1), 8–15

<sup>76</sup> For example, 55% of women in London report experiencing unwanted sexual harassment in a YouGov survey Prescott-Smith, S. [Most women have been sexually harassed on London public transport](#). YouGov.

<sup>77</sup> TUC (2018) [Number of people working night shifts up by more than 150,000 in 5 years](#)

<sup>78</sup> Dall'Ora, C., Ball, J., Redfern, O. C., & Griffiths, P. (2020). Night work for hospital nurses and sickness absence: A retrospective study using electronic rostering systems. *Chronobiology International*, 37(9–10), 1357–1364.

<sup>79</sup> TUC. (2018). [Number of people working night shifts up by more than 150,000 in 5 years](#).

Additionally, available statistics from the US show that women are more likely to work multiple jobs than men.<sup>80</sup> While there are no comparable statistics available for the target countries it is plausible that there is a similar disparity. The effects of working multiple jobs for low-paid women have not been researched to date, however, a new research programme suggests that multiple low-paid jobs are associated with “extended working days, nonstandard employment hours, difficult commutes, physically and sometimes emotionally demanding labour, and a lack of protections and rights such as flexible working, sick pay and pensions”.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the potential barriers resulting from working multiple low-paid roles may be significant.

Low-paid work is characterised by a lack of autonomy.<sup>82</sup> Unpredictable and volatile shift patterns are a barrier to low-paid and low-skill women, resulting in precarity.<sup>83</sup> A survey found that 51% of zero-hours workers had a shift cancelled within 24 hours of the shift starting.<sup>84</sup> Women may not be able to arrange normal childcare at short notice, requiring them to either pay a premium for childcare, or they may be required to turn down the shift which may have ramifications for their allocation of future shifts, as they may not be seen as available by the employer.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.1.4 Financial challenges

Coupled with care commitments, women in low-paid work often have to manage financial stress as they are seen as “primarily responsible for seeing to it that the everyday needs of the home and the children are met”.<sup>86</sup> Evidence suggests that financial stress can inhibit job performance, thereby acting as a further barrier to progression.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, low-paid roles are more likely to be associated with irregular hours, and thus irregular pay.<sup>88</sup> Scarcity research suggests that instability in pay increases uncertainty, meaning individuals have reduced capacity to think about progression opportunities as their focus is on managing their financial commitments.<sup>89</sup>

In South Africa, there has been an upward trend in the proportion of households that are female-dominated (where all adults in the household are only women), increasing from

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<sup>80</sup> Wilson, V (2015). [Women Are More Likely to Work Multiple Jobs than Men](#). *Economic Policy Institute*.

<sup>81</sup> [Women in multiple low-paid employment: Pathways between work, care and health](#). *Nuffield Foundation*.

<sup>82</sup> Warren, T., & Lyonette, C. (2018). Good, Bad and Very Bad Part-time Jobs for Women? Re-examining the Importance of Occupational Class for Job Quality since the ‘Great Recession’ in Britain. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(4), 747–767.

<sup>83</sup> Jones, L. (2019). *Women’s Progression in the Workplace*. King’s College London.

<sup>84</sup> Trades Union Congress, 2017. [Great Jobs with Guaranteed Hours](#).

<sup>85</sup> Jones, L. (2019). *Women’s Progression in the Workplace*. King’s College London.

<sup>86</sup> [Average number of trips by age, gender and main mode: England](#). *Department for Transport*.

<sup>87</sup> Ratnawat, R. G., & Jha, D. P. C. (2014). Impact of Job Related Stress on Employee Performance: A Review and Research Agenda. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16(11), 01–06.

<sup>88</sup> [Irregular Work Scheduling and Its Consequences](#). (2015). *Economic Policy Institute*.

<sup>89</sup> Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2020). Scarcity and Cognitive Function around Payday: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 5(4), 365–376.

16.2% in 1995 to 25% in 2018.<sup>90</sup> Female-dominated households are larger and more likely to include children under 18 and adults of pensionable age than male-dominated households. These households have a higher incidence of reliance on social grants, suggesting these households face increased financial challenges compared to male-dominated households. Additionally, there is low compliance by men with child maintenance payments in South Africa, furthering the financial challenges faced by women.<sup>91</sup>

Barriers to progression may also stem from limited access to formal credit compared to men, difficulties accessing markets to sell goods and less developed networks compared to men.<sup>92</sup> Thus women are not able to set up and develop businesses in the same way as men, as they have less access to initial capital and subsequently less opportunities to grow their business.<sup>93</sup>

## 3.2 Employer level

### 3.2.1 Flexible working policies

The ability to work flexibly is critical for many women to participate in the labour market, as this enables women to balance work and childcare responsibilities. However, flexible working arrangements are typically less well paid per hour than non-flexible arrangements for similar roles, as workers pay a “penalty” for being allowed to work flexibly.<sup>94</sup> For example, in Spain the government has introduced family-friendly measures, such as the adaptation of working hours for parents and the extension of parental leave. As these measures are mainly used by women, this can foment the belief in employers that the family work, such as childcare or housework is mainly a feminine task contributing to the propagation of gender stereotypes and the increasing inequalities.<sup>95</sup>

In addition, flexibility for low-paid and low-skill roles is often accompanied by a contract of employment that exposes the worker to earnings risk, whereas high-paid and high-skill jobs are typically still offered a fixed salary.<sup>96</sup> This puts low-skill and low-paid women in a position where they must accept this penalty, or they may not be able to work at all, given the additional responsibilities they face outside of work.

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<sup>90</sup> Posel, D., & Hall, K. (2021, November 18). The Economics of Households in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>91</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>92</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>93</sup> Biyase, M., & Fisher, B. (2017). Determinants of Access to Formal Credit by the Poor Households. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai: Oeconomica*, 62(1), 50–60.

<sup>94</sup> Jones, L. (2019). [Women's Progression in the Workplace](#). King's College London.

<sup>95</sup> Hupkau, C., & Ruiz-Valenzuela, J. (2021). Work and children: is the motherhood penalty in Spain too high for working women?. *LSE Business Review*.

<sup>96</sup> Adams-Prassl, A., Balgova, M., & Qian, M. (2020). Flexible Work Arrangements in Low Wage Jobs: Evidence from Job Vacancy Data. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

In one US study with interviews and focus groups with both employers and low-wage mothers, women were seen as personally “irresponsible” for having childcare commitments.<sup>97</sup> Thus requests for flexible working were perceived poorly as employers felt the women were disorganised and lacked a proper work ethic.

Timewise, a UK flexible working consultancy, finds that flexible working access is highest (28%) for the lowest paid roles, but then drops to the lowest ratio (20%) for roles paid £20,000 to £34,000.<sup>98</sup> They suggest that this creates a “pinch point” where workers may not want to progress as they cannot access the same flexible working arrangements in the next pay band. They also find that the types of flexibility offered differ between low-paid and high-paid roles, with part-time work being more prevalent for low-paid roles. Further, they find that home-working and flexible hours are offered least to the lowest-paid workers.

Where flexibility is offered at this “pinch point”, it may be seen as “one-off”, available only to high-performing women or women who have previously worked in high-skill positions.<sup>99</sup> Women may also have to work their way into a senior role first before they are able to negotiate to work flexibly. The paper distinguishes between “restrictive” and “optimal” part-time work. Restrictive flexibility relates to low-paid positions where workers can swap shifts as they are seen as substitutable. The authors elucidate how this leads to difficulty with progression as women are not given access to career pathways as a result of their substitutability. In addition, women who cannot work full-time may be limited by their inability to work the requisite hours managers deem as required for progression.<sup>100</sup>

Lack of access to flexible working from day one of starting a new job reduces labour market mobility and access to higher quality work. In the UK, for example, employers are only legally obliged to respond to a flexible working request after 26 weeks of continuous employment.<sup>101</sup> Employers are not obliged to accept these requests. This disincentivises women from pursuing higher quality jobs outside of their current employer in favour of retaining flexibility as they cannot immediately work flexibly for a new employer unless agreed from the outset.

<sup>102</sup>

Despite the huge changes in uptake of remote working due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these benefits were not felt to the same extent by low-paid low-skill women. Women are less likely to work in roles that can be performed remotely<sup>103</sup> and remote working is less available

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<sup>97</sup> Dodson, L. (2013). Stereotyping Low-Wage Mothers Who Have Work and Family Conflicts. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 257–278.

<sup>98</sup> Timewise. 2021. [The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2021](#).

<sup>99</sup> Tomlinson, J. (2006). Routes to Part-Time Management in UK Service Sector Organizations: Implications for Women’s Skills, Flexibility and Progression. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 13, 585–605

<sup>100</sup> Webb, J., Parken, A., Hodges, H., & Mathias, M. (2018). [Promoting job progression in low pay sectors](#). Wales Centre for Public Policy.

<sup>101</sup> [Flexible working](#). (n.d.). GOV.UK.

<sup>102</sup> Taylor, M. (2017). *Good work: The Taylor review of modern working practices*. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

<sup>103</sup> Nicks et al. (2021) *Impact of changes in flexible working during lockdown on gender equality in the workplace*. Government Equalities Office report.

to low-paid workers.<sup>104</sup> This inequality may further disadvantage low-paid low-skill women in managing caring responsibilities alongside work compared with men and high-skill women.

### 3.2.2 Organisational culture

Gendered norms in organisational culture can affect women's progression opportunities. In particular, studies have focussed on harassment and stereotyping in some male-dominated environments, further isolating women and acting as a barrier to progression.<sup>105</sup>

Male-dominated environments, such as the construction industry, may be associated with sexism, sexual harassment and bullying.<sup>106</sup> This is likely to dampen promotion opportunities for women and does not create an encouraging environment for women to flourish in. Indeed, increased sexual harassment is associated with fewer women in managerial positions.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Intersection with race*

A qualitative study explored the intersection of gender and race within organisational culture for low-paid and low-skill women in the UK.<sup>108</sup> Examining the experiences of 14 Nigerian and Indian women in work, it found evidence that organisational hierarchies were ignored for ethnic minority women, such that when they worked in leadership positions they faced disrespect from colleagues. Thus, when considering barriers faced by low-paid and low-skill women, it is important that the intersectional impacts of sexism and racism are considered.

This intersection between race and gender is also evident in the South African context. Through semi-structured interviews of black women, one study discusses how organisational culture can have "a powerful effect on employees' behaviour to the extent that women do not even feel comfortable to voice their requests".<sup>109</sup> Women in the study described cases where bosses think children are a distraction, so they do not want to request time off for childcare duties, or where they have to work longer hours as the boss is still working, meaning they cannot pick up their children. Moreover, the authors comment on how women internalise the culture, such that they adjust their behaviour to take the workplace culture into account. Another paper comments on how "black women are generally negatively evaluated for their organizational failure over black men or white women", meaning they are disproportionately

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<sup>104</sup> Cetrulo, A., Guarascio, D., & Virgillito, M. E. (2020). The Privilege of Working From Home at the Time of Social Distancing. *Intereconomics*, 55(3), 142–147.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, L. (2019). [Women's Progression in the Workplace](#). King's College London.

<sup>106</sup> Worrall, L., Harris, K., Stewart, R., Thomas, A., & McDermott, P. (2010). Barriers to women in the UK construction industry. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 17(3), 268–281.

<sup>107</sup> Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2019). The promise and peril of sexual harassment programs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(25), 12255–12260.

<sup>108</sup> Umolu, A. O. (2014). Gender and Race in UK Organisations: Case Study of Nigerian and Indian Women. *Gender & Behaviour*, 12(1), 6045–6058.

<sup>109</sup> Jaga, A., Arabandi, B., Bagraim, J., & Mdlongwa, S. (2018). Doing the 'gender dance': Black women professionals negotiating gender, race, work and family in post-apartheid South Africa. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(4), 429–444.



penalised for any failures.<sup>110</sup> Such hostile workplace cultures are likely to impede the prospects of black women who either may not wish to accommodate them or are limited in their growth if they cannot be themselves.

### *Intersection with immigration status*

Within South Africa, migrant women also face harassment and precarious work. One study examined the experiences of Zimbabwean women working in Johannesburg, finding that they often lacked legal status and in some cases would have to work for an employer for months before being hired as a permanent worker.<sup>111</sup> Due to their isolated position within the country, these women also had difficulty resisting precarity as they struggled to form collective networks.

In France, female migrants (excluding second generation immigrants) disproportionately occupy low-skill and low-paid positions.<sup>112,113</sup> While migrant women represent 5% of total employment, they represent 37% of domestic workers, 15% of domestic care workers, 13% of maternal assistants, and 11% of maintenance workers and hotel and catering supervisors. These occupations have the most considerable differences in representation of immigrant compared with non-immigrant women.

### **3.2.3 Training & skills development**

Training is frequently cited as a key enabler for low-paid and low-skill women. A large-scale quantitative study across 14 European countries, including the UK, France and Spain, found that, overall, training contributed more to increasing wages for women than men for those earning the lowest 10% of income.<sup>114</sup> A further UK study demonstrated a 10% increase in earnings in the medium-term following participation in “lifelong learning”, defined as any learning undertaken as an adult after compulsory education.<sup>115</sup>

However, qualitative research finds that many low-paid women are overqualified for their current position.<sup>116</sup> A global study of 130 countries finds that in high-income countries 23.6%

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<sup>110</sup> Babalola, O. O., du Plessis, Y., & Babalola, S. S. (2021). Insight into the Organizational Culture and Challenges Faced by Women STEM Leaders in Africa. *Social Sciences*, 10(3), 105.

<sup>111</sup> Hlatshwayo, M. (2019). Precarious work and precarious resistance: A case study of Zimbabwean migrant women workers in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Diaspora Studies*, 12(2), 160–178.

<sup>112</sup> Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Etudes et des Statistiques (DARES) is the department of the Ministry of Labour which produces analyses, studies and statistics on the themes of work, employment, vocational training and social dialogue.

<sup>113</sup> Aurore Desjonquères et Moustapha Niang, « Les métiers des immigrés », s. d., 71.

<sup>114</sup> Icardi, R. (2021). Returns to workplace training for male and female employees and implications for the gender wage gap: A quantile regression analysis. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 8(1), 21–45.

<sup>115</sup> Blanden, J., Buscha, F., Sturgis, P., & Urwin, P. (2012). Measuring the earnings returns to lifelong learning in the UK. *Economics of Education Review*, 31(4), 501–514.

<sup>116</sup> Rainbird, H. (2007). Can training remove the glue from the “sticky floor” of low-paid work for women? *Equal Opportunities International*, 26(6), 555–572.

of women are overeducated compared to 18.5% of men.<sup>117</sup> The UK's ONS corroborates this finding, identifying that 16% of the surveyed population were “overeducated”, and outlining that this is associated with a wage penalty.<sup>118</sup> The ONS defines overeducation as having a higher level of education than most others in a given occupation.<sup>119</sup> The proportion of overeducated women has increased over time, closing the gap in overeducation between men and women in the UK per the latest data available in 2017.

The ONS did not look at whether the subject(s) an individual studied matched those required by their role, so we cannot know from this if women are overeducated, but in a different discipline than is required by their occupation. One paper suggested that further training that provides skills may not be needed, but instead training should place a greater emphasis on teaching employees about their employer, allowing them to better navigate the next steps in career progression.<sup>120</sup>

Training and development opportunities may typically be offered within “core” working hours (e.g. Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm). These can be difficult to access for women who are more likely to work irregular hours often due to domestic responsibilities.<sup>121</sup>

In France, state funding is available for training, known as the *Compte Professionnel de Formation* (CPF). Unemployed or economically inactive women are slightly more likely than men to access training through CPF. However, employed women are less likely than employed men to benefit from the scheme, especially when it comes to low-skill workers. In particular, women with children under 6 and women working in precarious contracts are less likely to access training than other groups. A recent study on CPF uptake found that the use of CPF by employees on fixed-term or temporary contracts is 41% lower than for employees on permanent contracts.<sup>122,123</sup> In addition, they are less likely to choose the training of their choice. Two-thirds of low-skill workers perceive the training sessions as being “imposed” on them by their company, often to comply with new regulations and/or practices, compared to 50% of workers in managerial positions.

Evidence suggests that generic training is ineffective, which has led researchers to propose that 'targeted' training might be more effective.<sup>124</sup> However, there is little evidence to

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<sup>117</sup> International Labour Organisation. (2021). [Only half of workers worldwide hold jobs corresponding to their level of education](#).

<sup>118</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2019). [Overeducation and hourly wages in the UK labour market: 2006 to 2017](#).

<sup>119</sup> Specifically, they define overeducation as being one standard deviation above the average educational attainment for the occupation.

<sup>120</sup> Rainbird, H. (2007). Can training remove the glue from the “sticky floor” of low-paid work for women? *Equal Opportunities International*, 26(6), 555–572.

<sup>121</sup> Webb, J., Parken, A., Hodges, H., & Mathias, M. (2018). [Promoting job progression in low pay sectors](#). Wales Centre for Public Policy.

<sup>122</sup> Caisse des dépôts. Gabin Langevin (2022) [Formations financées par le CPF des salariés en contrats courts ou au Smic, en 2019 et en 2020](#)

<sup>123</sup> French public financial institution that carries out general interest activities on behalf of the State and local authorities.

<sup>124</sup> What works centre for local economic growth. (n.d.). [In-Work Progression Toolkit: In-Work Support](#).

demonstrate the impact of targeted training. Targeted training is not well defined in the literature, however, it could potentially mean:

- Targeted at women
- Targeted to the individual's needs to address their skills gaps
- Targeted at areas that women are disproportionately more likely to benefit from, but open to all

Training that is exclusively for women is not recommended as there is mixed evidence on its effectiveness.<sup>125</sup> It also runs the risk of implying both to the company and to the women involved that they are deficient and in need of extra support.

The second seems likely to be more effective than generic training, but would require an effective process for understanding an individual's skills and accurately identifying the required training. If such a process relies on self-reports, this may end up with women receiving unnecessary training if they are more likely to underestimate their skills.<sup>126</sup> However, a well designed process for achieving this matching could be highly effective.

Developing training programmes that tackle areas that would disproportionately benefit women, but allowing anyone access to them, is a fruitful avenue for further research. This approach would avoid stigmatising or implying that women are deficient, while ensuring that learning & development programmes acknowledge and address skill-related factors that may disproportionately hold women back. However, this is contingent on determining whether these skills gaps exist and what they are, which is yet to be established.

### 3.2.4 Recruitment processes

Low-paid and low-skill jobs are characterised by issues with career mobility and promotion practices with limited opportunities for development<sup>127</sup>, making it difficult for individuals to progress once they enter these roles.<sup>128</sup> Progression by changing job roles may be difficult when recruitment practices create barriers for women. In an evidence review of recruitment practices in the UK, the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that informal recruitment methods are used more in low-paid industries than high-paid industries, such as using 'word of mouth' and informal networks to find applicants.<sup>129</sup> They suggest that these practices may entrench existing demographics within the workforce, meaning that male-dominated industries exclude women.

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<sup>125</sup> Lacerenza, C. N., Reyes, D. L., Marlow, S. L., Joseph, D. L., & Salas, E. (2017). Leadership training design, delivery, and implementation: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(12), 1686.

<sup>126</sup> Exley, C and Kessler, J. (2019). [The Gender Gap in Self-Promotion](#). *National Bureau of Economic Research*

<sup>127</sup> OECD (2019), [Getting Skills Right: Engaging low-skilled adults in learning](#).

<sup>128</sup> OECD (2019), [Getting Skills Right: Engaging low-skilled adults in learning](#).

<sup>129</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2020). [Recruitment of workers into low-paid occupations and industries: an evidence review](#). National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

In France, a study found that spontaneous applications are the main channel of recruitment in female-dominated low-paid low-skill sectors, in contrast to male-dominated low-paid low-skill sectors where recruitment is mainly done through networks.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, for these women, applications are often made with a large asymmetry of information between recruiters and employees, as women apply for jobs for which they do not know the specifics, such as location, hours, or salary. In addition, many low-paid female-dominated sectors have a high turnover rate (e.g. retail and hospitality), so recruitment is frequently done in a hurry, which may not leave much room for candidates to negotiate anything at the time of hiring.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, this same study showed that salary negotiation is significantly less frequent for low-skill jobs than for other jobs.

In a Spanish study, CVs were submitted for 1,372 vacancies in Madrid and Barcelona to test gender stereotyping in selection practices.<sup>132</sup> One tranche of the sample involved CVs for low-skill positions across a range of male-dominated, female-dominated and gender-neutral companies. Four CVs were sent for each application, using combinations of gender, skill level and parental status. Measuring the callback rate for applications, the study found that those without children received more callbacks than those with children and that those with greater skills received more callbacks than those with lower skills. More importantly, women received lower callback rates than men within each comparison group (e.g. low-skill men compared to low-skill women). The authors speculated that the differences are due to gender stereotyping, however, we cannot know the mechanism driving the results from the experimental design. Regardless, it is clear evidence of discrimination on the basis of gender.

Furthermore, a UK review found evidence of discriminatory practices stemming from a requirement by recruiters to have a continuous employment history with no gaps.<sup>133</sup> Where individuals did not have a consistent work history they were immediately screened out from the application. The majority of individuals that have left the workforce for caring responsibilities (and wish to return) are women, and, in particular, women with dependent children.<sup>134</sup> As such, the requirement for continuous service represents a significant barrier for women to re-enter the workforce.

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<sup>130</sup> Dares analyses N°064 (2017) [Comment les employeurs recrutent-ils leurs salariés ?](#)

<sup>131</sup> Demazière, D., & Marchal, E. (2018). La fabrication du travail non qualifié. Analyser les obstacles à la valorisation. *Travail et emploi*, (155-156), 5-30.

<sup>132</sup> González, M. J., Cortina, C., & Rodríguez, J. (2019). *The Role of Gender Stereotypes in Hiring: A Field Experiment*. *European Sociological Review*, 35(2), 187–204.

<sup>133</sup> Hudson, N and Runge, J. (2020). [Recruitment of workers into low-paid occupations and industries: an evidence review](#). NIESR

<sup>134</sup> Paull, G. (2018). Analysis of those returning to the labour market following a break to care for others. Government Equalities Office

## 3.3 Policy and society level

### 3.3.1 Education

Education is often lauded as a panacea for addressing gender equality, poverty and economic growth, particularly in developing countries.<sup>135</sup> In the context of the UK, France, Spain and South Africa, there are very few educational differences between men and women. In fact, women in these three countries are more likely to have higher education than men.<sup>136</sup> However, this does not necessarily translate to better outcomes in the labour market.

Evidence suggests that the type of subject selected is important as some subjects are associated with higher pay than others, however this occurs irrespective of gender.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, even where men and women study the same subject, men earn more. Women thus need to be more highly educated to achieve similar pay.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that higher levels of education are associated with an increased likelihood that women work full-time and return to work more quickly following childbirth.<sup>139</sup>

Within each of the countries inequalities persist when considering education in science, mathematics, engineering and technology (STEM) fields.<sup>140</sup> There is a strong body of literature on the association between STEM education and earnings and progression.<sup>141</sup> Thus, the persistent gap in STEM education for women acts as a barrier as women cannot access opportunities with clear progression pathways, higher pay and greater job security.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Omoniyi, M. B. I., & Omoniyi, A. O. (2014). Unlocking Potentials in Developing Country through Education: A Panacea for Economic Growth and Poverty Alleviation. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, 5(2), 6.

<sup>136</sup> Mind the gap: [Gender differences in higher education](#). (2020, March 7). HEPI; [Education at a Glance 2021: OECD indicators - France](#). (2021). OECD; [Education at a Glance 2021: OECD indicators - Spain](#). (2021). OECD; [Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators - South Africa. \(2019\)](#). OECD. .

<sup>137</sup> Chevalier, A. (2011). Subject choice and earnings of UK graduates. *Economics of Education Review*, 30(6), 1187–1201.

<sup>138</sup> Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Gulish, A. (2018). Women Can't Win: Despite Making Educational Gains and Pursuing High-Wage Majors, Women Still Earn Less than Men [Report]. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>139</sup> Pronzato, C. D. (2009). Return to work after childbirth: Does parental leave matter in Europe? *Review of Economics of the Household*, 7(4), 341–360.

<sup>140</sup> Akala, B. M. (2019). Affirmative Action for Gender Justice in South African and Kenyan Education Systems. *Africa Education Review*, 16(5), 1–15;

McDool, E and Morris, D. (2020). Gender and Socio-Economic Differences in STEM Uptake and Attainment. Centre for Vocational Education Research.

<sup>141</sup> Melguizo, T., & Wolniak, G. C. (2012). The Earnings Benefits of Majoring in STEM Fields Among High Achieving Minority Students. *Research in Higher Education*, 53(4), 383–405.

<sup>142</sup> Ruder, A. I., & Noy, M. V. (n.d.). *Job Security and the Informed Major Choice of U.S. University Students*. 57.

### 3.3.2 Labour market

#### *Type of employment*

Labour market insecurity may act as a barrier to progression for low-paid and low-skill women.

Women may earn less because they work less. In 2019, almost 1 in 3 active women (28.9%) worked part-time, with women making up the bulk (79.5%) of part-time workers<sup>143</sup>. 9 in 10 part-time employees work in services and women are overrepresented in certain domains such as education, health and social work.

Short-term work, temporary contracts and seasonal labour increase precarity and are particularly prevalent in these sectors. Even where workers return to the same employer following fixed-term work, they may not gain the same employment rights as permanent staff and have less job security.<sup>144</sup>

Contributing to this precarity in retail is the requirement that employees are interchangeable in that they can perform a wide range of tasks relevant to all positions across the team, for example, from customer service, to inventory, or the shop floor. A French study finds that this prevents individuals from specialising or upskilling in a particular area and makes it easier to replace them, reducing their wage bargaining power.<sup>145</sup>

In France, 1 in 4 employees (26.6% of employees) experience “precarious” career paths characterised by frequent job changes, periods of inactivity and unemployment.<sup>146</sup> Women are overrepresented in this group (68% of women compared to 32% of men).<sup>147</sup> Employees who have this type of career path often express a lack of symbolic and financial recognition for their work. They are also less likely to think that their job matches their educational background.

An Oxfam report looking at low-paid women in the UK further identifies how company structures create divides between different types of work. Ancillary services, such as cleaning, are often outsourced to agencies.<sup>148</sup> This means that those services, and, therefore, the individuals working within those services, become disconnected from the company and viewed as outside the company’s development and progression structure. A

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<sup>143</sup> INSEE Références (2020) [Emploi, chômage, revenus du travail](#)

<sup>144</sup> Ray, Kathryn; Hoggart, Lesley; Vegeris, Sandra and Taylor, Rebecca (2010). *Better Off Working? Work, Poverty And Benefit Cycling*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

<sup>145</sup> Demazière, D., & Marchal, E. (2018). La fabrication du travail non qualifié. Analyser les obstacles à la valorisation. *Travail et emploi*, (155-156), 5-30.

<sup>146</sup> This study considers employees who have completed their initial training or studies at least 10 years ago. Enquête Conditions de travail 2013, in Dares Analyses (2018) [En quoi les conditions de travail sont-elles liées au parcours professionnel antérieurs?](#)

<sup>147</sup> Dares Analyses (2018) [En quoi les conditions de travail sont-elles liées au parcours professionnel antérieur?](#)

<sup>148</sup> Rubery, J. (2017). *Why is Women’s Work Low-Paid? Establishing a framework for understanding the causes of low pay among professions traditionally dominated by women*. Oxfam GB.

UK study on the effects of individuals moving from public sector employment to outsourced private sector employment notes the lack of progression routes in outsourced employment.<sup>149</sup> Looking at agency nurses in the UK, one study finds that these nurses are excluded from progression due to their “fleeting involvement with any single organisation and confinement to limited responsibility job roles”.<sup>150</sup>

### *Collective and wage bargaining*

Women have less access to unions, and may therefore be excluded from collective-bargaining opportunities, resulting in a weaker wage bargaining position. Across OECD countries, women are more likely to work in “non-standard” jobs (defined as workers not in a full-time permanent contract, such as temporary workers, part-time workers or self-employed workers), and women working in these jobs are 55% less likely to be unionised than workers in “standard” jobs.<sup>151</sup> Non-standard roles typically experience higher turnover rates so individuals cannot sign up to join a union as they do not have sufficient continuous service. Non-standard roles are often outsourced or contracted by companies and so categorised as “self-employed” meaning they cannot access the union of the company they provide services to. Within female-dominated occupations such as care, women are often not working in the same central location or are employed through an agency, making union recruitment, organisation and information dissemination difficult.

Where low-paid low-skill women work for monopsonistic employers, this acts as a barrier for women as they are not able to negotiate higher pay.<sup>152</sup> A monopsonistic employer is an employer that dominates the labour market and therefore has a stronger bargaining position, meaning they can set wages lower than would be offered in a competitive market. The nursing labour market is exemplified by monopsonistic employers, stagnating wage progression for low-paid nurses.

### *Informal economy*

South Africa’s informal economy is comparatively small when compared to other African countries, with a 34% share of informal employment compared to 85.8% for Africa as a whole.<sup>153</sup> However, South Africa’s informal economy is overrepresented by low-paid and low-skill women.<sup>154</sup> This is attributed to the ‘feminisation’ of the labour force in South Africa

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<sup>149</sup> UNISON. 2014. [Outsourcing the cuts: pay and employment effects of contracting out.](#)

<sup>150</sup> Tailby, S. (2005). Agency and bank nursing in the UK National Health Service. *Work, Employment and Society*, 19(2), 369–389.

<sup>151</sup> OECD. (2020). [Can collective bargaining help close the gender wage gap for women in non-standard jobs?](#)

<sup>152</sup> Grimshaw, D. (2011). *What do we know about low-wage work and low-wage workers? Analysing the definitions, patterns, causes and consequences in international perspective.* International Labour Office

<sup>153</sup> ILO (International Labour Organization). 2018. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, third edition. International Labour Organization, Geneva

<sup>154</sup> Rogan, M., & Alfery, L. (2019). Gendered inequalities in the South African informal economy. *Agenda*, 33(4), 91–102.

post-Apartheid.<sup>155</sup> Researchers have suggested that this may be because informal work is more compatible with traditional household responsibilities and requires less education.<sup>156</sup> Informal work acts as a barrier to progression as this means workers cannot access welfare to support their income, are not entitled to a minimum wage and do not have formal unions allowing for collective bargaining.<sup>157</sup> Women are unable to access labour protection and they may also be marginalised and excluded from social and political life as a result of their participation in the informal economy.<sup>158</sup> The informal economy may also create greater direct competition between women participating in the informal labour market, as they share the same consumers, products and locations, reducing a sense of shared social identity.<sup>159</sup>

### *Unemployment*

South Africa has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world, with 34.9% per the official unemployment rate in Q3 2021.<sup>160</sup> There are more unemployed women (37.3%) than men (32.9%) and this figure rises dramatically when considering black African women (41.5%). Against this backdrop, it is important to consider the availability of jobs when considering interventions. Having said this, one paper notes the higher proportion of women than men that are not actively seeking work.<sup>161</sup> The authors suggest that this may be due to childcare, distance from centres of employment, and fewer resources to fund costly job searches.

Spain suffers from high unemployment rates, particularly youth unemployment. The unemployment rate in Spain is also highly unequal across demographic groups. Women and people with lower levels of education are more likely to be unemployed.<sup>162</sup> Women are more likely to be unemployed than men whether under 25 years old (39.7% vs. 37.1%) or over (16% vs. 12.3%).<sup>163</sup> This is likely due to a combination of challenges with childcare, discrimination in the labour market and female-dominated sectors facing higher unemployment.

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<sup>155</sup> Rogan, M., & Skinner, C. (2021, November 18). The South African Informal Economy. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>156</sup> Mabilo, M. (2018). *Women in the informal economy: Precarious labour in South Africa* [Thesis, Stellenbosch : Stellenbosch University].

<sup>157</sup> Mabilo, M. (2018). *Women in the informal economy: Precarious labour in South Africa* [Thesis, Stellenbosch : Stellenbosch University].

<sup>158</sup> Fourie, E. (2019). Gender and race in the informal economy: The South African framework. *Social Security Outside the Realm of the Employment Contract*.

<sup>159</sup> Kabeer, N., Milward, K., & Sudarshan, R. (2013). Organising women workers in the informal economy. *Gender & Development*, 21(2), 249–263.

<sup>160</sup> Africa, S. S. (2021). [Quarterly Labour Force Survey \(QLFS\) – Q3:2021](#). Statistics South Africa.

<sup>161</sup> Casale, D., Posel, D., & Mosomi, J. (2021, November 18). Gender and Work in South Africa. The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy.

<sup>162</sup> EIDiario.es (2021), La desigualdad del desempleo: consulta la tasa de paro de la gente como tú.

<sup>163</sup> INE (2020). Empleo. Tasa de paro y brecha de género según grupos de edad y periodo en la UE.



Unemployment is less of an issue for France and the UK, where the unemployment rate is relatively low with little difference by gender.<sup>164,165</sup>

### 3.3.5 Gender norms & stereotyping

Women are subject to gendered stereotypes, both that they are natural caregivers, and that they are not natural leaders.<sup>166</sup> These stereotypes work to affect both how women see themselves and how others perceive them. As a result, women face a double bind whereby women are punished when they are not seen as caring or warm, but when they are seen as caring or warm they are not seen as fit for leadership.<sup>167</sup>

A survey of accountants found that being successful required “suppressing or eliminating attitudes and behaviours that would identify them as ‘typically female’, and therefore ill-suited for [leadership]”.<sup>168</sup> Summarising the previous literature, one study suggests that both men and women believe that men make better leaders than women.<sup>169</sup> The study goes on to outline the impacts of gender stereotyping on women in the workplace, as listed below:

- Stereotype threat: women anticipate the prospect of being judged based on their gender
- Disparate treatment: women may receive differential treatment as a result of their gender
- Prejudice: women are perceived to be weaker leaders
- Tokenism: women are perceived to be promoted by virtue of their gender rather than due to their attributes
- Perception: women are seen as risk-averse, emotional and illogical

A meta-analysis on the literature for gender stereotyping, while confirming the masculine construal of leadership, finds that over time stereotypes have reduced and that female perceptions of female leaders have improved.<sup>170</sup>

The majority of low-paid and low-skill women work in female-dominated environments.<sup>171</sup> However, there is evidence to suggest that more senior roles within these female-dominated

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<sup>164</sup> ONS (2022). [Unemployment](#).

<sup>165</sup> INSEE Références database (2021) [Emploi, chômage, revenus du travail](#)

<sup>166</sup> Kubu, C. S. (2018). Who does she think she is? Women, leadership and the ‘B’(ias) word. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 32(2), 235-251.

<sup>167</sup> Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype content: Warmth and competence endure. *Current directions in psychological science*, 27(2), 67-73.

<sup>168</sup> Maupin, R. J., & Lehman, C. R. (1994). Talking heads: Stereotypes, status, sex-roles and satisfaction of female and male auditors. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 19(4), 427–437.

<sup>169</sup> Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B. S. (2021). Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women’s Career Progressions from a Managerial Perspective. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 10(2), 192–208.

<sup>170</sup> Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological bulletin*, 137(4), 616.

<sup>171</sup> [Women Work More, But are Still Paid Less](#). (1995, August 25). [Press release].;

Devine, F, Foley, N and Ward, M. (2021). [Women and the economy](#). House of Commons Library.

industries are still dominated by men.<sup>172</sup> In addition, female-dominated occupations tend to be less well paid than male-dominated occupations,<sup>173</sup> trapping low-paid low-skill women into roles they may be perceived as better suited to, but are less well paid. Indeed, a review finds evidence that recruitment practices in low-paid roles may favour women where the jobs are seen as “feminised” and requiring “personal skills of empathy and servility”.<sup>174</sup> Male-dominated industries often provide greater pay and opportunities for advancement than female-dominated industries.<sup>175</sup> However, women can face hostility and harassment in these environments, as discussed previously.

In France, many jobs are classified as low-skill because they rely on qualities perceived as “natural” for women.<sup>176</sup> The current occupational classification grids are based on agreements from the 1970s that determined a value for each type of job according to the qualifications and skills required. These agreements may be outdated in the sense that the types of jobs described and the world of work have changed considerably since then. In this classification, technical production jobs are seen as more highly skilled than service jobs. The physical and mental strain is often underestimated for female-dominated jobs, such as the physical strain of carrying a heavy load for cashiers, or the mental strain of working in the care sector. Skills such as attention to detail, patience, availability, interpersonal skills and the ability to resolve conflict are often overlooked in those grids because they are considered “natural” or intuitive for women. The skills involved in this kind of work may be underestimated because they have historically been carried out by women in the private sphere where they are often invisible to others.<sup>177</sup>

This leads to a devaluation of “women’s” work, reflected by the skill classification, but also on recruitment phenomena like massive recruitment from populations whose skills are considered “natural”, such as a workforce of immigrant women in home help services.<sup>178</sup>

In a European Parliament policy paper, the authors describe the stigma associated with care work. Care work is often perceived as work that women have traditionally done in the household unpaid and, as such, is underpaid and undervalued.<sup>179</sup> In addition, the prosocial

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<sup>172</sup> Broadbridge, A. (2007). Dominated by women: Managed by men? The career development process of retail managers. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 35(12), 956–974.

<sup>173</sup> Olsen, W., Gash, V., Kim, S., & Zhang, M. (2018). *The gender pay gap in the UK: evidence from the UKHLS*

<sup>174</sup> Paull, G. (2018). Analysis of those returning to the labour market following a break to care for others. Government Equalities Office

<sup>175</sup> Corby, S., & Stanworth, C. (2009). *A price worth paying? Women and work – choice, constraint or satisficing*. *Equal Opportunities International*, 28(2), 162–178.

<sup>176</sup> Le défenseur des droits, République française (2013). [Guide pour une évaluation non discriminante des emplois à prédominance féminine](#).

<sup>177</sup> Dussuet, « Genre, frontières du travail domestique et marges du salariat. Le cas des aides à domicile », *Revue Française de Socio-Economie* 17, no 2 (28 novembre 2016): 123-41.

<sup>178</sup> Demazière, D., & Marchal, E. (2018). La fabrication du travail non qualifié. Analyser les obstacles à la valorisation. *Travail et emploi*, (155-156), 5-30.

<sup>179</sup> Hieming, B., Jaehrling, K., Kalina, T., Weinkopf, C., Grimshaw, D., Rubery, J., Schimron, N., & Stupnytsky, O. (2007). *Women in low-skill work*. European Parliament

nature of care work is perceived as making these roles more fulfilling. This higher satisfaction may be exploited by employers, who can utilise the increased satisfaction as a substitute for pay.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Grimshaw, D. (2011). *What do we know about low-wage work and low-wage workers? Analysing the definitions, patterns, causes and consequences in international perspective*. International Labour Office

## 4. Interventions

Having provided barriers and enablers in the previous section, we now turn to possible interventions to achieve higher quality work for low-paid and low-skill women. We prioritise interventions with a behaviour change element and only those that are effective or promising according to the current evidence. We consider feasibility of adoption and draw out any specific country considerations where appropriate.

While we identified barriers at the individual level, the interventions identified in the literature are all implemented at the employer and policy levels. We also consider this to be the appropriate locus of responsibility, since interventions focused on women's behaviour may wrongly "reinforce masculine discourses which position women as deficient".<sup>181</sup>

### 4.1 Employer level

#### 4.1.1 Increase workplace flexibility

Flexible working was identified as one of the key barriers to progression for low-paid and low-skill women. Thus, interventions at the employer level should focus on facilitating access to flexible working and ensuring flexible workers can progress.

##### *Enable shift swapping & scheduling*

Shift swapping and fair scheduling may be promising interventions. Agreeing schedules well in advance provides employees with greater certainty over their working patterns, allowing them to plan more effectively.<sup>182</sup> This may provide greater security for low-paid and low-skill women and allow better management of domestic responsibilities, such as childcare.

Coupled with advance scheduling, shift swapping enables women to manage domestic responsibilities. However, while agreeing schedules in advance allows arrangements to be made for commitments, such as childcare, it does not allow for short-term, last-minute changes, such as illness of a child. Shift swapping technology has been offered in the literature to provide an effective response to this, through allowing quick changes to be made and removing some of the associated efforts needed to swap shifts such as gaining manager approval (known as friction costs).<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Dashper, K. (2019). Challenging the gendered rhetoric of success? The limitations of women-only mentoring for tackling gender inequality in the workplace. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(4), 541-557.

<sup>182</sup> Gerstel, N., & Clawson, D. (2018). Control over Time: Employers, Workers, and Families Shaping Work Schedules. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 44(1), 77-97.

<sup>183</sup> Watson, L., & Swanberg, J. E. (2013). Flexible workplace solutions for low-wage hourly workers: A framework for a national conversation. *Labor & Employment Law Forum*, 3(3), 408-438.

A US study specific to the retail industry implemented a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate increasing schedule stability and shift swapping.<sup>184</sup> There were 19 stores in the treatment group and 9 in the control group. The control group published schedules two weeks in advance and did not allow tentative shifts, which are sometimes used to allow employers to cancel shifts immediately prior to a shift starting where there is insufficient demand. In addition to these existing scheduling practices, the treatment group had the following interventions:

1. Tech-enabled shift swapping: a mobile application that allowed employees to swap shifts between them without manager consent. This was designed to provide employees with more control over their schedules, thereby allowing them to work around domestic responsibilities. It also allowed managers to post additional shifts to the app that could be taken up by employees at short notice and eliminated the need for phone calls to be made to employees.
2. Stable shift structure: increased consistency of weekly start and end times for shifts, where previously shift start and end times varied between days of the week.
3. Core scheduling: greater consistency of shifts for an individual employee between weeks. This aimed to afford employees greater certainty, enabling them to better balance work and domestic commitments.
4. Core staff: a core team of employees were offered a soft guarantee of 20 hours or more per week (hours are not strictly guaranteed, however, managers would aim to adhere to this as far as possible). These employees were often more senior. The rationale behind this intervention was to provide the managers with a core staff they could rely on throughout a week.

The study found that the interventions increased the consistency of shifts, both in terms of start and end times and in terms of the time of day, with 71% of respondents stating they could easily anticipate their working hours compared to 63% in the control group. Most employees (62%) used the shift-swapping technology to change shifts during the intervention. However, shift swapping was less likely to occur where the request was made through the app closer to the shift start and for overnight shifts. Notably, regarding feasibility, the study found that worker input increased, store sales rose and labour productivity increased by 5%.

Caution should be taken when interpreting the results as the size of the sample was small (28 stores) and specific to US retail workers, therefore, it is not clear whether this approach would work in the countries of interest or in wider industries. Additionally, the research was not limited to women, however three-quarters of the employees in the study were women.

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<sup>184</sup> Williams, J et al. (n.d.). [Stable Scheduling Increases Productivity and Sales: The Stable Scheduling Study](#). *WorkLife Law*.

A similar study found that an intervention to increase schedule predictability led to employees with children working less days per week but more hours per day.<sup>185</sup> This may be beneficial to women who may find childcare arrangements easier and cheaper if they are required for fewer days. Additionally, the study found that the parents had less difficulty sleeping.

The effects of stable scheduling appear positive for the employer. One review finds that "when blue-collar employees describe their schedules as predictable, they are less likely to quit. Having a predictable schedule is six times more powerful in predicting front-line employee retention than having a flexible schedule."<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the potential for improved retention may serve as an inducement to implement stable scheduling.

Yet, scheduling and shift swapping appear promising low-cost interventions with minimal impact to the employer, thus they should be explored further. It is worth considering the circumstances in which shift swapping can occur, as there is anecdotal evidence that it relies upon trust and reciprocity between employees.<sup>187</sup> Promisingly, much of the evidence comes from healthcare and retail, where shift work is dominated by women.

#### *Default job advertisements to include flexible working statements*

Advertising that flexible working arrangements are available reduces the risk faced by many low-paid and low-skill women that they will not be able to work flexibly in a new role. The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) previously trialled an intervention with Zurich Insurance UK where a default was introduced that hiring managers advertise new positions as open to job-share and part-time work options.<sup>188</sup> Hiring managers had the option to make the case to HR not to include these options if they felt it would be operationally difficult. In practice, 78% of the vacancies applied the default. The intervention led to a 16.4% increase in the proportion of female applicants, and 19% when just considering senior roles. BIT replicated the flexible default with the retail group John Lewis Partnership, using a Randomised Controlled Trial design and just focused on supporting part-time staff to progress from entry-level roles to managerial roles. The proportion of women applying to store management positions increased by 35%.<sup>189</sup>

Timewise, a UK flexible working consultancy, suggests that employers should go beyond generic statements on flexible working and instead provide specific requirements for the flexibility the employer offers, as candidates are already familiar with the type of flexible

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<sup>185</sup> Ananat, E., Gassman-Pines, A., & Fitz-Henley, J. (2022). The Effects of the Emeryville Fair Workweek Ordinance on the Daily Lives of Low-Wage Workers and their Families (Working Paper No. 29792; Working Paper Series). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>186</sup> Sull, D., Sull, C., & Zweig, B. (2022). [Toxic Culture Is Driving the Great Resignation](#). *MIT Sloan Management Review*.

<sup>187</sup> Backett-Milburn, K., Airey, L., McKie, L., & Hogg, G. (2008). Family Comes First or Open All Hours?: How Low Paid Women Working in Food Retailing Manage Webs of Obligation at Home and Work. *The Sociological Review*, 56(3), 474–496.

<sup>188</sup> Government Equalities Office. 2020. [Changing the default: a field trial with Zurich Insurance to advertise all jobs as part time](#).

<sup>189</sup> Government Equalities Office. 2021. [Flexibility by default: Increasing the advertisement of part-time or job-share options](#).

working they need.<sup>190</sup> An online experiment by BIT found that both men and women prefer specific statements on flexibility rather than generic statements.<sup>191</sup> The study also found that specific statements on flexibility plus a statement on the ability to work part-time was preferred the most by women. Thus, further research could test the impact of specific flexible working arrangements in job adverts on real-world application behaviour.

#### 4.1.2 Reduce bias in organisational processes

##### *Increase organisational transparency*

Increasing organisational transparency by making the requirements for promotion clearer may help provide greater insight to low-paid and low-skill women about how to progress. Research suggests that increasing transparency can expand and diversify the talent pool and encourage accountability for hiring managers.<sup>192</sup> In one US-based study, the authors use quantitative methods to evaluate the effects of job ladder (employers must stipulate pathways for progression) and job-posting (hiring managers must post all promotion and transfer opportunities to all employees) reforms on management diversity. They find that job ladders increase the number of Asian women in managerial positions and that job postings increase the number of white and Latina women. While this study was US-based and not limited to low-paid and low-skill roles, these results show promise.

Another US study evaluated the effects of accountability and transparency initiatives in a large company of 9,000 employees.<sup>193</sup> The following interventions were implemented following a review of the company's pay and reward practices:

1. A performance-reward committee was appointed to review reward decisions
2. Senior managers were educated on the merit-based performance review process

The research methodology adopted was a before-and-after design, comparing the effect of the intervention following implementation in 2004 to the pre-intervention period. The results show that after the intervention there was no longer a difference between men and women on performance-based reward for equally performing employees. This study also did not target low-paid and low-skill women, but the principles of accountability and transparency are likely to have a positive effect on low-paid and low-skill women and have been suggested as a key organisational intervention in the literature.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Timewise. 2021. [The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2021](#).

<sup>191</sup> Behavioural Insights Team. [Who is more likely to apply for flexible jobs – men or women?](#) (2021).

<sup>192</sup> Dobbin, F., Schrage, D., & Kalev, A. (2015). Rage against the Iron Cage: The Varied Effects of Bureaucratic Personnel Reforms on Diversity. *American Sociological Review*, 80(5), 1014–1044.

<sup>193</sup> Castilla, E. J. (2015). Accounting for the gap: A firm study manipulating organizational accountability and transparency in pay decisions. *Organization Science*, 26(2), 311–334.

<sup>194</sup> Jones, L. (2019). [Women's Progression in the Workplace](#). King's College London.

### *Reduce bias in recruitment*

The following interventions have been identified as promising in the literature to reduce bias in recruitment:

- Target underrepresented groups to apply for jobs
- Provide reference letters to employees
- Anonymise applications
- Make it possible to list experience in terms of years, not dates in CVs
- Use structured interviews for recruitment and promotions

Evidence from a RCT found that challenging hiring managers and employees to specifically target women when sending referrals for new vacancies increased the gender balance of referrals by 13%.<sup>195</sup> Managers in the intervention group were sent an email inviting them to ask their employees to share a new job advert with five women. These targeted referrals improved the quality of applications made, making them an attractive intervention for employers to adopt.

A South African study evaluated the effects of encouraging employees to obtain reference letters when leaving a job.<sup>196</sup> The study found that those women encouraged to obtain reference letters were 13% more likely to have a job interview and 6% more likely to be employed than women in the control group. Therefore, an intervention designed to encourage employers to provide references as a default when an employee leaves may improve progression outcomes for women.

There are some large-scale studies of the effects of anonymisation for women, both in academia and in the workplace, which show that women are more likely to progress when their gender is obscured in the application process.<sup>197</sup>

Evidence suggests that listing experience in terms of years rather than dates can reduce bias against women returning to work. For example, one RCT found that positioning experience in terms of years rather than dates on a CV increased callback rates from employers by 15% for women returning to work after a break to care for children.<sup>198</sup> In addition, for low skill roles, CVs that explained that the gap was due to childcare performed worse than leaving it unexplained - the opposite was true for high skill roles. This is important as women who

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<sup>195</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team (2021). [Targeted referrals can improve gender equality in recruitment.](#)

<sup>196</sup> Martin, A, Burger, R & Piraino, P. (2020). The value of reference letters: Experimental Evidence from South Africa. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 12(3): 40-71

<sup>197</sup> Johnson, S. K., & Kirk, J. F. (2020). [To Reduce Gender Bias, Anonymize Job Applications](#); Åslund, O., & Skans, O. N. (2012). Do anonymous job application procedures level the playing field?. *ILR Review*, 65(1), 82-107 ;

Goldin, C., & Rouse, C. (2000). Orchestrating impartiality: The impact of "blind" auditions on female musicians. *American economic review*, 90(4), 715-741.

<sup>198</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team (2021). [Facilitating return to the labour market with a novel CV format intervention.](#)



leave the workforce for caring responsibilities are more likely to have lower levels of qualifications.<sup>199</sup>

Using structured interviews is an effective way to minimise bias. There is high quality evidence that there are no differences in interview scores for candidates based on gender or ethnicity when structured interviews are used.<sup>200</sup> Structured interviews may be more effective where they involve more than one interviewer<sup>201</sup> and where all candidates are asked the same questions and scored using the same criteria.<sup>202</sup>

### 4.1.3 Improve workplace training

Despite the common recommendation for training to solve progression challenges, there is very little evidence on its effectiveness or how to implement it effectively. The ONS in the UK found that those in mid-skill professions saw the largest wage increases from training and those with lower education saw the least.<sup>203</sup> They also found that women receive more training than men, but the duration of the training is shorter.

Counteracting the downward trend in workplace training and encouraging greater participation in training programs may be promising solutions.<sup>204</sup> A previous BIT report on workplace training for the UK Department for Education made the following recommendations:<sup>205</sup>

- Identify training as a need: employers should focus on making skill gaps visible to managers and provide benchmarks so employers can compare training levels between themselves. This could be achieved through the performance evaluation process, aided by clear job descriptions and consultations on job changes.<sup>206</sup>
- Motivate employers to provide training: giving employers information on the return from investment from providing training
- Make it easy to source training: reduce choice overload and make it easier for employers to find the right training through providing a training comparison platform

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<sup>199</sup> Paull, G. (2018). Analysis of those returning to the labour market following a break to care for others. Government Equalities Office

<sup>200</sup> Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature. *Personnel Psychology*, 67(1), 241-293;

McCarthy, J. M., Van Iddekinge, C. H., & Campion, M. A. (2010). Are highly structured job interviews resistant to demographic similarity effects?. *Personnel Psychology*, 63(2), 325-359.

<sup>201</sup> Huffcutt, A. I., Culbertson, S. S., & Weyhrauch, W. S. (2013). Employment interview reliability: New meta-analytic estimates by structure and format. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 21(3), 264-276.

<sup>202</sup> Neogov (2021). [Diversity in public sector hiring report](#).

<sup>203</sup> Office for National Statistics. 2019. [Characteristics and benefits of training at work, UK: 2017](#).

<sup>204</sup> Green, F., & Henseke, G. (2019). [Training trends in Britain](#). LLAKES.

<sup>205</sup> Booth, S. (2017). [Annex B: Basic skills in workplaces – a behavioural insights perspective](#). Department for Education.

<sup>206</sup> McGuinness, S., & Ortiz, L. (2016). Skill gaps in the workplace: measurement, determinants and impacts. *Industrial relations journal*, 47(3), 253-278.

- Encourage employees to take part: reduce difficulties for employees accessing training

Regarding employees, one way in which to encourage greater participation from low-paid and low-skill women may be to encourage employers to cater for those not working within 'core hours'. Using online methods of delivery may overcome the barriers women face with transport and childcare constraints.

These suggestions have not been evaluated and do not specifically consider women. However, we believe these to be promising avenues for further exploration as they are light-touch interventions and may be less costly than structural reforms to training. Further research is needed to determine whether they can be effective to low-paid and low-skill women in the UK, South Africa, Spain and France.

#### 4.1.4 Increase pay frequency

By splitting pay into smaller and more frequent payments, individuals may have greater financial security, thereby reducing the cognitive load and financial stress associated with infrequent pay, one of the barriers previously identified. There may also be increased retention for employees as they value the frequency of payments. Increased retention may improve progression for low-paid and low-skill women as longer tenure is associated with greater career prospects.<sup>207</sup>

Evidence of increasing pay frequency is promising. Research into tax credits found that spreading them into four smaller payments during a year, rather than as a lump sum, increased economic security, reduced reliance on credit, increased ability to pay for childcare and education and reduced stress about finances.<sup>208</sup> Most of the participants (97%) were women and the median income was USD \$17,089, thus, the findings have good applicability to the population of interest. Most participants (90%) expressed that the periodic payment was preferable to the lump sum payment. One participant stated that it was "nice to have extra money to attend to and balance out monthly expenses". However, the study had a relatively small sample size (n=343) and the outcome measures were self-reported, so while still useful for understanding financial stress, it does not provide an objective evaluation of the impact on disposable income.

Evidence from retired couples suggests that more frequent payments help individuals to spread their expenditure. Spreading expenditure over a greater period is desirable as having a spike in expenditure initially after payment often leads to too little income prior to the next payment. The US study found that retired couples were better at spreading their expenditure

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<sup>207</sup> Zin, M., Mohd, L., & Ibrahim, H. (2021). The Moderating Effect of Organization Tenure on Job Rotation and Career Development. *Annals of Contemporary Developments in Management & HR (ACDMHR)*, 3(3), 1-9.

<sup>208</sup> Bellisle, D., & Marzahl, D. (2015). Restructuring the EITC: A Credit for the Modern Worker. *Center for Economic Progress Report*.

when pension payments were made on two days a month rather than one.<sup>209</sup> Evidently, however, this study was not related to employment pay, nor did the study focus solely on women. However, academics suggest that increased pay frequency could be particularly beneficial to low-paid workers, as they are less likely to have a savings buffer to allow them to sufficiently manage and reduce spikes in expenditure between pay periods.<sup>210</sup> Thus, the increased pay frequency may reduce financial stress prior to the next pay period.

Offering advanced pay (providing wages to employees prior to payday) has been associated with a reduction in turnover of 19%.<sup>211</sup> The study estimated that for each employee paid \$10 per hour, the cost of turnover was \$3,328, thereby representing a large potential saving for businesses. This may assuage concerns for employers and provide a strong rationale for implementation, albeit further research is needed on whether these results are traversable to the context of increased pay periods.

When considering increasing pay frequency, it is worth identifying the possible limitations. Firstly, there may be an effect on the ability for individuals to pay larger expenses.<sup>212</sup> In the event of emergency situations, this may result in additional stress. Thus, any trial of this intervention should ensure that it is run for long enough to understand the impact in the event of emergency expenses to capture this possible backfire effect. Secondly, there may be additional administrative costs associated with increasing pay frequency for employers. However, it is likely that the potential administrative costs would be outweighed by the potential savings from increased retention. Lastly, the available studies are all US-based and the primary focus of these studies has not been the progression of low-paid and low-skill women. Further evaluation of this potential intervention should adopt measures of financial stress as a primary outcome and should be trialled within the target countries.

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<sup>209</sup> Berniell, I. (2018). Pay Cycles: Individual and Aggregate Effects of Paycheck Frequency. In *CEDLAS, Working Papers* (No. 0221; CEDLAS, Working Papers). CEDLAS, Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

<sup>210</sup> Parsons, C. A., & Van Wesep, E. D. (2013). The timing of pay. *Journal of Financial Economics*, 109(2), 373–397.

<sup>211</sup> Baker, T. H., & Kumar, S. (2018). *The Power of the Salary Link: Assessing the Benefits of Employer-Sponsored FinTech Liquidity and Credit Solutions for Low-Wage Working Americans and their Employers*. SSRN Electronic Journal.

<sup>212</sup> Vellekoop, N. (2018). *Explaining intra-monthly consumption patterns: The timing of income or the timing of consumption commitments?* (Working Paper No. 237). SAFE Working Paper.

## 4.2 Policy level

### 4.2.1 Reduce women's domestic responsibilities burden

#### *Improve access to child-related support*

Government child support can reduce poverty, increase incomes and afford mothers with support to pay for expenses.<sup>213</sup> However, accessing this support can be difficult.

In a survey of 2000 parents in the UK, 82% reported being unable to access an early years service (such as child education and development programmes) for a child aged between 0-5.<sup>214</sup> The most commonly reported barriers to access were that either the services were not available, it was not clear how to access them, or that they were only available online.

The Child Support Grant (CSG) is a payment made to low-income families in South Africa for each child. "Among informal working women, the CSG is an important source of income after childbirth when informal workers are unable to work".<sup>215</sup> However, a mixed-methods study of 24 women working in the informal economy found that accessing the CSG is difficult due to the complex application process, requiring various documents and travel to different government departments. This meant delays in accessing the grant and, in some instances, women returning to work earlier than expected after childbirth.

By returning to work early, women were unable to complete the CSG application as they could not then take the time off from work to complete it. This meant some women were not able to access good quality childcare as they lacked the resources. Plausibly, this may result in additional issues as a lack of good quality childcare may mean that women face interruptions from work.

Thus, making it easier to access child-related support services appears to be a promising intervention, allowing women to access services and funding immediately after birth.

MDRC, a US-based social policy consultancy, suggests the following possible behavioural interventions to address access to childcare:<sup>216</sup>

- Automate or remove steps where possible to access support.
- Limit options to those most relevant to the decision-maker. For example, in a US state, parents were sent a list of the three highest quality childcare providers in their area alongside their childcare voucher, rather than a long list of providers.

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<sup>213</sup> Baker, M., Messacar, D., & Stabile, M. (2021). *The Effects of Child Tax Benefits on Poverty and Labor Supply: Evidence from the Canada Child Benefit and Universal Child Care Benefit* (Working Paper No. 28556; Working Paper Series). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>214</sup> Action for Children. (2021). *Beyond reach: barriers to accessing early years services for children*.

<sup>215</sup> Luthuli, S., Haskins, L., Mapumulo, S., & Horwood, C. (2022). Does the unconditional cash transfer program in South Africa provide support for women after child birth? Barriers to accessing the child support grant among women in informal work in Durban, South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 112.

<sup>216</sup> Kruglaya, I. (2020). [Behavioral Science Strategies to Increase Access to Child Care](#). MDRC.

- Amend messages to parents to make clearer what they need to do to access support, why they need to do it, and when they need to do it by.
- Break down actions for parents into smaller steps by using checklists.
- Send actionable reminders, emphasising what needs to be done before the deadline.

While these possible interventions require further evaluation and tailoring to the childcare support systems in the target countries, they appear promising.

#### *Increase men's uptake of parental leave*

Men taking longer parental leave could disrupt traditional gender norms.<sup>217</sup> While financial subsidy makes a difference, even in the presence of financial subsidy men may still not take longer leave if they perceive other social or professional penalties.

A key barrier to men taking longer parental leave is the perception that other male colleagues would not approve of them doing so. Men are privately more supportive of men taking longer parental leave than they believe other men are. Across two RCTs, BIT showed that providing men with the information that their male colleagues strongly support men taking longer parental leave increased intentions to take longer parental leave compared with men who did not see this information.<sup>218</sup> Importantly, this was in a context where longer parental leave was financially supported by the organisation.

Another key barrier - or rather enabler of lower uptake - is the lack of advanced planning among parents about how they will divide household responsibilities after having a child and underestimation of work required to look after a new baby. Parents often do not discuss in advance how they will share parental leave, childcare and housework before they have their first child.<sup>219</sup> Couples that have these conversations are less likely to fall into a more traditional division of labour.<sup>220</sup> In an RCT, BIT targeted first-time mothers reading a parental newsletter and aimed to influence their male partner's (if they had one) uptake of parental leave. The intervention primarily reframed decision-making around domestic care as a shared responsibility and was supported with worksheets that outlined key domestic tasks for couples to assign between themselves. For mothers receiving the intervention, their male partner's intended days of parental leave increased by 10%.<sup>221</sup>

Parental leave policy can also be designed in a way that is more likely to change men's behaviour. The UK's shared parental leave policy (SPL) is unnecessarily complicated, which puts eligible couples off from using it. In an online experiment, BIT showed that simplifying information about SPL increased comprehension and highlighting that SPL is a legal

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<sup>217</sup> Arolas et al. (2021) The effect of childbirth on job separations. *CRES-UPF working paper*.

<sup>218</sup> Davidson et al. (2021) [Supporting men to take longer parental leave and work flexibly](#)

<sup>219</sup> Hacoen, R., Likki, T., Londakova, K., & Rossiter, J. (2018). [Return to work: parental decision making](#)

<sup>220</sup> Knudson-Martin, C., & Mahoney, A. R. (2005). Moving beyond gender: Processes that create relationship equality. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31(2), 235-258.

<sup>221</sup> Nicks et al. (2021) [Increasing men's involvement in parental care](#)

entitlement reduced the perceived effort of using it.<sup>222</sup> Knowing that SPL is a legal entitlement may have reduced the perceived effort of negotiating it with employers. In addition, while 'sharing' parental leave may seem egalitarian, in practice, it is perceived as taking time away from mothers. Protecting time for fathers may be more effective. For example, Swedish shared parental leave policy did not really increase men's uptake until a period of non-transferable leave was introduced, and even then it needed to be relatively highly paid (80% previous pay).<sup>223</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Encourage gender-balanced procurement practices

Procurement practices can be used to signal to employers that they should adopt social value requirements in their HR processes. The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) legislative framework was introduced in 2003 with the aim of empowering black people in South Africa.<sup>224</sup> Under BBBEE, a company is scored a level of compliance out of 100 points based on their activities in the following fields: ownership; management; employment equity; skills development; preferential procurement; enterprise development; socio-economic development. Preferential procurement points account for 20% of the total score and are awarded where a company procured from suppliers which themselves have high BBBEE scores. The rationale behind this is that through BBBEE the government can exert influence on the private sector as a cascading effect as those contracting with the government will need to have high BBBEE scores, which in-turn will encourage their suppliers to have high BBBEE scores.

Evaluating the average scores of a sample of 100 companies, one study finds that there has been an increase in average scores between 2003 and 2015.<sup>225</sup> Within this, they show that mean preferential procurement scores increased the most between 2003 and 2015, suggesting companies focussed on this area most to improve their overall score.

Some evidence suggests these increasing scores for BBBEE compliance have translated into greater equity for black employees in the workplace.<sup>226</sup> Having said this, the authors conclude that BBBEE has led to incremental change rather than being transformative. Another study into the effectiveness of BBBEE contends that its effectiveness has been hindered by a plethora of issues such as corruption, lack of enforcement and limited

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<sup>222</sup> Hacothen, R., Likki, T., Londakova, K., & Rossiter, J. (2018). [Return to work: parental decision making](#)

<sup>223</sup> Castro-García, C., & Pazos-Moran, M. (2016). Parental leave policy and gender equality in Europe. *Feminist Economics*, 22(3), 51-73.

<sup>224</sup> Dreyer, J. A., Viviers, S., & Mans-Kemp, N. (2021). Reflecting on compliance with Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment codes of good practice: Trends and suggestions. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 52(1), 11.

<sup>225</sup> Dreyer, J. A., Viviers, S., & Mans-Kemp, N. (2021). Reflecting on compliance with Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment codes of good practice: Trends and suggestions. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 52(1), 11.

<sup>226</sup> Horwitz, F. M., & Jain, H. (2011). An assessment of employment equity and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment developments in South Africa. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 30(4), 297–317.

engagement by the private sector.<sup>227</sup> Nonetheless, the study concludes with recommendations on how BBEE can be improved, suggesting there is scope for public procurement policies to have effect.

Thus, there appears to be some promising evidence that including preferential procurement practices can lead to more equitable outcomes. Applying this to a gender context, in the UK construction industry procurement practices have been used to increase female representation in the industry. The Women into Construction (WiC) project was introduced in 2008 in the run-up to the London Olympic games. One study finds that the WiC initiative was able to exert some influence on private sector employers, but did not quantify this.<sup>228</sup>

Gender-based public procurement has also been used to attempt to increase equality for self-employed women. In the UK, on average, self-employed women are more likely to be low-paid than employed women and have lower earnings than self-employed men.<sup>229</sup> In the US, 5% of annual public sector procurement spend is earmarked for women-owned small businesses.<sup>230</sup> Since its introduction, the gender gap in successful bids between men- and women-owned businesses has closed: the success rate for woman-owned businesses was 51.8% compared to 49.6% for men-owned businesses. Thus, it appears that parity can be achieved through the procurement process. The authors were, however, critical of the US system and suggested the percentage of contracts that should be awarded to women-owned businesses should be increased in line with the proportion of women-owned businesses in the US (30%). It is worth noting that the methodology applied means it is difficult to make causal claims about the effect of the procurement policy.

While gender-balanced procurement has not been introduced in the target countries to date, it appears feasible. South Africa has already demonstrated willingness to use procurement for social purposes as discussed above. In the UK, measures were introduced to ensure that government bodies engaging with private companies considered the social value those companies would provide.<sup>231</sup> This suggests the UK government may consider other social purpose procurement initiatives such as gender-based procurement.

In France, where public spending represents more than 55% of GDP,<sup>232</sup> the *Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* (HCE) - an independent advisory body - asked the

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<sup>227</sup> Shai, L., Molefinyana, C., & Quinot, G. (2019). Public Procurement in the Context of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBEE) in South Africa—Lessons Learned for Sustainable Public Procurement. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 7164.

<sup>228</sup> Wright, T., & Conley, H. (2020). Advancing gender equality in the construction sector through public procurement: Making effective use of responsive regulation. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 41(4), 975–996.

<sup>229</sup> Department for Business Innovation & Skills. (2016). [The income of the self-employed](#).

<sup>230</sup> Orser, B., Riding, A., & Weeks, J. (2019). The efficacy of gender-based federal procurement policies in the United States. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 11(1), 6–37.

<sup>231</sup> UK Government. (2021). [Social Value Act: information and resources](#)

<sup>232</sup> Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (15 septembre 2016). Activer l'éga-conditionnalité ou le conditionnement des financements publics à l'égalité femmes-hommes. <https://haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/stereotypes-et-roles-sociaux/travaux-du-hce/article/activer-l-ega-conditionnalite-ou#top#1>

government to make the allocation of funds conditional on certain requirements. For instance, they argue that public funds should only be given to start-ups that have parity in corporate governance, management and ownership, or to banks that give women more loans.<sup>233</sup> Currently female entrepreneurs are twice as likely to see their loan application rejected.<sup>234</sup>

The Spanish government has made gender equality a key part of its strategy in the recovery from the COVID pandemic. Measures are focused mainly on raising the female employment rate through new employment policies, and strengthening and reorganising the long-term care system.<sup>235</sup> Similarly, the City Council of Barcelona incorporated into its 2020-21 Sustainable Public Procurement Target Plan measures related to the promotion of female-led procurement, gender training, target-based remuneration of persons performing the contract, data collection by sex/gender, criminal compliance and obligations in terms of integrity and conflict of interest.<sup>236</sup> As a result, in 2021, 658 equality clauses were included in public procurement contracts, compared to 44 in 2017.<sup>237</sup>

### 4.2.3 Increase the value of low-paid and low-skill women's occupations

#### *Encourage men into female-dominated occupations*

Encouraging more men to work in female-dominated occupations could potentially counteract the devaluation of these fields, breaking down traditional gender norms and ultimately increasing pay and progression opportunities for women.<sup>238</sup> There is little evidence assessing both the impact of this and the best way to achieve this, but we think this is a promising avenue for further research.

Encouraging male participation in female-dominated occupations centres on addressing the barriers men face on entry, particularly regarding perceptions about violating masculine norms, reduced earning potential and status, stigma, not fitting in, but also lack of information and awareness of such sectors.

The nursing and social care fields offer possible solutions, focussed on changing participation in female-dominated courses at university. While research is still nascent, some possible interventions are:

- Change the language to appeal to men
- Highlight less well known responsibilities and benefits

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<sup>233</sup> Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (11 juin 2020). [L'éga-conditionnalité comme moteur de sortie de crise.](#)

<sup>234</sup> Axa (2017) Étude Opinionway pour la Fondation Entreprendre et Axa.

<sup>235</sup> Gobierno de España (2021). [Plan de recuperación, transformación y resiliencia.](#)

<sup>236</sup> Ajuntament Barcelona (2020). [Nuevo Plan de Objetivos de Contratación Pública Sostenible 2020-2021.](#)

<sup>237</sup> Ajuntament Barcelona (2021). [Las cláusulas de igualdad de género se multiplican por quince en los contratos públicos municipales.](#)

<sup>238</sup> Levanon, A., England, P., & Allison, P. (2009). Occupational feminization and pay: Assessing causal dynamics using 1950–2000 US census data. *Social forces*, 88(2), 865-891.



- Use role models and peer influence
- Broaden recruitment outreach

A report produced for NHS Scotland on the underrepresentation of men in nursing suggests that to redress this imbalance the perception of nursing as a female-dominated profession needs to be changed.<sup>239</sup> The report offers that a national rebranding of nursing is required, using gender-neutral language, emphasising the skills and qualities of a nurse and promoting the academic nature of nursing courses. Practically, they suggest social media posts of male nurses and the use of role models.

Many men may think care roles are limited to personal care, or may associate care roles with activities which are typically considered to be feminine (e.g. cooking, feeding and cleaning). Instead, recruitment materials could highlight aspects of nursing and care work that might appeal to men and relate to their motivations when choosing a career in caring.<sup>240</sup> For example, a study on pre-registration nursing recruitment in Scotland recommended focusing on ‘the academic nature of the programme, the transferability of skills, the financial stability of the profession, the range of career opportunities and the opportunities for career mobility’.<sup>241</sup> It is important that materials appeal to both genders and do not backfire by reducing the number of women candidates.

While using male role models to address the gendered stereotypes is commonly recommended, we have not identified any rigorous evaluations using role models in this particular context. However, there is experimental evidence from BIT’s trials that role models and peer influence can encourage young people from less advantaged backgrounds into prestigious universities.<sup>242</sup> The use of role models could be integrated with mentoring and informal peer networking programmes. For example, Sheffield Hallam University established a peer support group called Men in Nursing Together (MINT) to provide a space for men to share their experiences.<sup>243</sup> While the programme has not been rigorously evaluated, the authors speculate that it may act as an inducement for men into nursing programmes.<sup>244</sup>

Not all men enter female-dominated occupations through formal education routes: many switch from other professions. Therefore, information materials and recruitment initiatives

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<sup>239</sup> NHS Scotland. 2018. [Pre-registration nursing recruitment and retention – underrepresentation of men, influences and causes](#).

<sup>240</sup> Office for Students. (2020). Male participation in nursing and allied health higher education courses.

<sup>241</sup> Whitford, H., Bain, H., Carson, M., Gavine, A., Lee, J., Marland, G., & Taylor, J. (2018).

Pre-registration nursing recruitment and retention—underrepresentation of men, influences and causes.

<sup>242</sup> Sanders, M., Burgess, S., Chande, R., Dilnot, C., Kozman, E., & Macmillan, L. (2018). Role models, mentoring and university applications-evidence from a crossover randomised controlled trial in the United Kingdom. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 20(4), 57-80.

Sanders, M, Chande, R & Selley, E (2017), Encouraging People Into University. Department of Education, United Kingdom

<sup>243</sup> Wood, D and Souter, G. (2018). [What can be done about the lack of men in nursing?](#) *Nursing Times*.

<sup>244</sup> Sheffield Hallam University. (2019). [Project attracts more men into nursing](#).

should also target male-dominated environments, including army forces and fire brigades.<sup>245</sup> Furthermore, retraining opportunities could be offered to people who have lost their jobs or are working in industries where job opportunities are rapidly declining. Behavioural research indicates that people are more open to taking action and adopting new behaviours during ‘moments of change’ when their routines are already disrupted by external events.<sup>246</sup> It is important that these efforts are combined with other recommendations such as use of role models, peer networks, appealing information materials and others.

However, if recruiting through formal education routes, evidence from a qualitative study in New Zealand suggests that men are more likely to engage with graduate degrees in nursing than undergraduate degrees.<sup>247</sup> Responses from interviews suggested that this was because men are more likely to re-evaluate their career pathways at a later stage in life and search for more fulfilling roles and may prefer a shorter course. The authors of the study suggest that communications promoting graduate programs should focus on the short time frame of the course, reduced financial burden of career change and potential career advancement related to having a postgraduate qualification.

Caution should be taken when implementing interventions to ensure that parity in progression is maintained and men are not disproportionately offered progression routes if they enter female-dominated occupations. This is referred to as the ‘glass escalator’, which describes the phenomenon that when men enter female-dominated occupations, they are more likely to receive higher pay and progress into more senior roles.<sup>248</sup> It is plausible that a critical threshold of men entering a female-dominated occupation is required to avoid the glass escalator effect, increase average pay and challenge the gendered norms of the profession.

#### *Use signalling devices to promote professional qualifications*

Signalling devices may be used to improve the job opportunities available to low-paid and low-skill women. They work by acting as a signal to potential employers that they are a suitable candidate. For example, a tailored cover letter to an employer signals the individual’s interest, skills and qualifications.

The In-Work Progression Commission suggests that signalling devices can be used to reduce the stigma associated with some roles.<sup>249</sup> They suggest that creating a centralised registration for care workers will signal that “caring is a profession with associated standards and expectation”. An additional cross-national study on the UK, US and Australia, refers to

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<sup>245</sup> Office for Students. (2020). Male participation in nursing and allied health higher education courses.

<sup>246</sup> Thompson, S., Michaelson, J., Abdallah, S., Johnson, V., Morris, D., Riley, K., & Simms, A. (2011). ‘Moments of Change’ as opportunities for influencing behaviour.

<sup>247</sup> Harding, T., Jamieson, I., Withington, J., Hudson, D., & Dixon, A. (2018). Attracting men to nursing: Is graduate entry an answer? *Nurse Education in Practice*, 28, 257–263.

<sup>248</sup> Punshon, G., Maclaine, K., Trevatt, P., Radford, M., Shanley, O., & Leary, A. (2019). Nursing pay by gender distribution in the UK-does the Glass Escalator still exist?. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 93, 21-29.

<sup>249</sup> In-Work Progression Commission. (2021). [Supporting progression out of low pay: a call to action](#).

the “de-professionalisation” of social work and asserts that professional associations can help to “re-professionalise” these roles.<sup>250</sup> The authors argue that de-professionalisation (wherein occupations are perceived as not requiring professional skills) can limit the scope for independence in roles, limiting their ability to exercise discretion and creativity. They also suggest that social workers may end up in roles that do not fully utilise their skills as individuals may seek other roles that are perceived to be more professional.

In South Africa, one paper examines the effect of signalling devices regarding employee skills.<sup>251</sup> Individuals with limited work experience completed standardised skills assessments and were subsequently provided with certificates that showed their results and were branded by well-known agencies to lend legitimacy. Six assessments were conducted on communication, concept formation, focus, grit, numeracy and planning. The study found that those individuals who were provided with their results and certification were more likely to target jobs that they felt would value their skills. There was also a behavioural shift as individuals’ beliefs about their own skills more closely aligned with their assessment results following the intervention, allowing them to target jobs that were better aligned to their skills. Compared to a control group, the treatment group were more likely to have found employment and increased their earnings. Most (62%) of the study participants were female and 99% were black African, meaning there is good applicability to the target population of low-skill and low-paid women in South Africa who are predominantly black.

Evidently, however, the intervention was focussed on entry into the labour market rather than progression within the labour market. We consider two counterarguments to this: firstly, by allowing closer alignment between skills and the roles individuals enter into, it is likely that they are in better positions than if imperfect information existed. Secondly, the results show that signalling can have positive outcomes, which may be traversable to attaining a new role or for progression within work.

While there is a scarcity of evaluation on the effects of professional association, perception of roles and associated impact on wages, this may be a promising avenue for future research.

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<sup>250</sup> Healy, K., & Meagher, G. (2004). The Reprofessionalization of Social Work: Collaborative Approaches for Achieving Professional Recognition. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 34(2), 243–260.

<sup>251</sup> Orkin, K., Carranza, E., Garlick, R., & Rankin, N. (2020). *Job search and hiring with two-sided limited information about workseekers’ skills*. CSAE Working Paper

## 5. Conclusion

Reviewing the literature, we find strong evidence that the barriers faced by low-paid and low-skill women in the UK, Spain, France and South Africa are diverse, ranging from the individual level to the employer level and finally to the policy and society level.

A key finding from this review is that reviewing barriers as distinct, isolated topics is short-sighted. Each of the barriers identified are interconnected with the other barriers, across all levels. Domestic responsibilities affect where women choose to work, their shift patterns and their requirement for flexible working arrangements. Each of these elements face their own barriers, such as the cost of transport, employer views on flexible working and the effects of working multiple jobs.

Organisational culture is influenced by broader gender norms and stereotyping working together to act as barriers for progression. Women may be perceived to be worse leaders than men and are therefore not promoted, while also perceived as better suited to less well paid feminised occupations. Meanwhile, women working in better paid male-dominated environments may also be subject to harassment at work.

While a commonly cited enabler is training and skills development, we note that generally women have higher levels of education than men and overqualification may be a greater barrier for low-paid women in low-skill jobs than workplace training.

The most promising interventions identified for changing employer behaviour were i) **increase workplace flexibility**, by which we mean genuine flexibility in terms of increasing employee control over their schedule, ii) **reduce bias in organisational processes** and iii) **increase pay frequency**. While training is commonly recommended, further research is required to understand its role. Since women are typically over-qualified, standard training is unlikely to make a difference. However, targeted training that women would find beneficial, such as providing information on how the company works, may be helpful.

From a policy perspective, finding ways to **reduce women's domestic responsibilities burden** is critical as these are at the route of so many barriers for low-paid low-skill women's access to and progression within the labour market. **Encouraging gender-balanced procurement practices** appears a particularly fruitful avenue for further research, affording greater opportunities to self-employed women who are more likely to be low-paid, particularly if some of the identified criticisms can be addressed. Finally, **increasing the value of low-paid low-skill women's occupations** may be a longer term, but hugely impactful avenue for policy intervention to tackle broader harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

Across all of these different intervention areas, there are usually a number of smaller steps involved in achieving the outcome. For example, shift scheduling involves coordinating the behaviour of a number of different members of staff and there might be a wide range of solutions for reducing the effort involved to make it work smoothly. There is typically no evidence testing the impact of changing behaviour in these "smaller" steps, and so these

potential smaller interventions have not been discussed. However, the success of many of these interventions often hinges on changing the behaviour involved in these smaller steps. These will be explored in the next phases of the programme.