

# *Unemployment, Effects of Government Measures and Employment Effects During the Corona Crisis in Germany*

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## **Abstract**

During the corona pandemic, policymakers in Germany had to act swiftly. There were targeted corona aid and programmes. The impact of the programmes on the development of unemployment is the subject of research, especially in German-speaking countries. There are gaps in knowledge regarding the impact of the pandemic on gender unemployment. By analysing the research in a structured way and combining it with the analysis of unemployment data, it is shown that the Corona measures helped prevent unemployment. It also shows that women were more affected by unemployment. The increased risk of becoming unemployed is followed by a higher risk of remaining unemployed for longer. Studies show that women are significantly more affected by this risk than in previous recessions. The results indicate that women are more likely to be unemployed for longer due to their desire to work in sectors that are typical for women. Considering the shortage of skilled labour is a prevalent issue, the author proposes targeted policy advice to bring women out of unemployment without stereotypes.

## **Keywords**

unemployment, short-time work, women's unemployment, corona crisis in Germany

## **JEL Codes**

J64, H12, E63, G28, J21, J28, J68

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## **1 Introduction**

The corona pandemic has brought far-reaching changes for many people. In addition to their private lives, the daily work of employees in Germany has also changed massively. Many people are affected by short-time work, which on the one hand gives confidence in the preservation of jobs, but on the other hand, brings about considerable changes in everyday working life due to the change in the type and situation of working hours. The daily balancing act between family and work also changes employees' everyday life with family responsibilities. The pandemic has made it more difficult for workers with caring responsibilities to pursue regular employment (Bünning et al., 2020).

Companies' communication and working atmosphere have also changed due to strict hygiene and distance regulations (Frodermann et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic and containment strategies profoundly impact global economies and labour markets (Michelsen et al., 2020). The impact on the labour market is not yet entirely foreseeable and appears to be different from previous recessions, partly because the service sector, especially areas with increased female employment, is severely affected (Alon et al., 2020a; Collins et al., 2020). There is a controversial debate in science as to whether the crisis will bring about an approximation of the equal distribution of labour force participation between men and women with family responsibilities. The IAB notes that weekly working hours have decreased. Reducing weekly work is mainly due to the massive short-time work. Even though men have reduced their working hours slightly more than women, a clear gap between the sexes remains (Globisch et al., 2020). The report notes that mothers have taken on a larger share of childcare before and during the pandemic. According to the survey results, this is also the view of men. However, men are becoming more involved in this task during the pandemic than before. This fact speaks against the thesis that the Covid-19 pandemic is leading to a re-traditionalization of gender relations in this area (Krehenfeld, 2020). In the companies, working hours have arisen for the family mentioned above (Wanger; Weber 2020). According to the IAB, the temporarily introduced right to continued payment of wages for childcare and various working time instruments help compensate for these losses, secure employment and cope with personal challenges (Globisch et al., 2020). During the demand-driven slumps in the financial crisis of 2009, measures such as the temporary reduction of weekly working hours, the insertion of vacation days and the reduction of overtime and credit balances on working time accounts had proven themselves in addition to short-time work (Walwei 2020).

Against this background, this article examines the question of what measures the state has taken on the highly regulated labour market and what effects on gender can be identified. To this end, the author interprets detailed longitudinal data from the study by Möhring et al. and statistical data from the Federal Employment Agency. Lockdown period, lockdown period light, Christmas lockdown period, transitional lockdown period change employment in Germany. In addition, government programs are changing throughout the pandemic. Therefore, further data interpretations from the data of the German Internet Panel (GIP), the longitudinal study of the German population (Blom, Gathmann & Krieger, 2015) and a particular Covid-19 study within the framework of the GIP (Blom et al., 2020) come into play. In the statistical data analysis, the author investigates the impact of gender-specific unemployment and its duration. For this purpose, a data request was made by the Statistical Service of the Federal Employment Agency.

The article aims to shed light on women's employment in the crisis period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The benefit lies in mapping and evaluating the measures taken because this situation can be repeated. It turns out that women and families were particularly affected during the crisis in terms of taking up and pursuing employment. Therefore, the author formulates new approaches, both on the part of employers, those affected and politics.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section, the author describes the material, methods, and research questions. After that, in the first paragraph, the definition section shows crisis-related abnormalities and state measures on the German labour market. In addition, the corona effect on the development of unemployment is discussed,

and the author describes who is mainly affected by unemployment during the pandemic. The following explains the state measure of „short-time work“ and its effect. The focus is on short-time work with special consideration of gender aspects. Based on these descriptions, an overview of the methods described by the cited authors in the literature is given. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and conclusions of the various investigations.

## 2 Data and methods

This article explores two research questions:

„What government measures have been taken to stabilise the labour market in the Covid19 pandemic?“ and „What are the gender impacts on the labour market?“

In order to answer the research questions, a literature search and qualitative literature analysis were first carried out. The method used is based on a conceptual model. The content analysis is carried out according to Mayring (Frenzl/ Mayring, 2009 and Mayring, 2010).

Several databases were used for the literature search, including:

Ideas, Scopus, Google Scholar and the research database of the Institute for Employment Research.

The keyword search shows 275 relevant data sources, and forty-five are used in this article.

**Table 1:** Code words and literature source overview

Keywords	Topic area	Sub-area	Sub-area 2
Labour market	Unemployment	Labour market restraint	Requirement level
Business cycle forecast	German Economy	sectors	Working time
Coronavirus inequality	Participation on work	Financial condition	Corona Measures
Coronavirus recessions	Women's unemployment	Capitalism	Women Labour force participation
Macroeconomics	Institution: Federal Employment Agency	Liberalism	Women Short-time work
Short time work	Short-time working	Recession	
Financial Policy			

This article uses analysis results from research reports, short reports and reports from the IAB Forum.

In addition, data was requested from the Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency. As part of secondary data analysis, literature analysis's aspects are strengthened.

The Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency (IAB) uses data from the Federal Employment Agency based on theoretical approaches to the development of unemployment.

The IAB currently takes unemployment registrations into account until 14. 4. 2020. Companies that want to use short-time work must first register with an employment agency. These reports are recorded in the statistics of the Federal Employment Agency as soon as they are available electronically. On the one hand, it can be assumed that the currently available data are still under-recorded due to the mass of notifications and a higher actual number of notifications. On the other hand, it is unclear when and if short-time work begins – and for how many people in the company. During the financial crisis, for example, only about one in three companies that registered this went into short-time work. Also, there is still an overlap in the data. Final data on short-time work will only be available with a delay of several months (statistics of the Federal Employment Agency, 2020). The data on short-time work and unemployment registrations in March, April 2020 and 2009 are compared by sector.

Another method is questioning those affected, both by the IAB and by the repeatedly cited study by Moehring et al. (2020). Currently, many surveys of employees are carried out on their current work situation. However, the survey method can lead to a selection of participants. It can be assumed that computer-savvy people who work a lot on the PC, for example, are more likely to participate in an online survey (Frodermann, 2020).

The IAB weights the results presented on those affected by short-time work. They can be transferred to the population of all employees subject to social security contributions which a) use digital information and communication technologies during their work and b) work in companies in the private sector with at least 50 employees subject to social security contributions. According to the IAB, this applies to around 40 % of employees subject to social security contributions in Germany.

Moehring et al. (2020) use GIP data based on a random probability sample of the German general population aged 16 to 75. The panellists were recruited offline according to strict statistical procedures (Blom et al., 2015). The GIP initiated a unique survey on March 2020 to collect data on Covid-19. In the descriptive analysis, Moehring et al. (2020) use weights to extrapolate the characteristics of the participants to the German general population (by age, gender, marital status, the highest level of education, household, height and state). In further research, Moehring et al. (2020) use logit growth curve models with random effects to estimate the average risks of entering short-time work or unemployment in each federal state between March 20 (week 1) and July 9 (week 16).

Unemployment by gender and duration is analysed using descriptive data analysis (Burkhardt/ Sedlmeier, 2015).

These results are the basis for conclusions and recommendations.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 The labour market in Germany in the crisis year 2020

In spring 2020, extensive containment measures were taken in Germany and worldwide. As a result, unemployment in Germany rose drastically. The IAB has therefore asked itself how much the containment measures have caused unemployment. The IAB concludes that 60 % of the significantly increased additions to unemployment in April 2020 are due to the decommissioning measures. In total, the decommissioning measures have increased unemployment by 117,000 in the short term (Bauer and Weber 2020). Promoting existing jobs, e.g. through short-time work, is insufficient to prevent a decline in the labour market (Merkl and Weber 2020).

Unemployment rose by 308,000 to 2,644,000 from March to April 2020, but as part of the spring recovery, it usually falls this month. In April of this year, for example, there was a decline of 72,000.

The extent to which unemployment in April could have been significantly lower than in the previous year due to the already emerging economic weakness cannot be quantified and is not taken into account here. People who have become unemployed due to the measures taken to contain the corona crisis account for only part of the crisis-related increase. Another factor is that in April 2020, fewer people ended their unemployment by taking up employment or starting their businesses. Together, these two causes account for about half of the overall effect of unemployment. In addition, an effect that has nothing to do with the employment system plays a role: many people who are normally looked after by an employment agency or a job centre but are not registered as unemployed because, for example, they do not participate in a labour market measure, are now counted as unemployed. The result accounts for 37% of the total effect. Due to the corona crisis, departures to the first labour market and self-employment are slightly lower than in the previous year. In April 2020, 137,000 people left unemployment by entering employment (130,000) or self-employment (7,000). In April 2019, these departures from unemployment amounted to 218,000. The decline of 82,000 people has just as much an increasing effect on unemployment as the increased number of people. The percentage decline in paid employment and self-employment was about the same. Participants in many labour market policy measures and persons who are temporarily unable to work are not counted among the registered unemployed, as they are not available for placement in the short term due to their participation in measures or their illness. However, they are shown in underemployment. Due to the contact bans during the corona crisis, significantly fewer new labour market policy measures are being started. In this context, the Federal Government launched the new Social Service Provider

Deployment Act (SodEG). The Social Service Provider Deployment Act regulates the conditions for granting grants to institutions and social services to combat the effects of the Corona crisis. The Social Service Provider Deployment Act regulates a special warranty mandate for social service providers who provide social services based on the Social Code and the Residence Act. Among other things, the discontinuation of measures in the field of labour market policy for training providers is refinanced by grants. The employment agencies and the joint institutions ensure the continued existence of the social service providers who have a legal relationship with them under social law from January 2021 until further notice.

In order to cushion social and economic hardship and to support economic reconstruction, the Federal Government has continued the measure „Extension of the duration of unemployment benefit I“ in the area of unemployment insurance. According to the regulation, the unemployment benefit duration was extended – by three months and for those whose entitlement ended between 1. 5. and 31. 12. 2020. This creates more leeway to compensate for corona-related difficulties in finding work.

Spending on unemployment benefits amounted to 20.6 billion euros, an increase of 15 billion euros in 2019, as more people are unemployed on average.

### **3.1.1 The sectors and groups affected by short-time working**

According to the research results of the IAB (Weber et al., 2020), there are very severely affected industries that could not be active or only to a minimal extent due to the closure and can hardly compensate for the loss of sales. These include aviation, accommodation and catering, travel services, cultural institutions and leisure, entertainment and sports facilities. According to survey results of the IAB Job Survey (Böhme et al., 2020), these are also predominantly the companies that had to make redundancies, although this also applies, for example, to parts of trade and logistics (Böhme et al., IAB 2020/09). The economic structure, particularly the proportion of persons employed in the hotel and catering industry, is of considerable importance for the regional variation of the crisis-related increase in unemployment. However, other regional characteristics also play a role. This is shown, among other things, by a published study (Martin et al., 2016) on the regional effects of major economic crises. Accordingly, „region-specific“ or „competitiveness“ effects generally seem to play an equally large, if not more significant, role in economic recessions.

A regression analysis carried out by the IAB (Böhme et al., 2020) shows that in addition to the economic structure, the company size structure within the very strongly affected economic sectors is also relevant for the different regional unemployment development (Böhme et al., 2020). A more substantial corona-related increase in unemployment accompanied a higher proportion of employees in micro-enterprises from these sectors. In addition, Böhme et al. (2020) note that a relatively high population density, typical for cities, is also associated with a comparatively high corona effect. Many cities have a comparatively high proportion of workers in hard-hit sectors but have not benefited

from lifting measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic to the same extent as, for example, the traditional coastal tourism regions.

### 3.1.2 Affect unemployment from women in comparison to men in the crisis

Germany is a conservative welfare state with a coordinated market economy and a corporatist structure (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001). The traditional division of paid work and unpaid care work between men and women has been supported by key elements of the social security system, taxes and wage structure (Schäfer & Gottschall, 2015; Trappe, Pollmann-Schult & Schmitt, 2015). This traditional arrangement has been undergoing change for about three decades. Family policy reforms since the mid-2000s, including the expansion of public childcare in West Germany, have led to a further increase in women's participation in the labour market (Möhring et al., 2020). Taking gender as a cluster feature on the German labour market, women predominate in the part-time and low-wage sectors (Hassel, 2014; Häusermann & Schwander, 2012). With regard to the economic structure, the employment model can be found in the sectors severely affected by the crisis. Möhring et al. (2020) therefore derive the hypothesis that the risk of women becoming unemployed is higher than that of men. This is justified by their higher share of low-wage employment.

The hypothesis is extended by the descriptive secondary data analysis of the statistical data of the Statistics Service of the Federal Agency. For women, there is also the risk of staying longer in unemployment. The proportion of unemployed women in the population decreases between the crisis years 2020 and 2021. Women's unemployment does not correspond to the same extent as that of men. This concludes that the proportion of women staying on unemployment is increasing.

**Table 2:** Proportions of unemployed men and women in the two crisis years

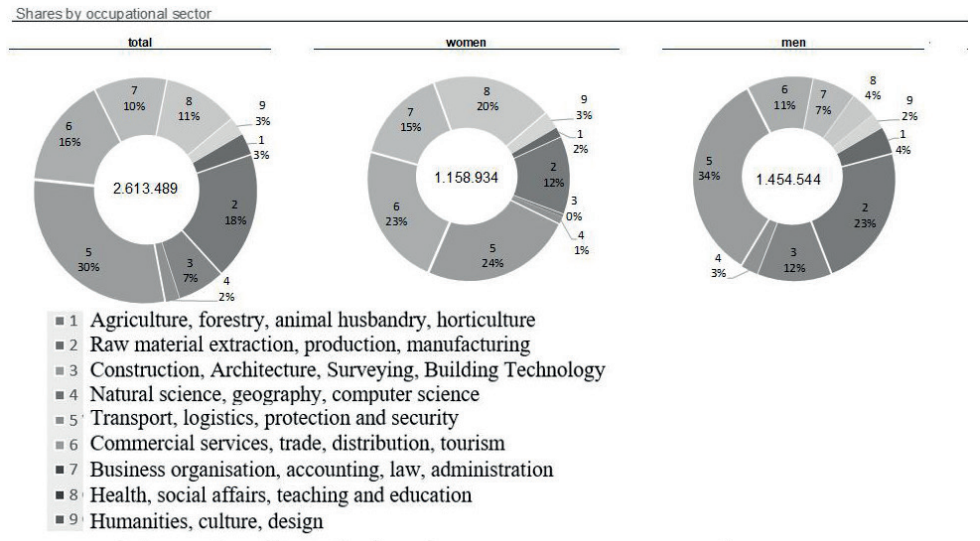
Year	Number of unemployed		Germany			
			therefrom			
	2020	2021	men	2021	women	2021
Total (absolute)	2695444	2.613.489	1.520.596	1.454.544	1.174.838	1.158.934
Share of total in %			56,3	55,7	43,6	44,3

Source: Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency, own presentation

Möhring et al. and the author's hypothesis on the extended stay are confirmed in the detailed analysis of occupational areas.

The result is that in the event of unemployment women are looking for new employment in the sectors „5 transport, logistics, protection and security“, „6 commercial services, trade, distribution, tourism“, „8 health, social affairs, teaching and education“ and „7 business organisation, accounting, law, the administration“. Except for the „5 Transport, Logistics, Protection and Safety“, these are not the heavyweight target occupations for men.

**Figure 1:** Number of unemployed in Germany in 2021 by gender and occupational sector



Source: Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency, own presentation

According to the methodological advice of the Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency, the previous duration (also the duration of existence) refers to the number of unemployed and reflects the period from the beginning of unemployment to a statistical counting day. Figure 2 below shows that the pandemic has significantly increased the duration of unemployment for men and women between 2020 (Figure 2.1) and 2021 (Figure 2.2). Without exception, all occupational areas are affected. In the preferred target occupational areas „5 Transport, Logistics, Protection and Security“ and „6 Commercial Services, Trade, Sales, Tourism“, 630 days on the cut-off date in December 2021 is recorded.



**Figure 2:** Previous average duration of unemployment by gender 2020 and 2021

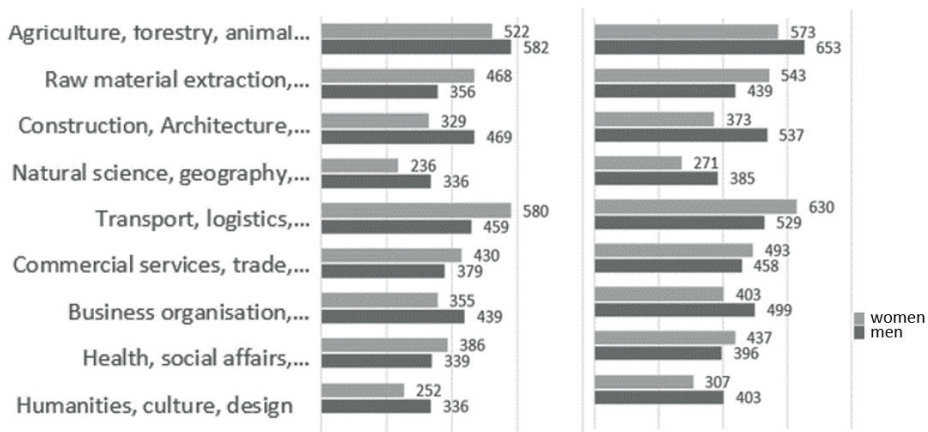


Figure 2.1: Dec 20

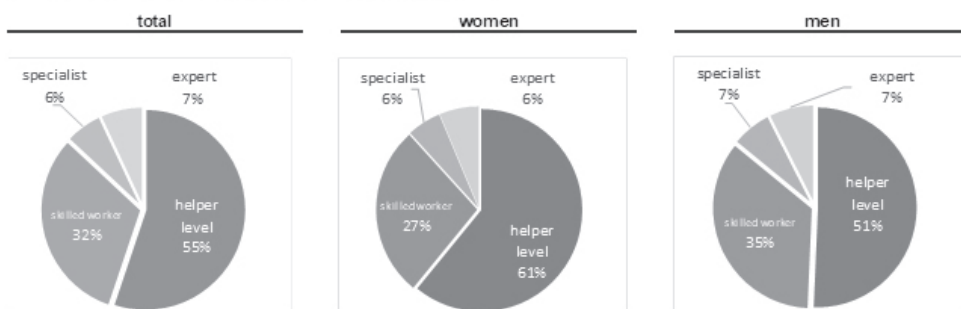
Figure 2.2: Dec 21

Source: Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency, own presentation

In addition to the analysis of occupational areas, solutions for overcoming unemployment must be found in terms of the level of requirements. The result is that more than one in two unemployed people has the helper level. This proportion of women is over 60%. The level of helpers often leads to a long period of permanent unemployment. Almost three out of four women with helper level are long-term unemployed, i.e. without a job for more than a year. This shows a fact that cannot be attributed to the pandemic skill levels determining the duration of unemployment. In women, this fact is even more pronounced than in men.

**Figure 3:** level of requirements of women and men

Figures 3.1: Shares according to requirement level (Germany, Dec 2021)



**Figures 3.2:** Shares of long-term unemployed according to requirement level (Germany, Dec. 2021)



Source: Statistics Service of the Federal Employment Agency, own presentation

Due to the pandemic, priorities have been set in the operational institutions, and the effects on women are not visible in the data. The data for these operational institutions concludes that women need a particular focus on integration work in the transition to mainstream business after the pandemic. Above all, qualifications to overcome the level of helpers and advice on transparency in the labour market must be provided.

### 3.1.3 Scope and impact of short-time working

The short-time working allowance is intended to help companies avoid redundancies in economically challenging times. The Federal Employment Agency pays wage compensation for lost working hours. According to initial projections by the Federal Employment Agency, around 2.85 million employees were on short-time work in January 2021. Thus, the increase observed since November 2020 continued in January. The number of short-time workers is very high in a long-term comparison but is well below the previous high of almost 6 million in April 2020 (Bellmann et al., 2021).

In contrast to the financial crisis in 2009, when short-time work was mainly used in the manufacturing sector, significantly more short-time work was registered in all sectors. The highest value is reached in the hotel and catering industry, where short-time work was registered for almost 93 % of all employees in May 2020 (Gehrke et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the manufacturing sector and other economic service providers are more indirectly affected by the corona containment measures. Here, supply difficulties and (global) demand shortfalls lead to the loss of work. The fact that women are more affected by short-time work due to the increased use in all sectors is discussed in research primarily from the point of view of a „re-traditionalization of the gender order“ (Allmendinger, 2021). According to Möhring (2020), however, the probability of short-time work occurring is no higher for women than for men. Bauer and Weber (2020) note that the increase in unemployment is due to the lockdown period. In addition, both note that the recruitment margin accounts for more than 80% of the unemployment effect.

Although the federal government provided massive financial support, this could not prevent the collapse of the labour market.

Möhring et al. (2020) show that in January 2020, 42.0 per cent of working women worked part-time, compared to 6.4 per cent and 1.9 per cent of men (excluding those in vocational training). They also found that 21.2 per cent of working women had a net income of less than \$1,000. Möhring et al. (2020) also found gender-specific differences in the field of work: 40.0 per cent of employees were employed in the manufacturing sector, only 15.4 per cent of women. They found the highest proportion of women in the private sector (84.5 per cent in „other services“, mainly household-related services such as cleaning). Möhring et al. (2020) found in the analysis of the survey results that between the end of March and the beginning of July 2020, 14.2 per cent of women and 24.1 per cent of men had short-time work for at least one week. Weber and Bauer (2020) analysed that an average of a good fifth reduced the contractual working hours of employees on short-time work. Möhring et al. (2020) note that 7.6 per cent of women and 8.7 per cent of men stayed at home unpaid for at least a week in connection with the reduction in working hours. In addition, the authors describe that the proportions of women on unemployment and unpaid leave are almost always slightly higher than those of men.

Möhring et al. (2020) note that workers in the service sector's low-wage segment were negatively affected by the work stoppage and job loss. However, they found that short-time work was more widely distributed, not only in the middle tttt of production, as they had initially assumed. In addition, the authors summarise that during the first closure, women were less likely to work short-time and more likely to be unemployed. Neither Möhring et al. (2020) nor Bauer and Weber (2020) see Allmendinger's thesis on retradition confirmed.

## 4 Conclusion and recommendations

This article looks at the evolution of unemployment during the corona pandemic. Until 2019, the German labour market absorbed workers in an ideal economic situation – so unemployment fell continuously. Especially among women, there was a higher labour force participation – and workers, especially women from the so-called hidden reserve, could be activated. The Corona 19 virus led Germany and the world into a crisis from which the labour market was not spared. o avoid mass unemployment and a total economic loss, the Federal Government financed numerous measures. This article shows that the short-time working scheme has retained many jobs.

Nevertheless, an increase in unemployment could not be prevented. The increased risk of becoming unemployed is followed by a higher risk of remaining unemployed for longer. Studies show that, unlike in previous recessions, women are significantly more affected by this risk. The corona crisis is a significant challenge for everyone. Especially families with small children and school-age children have to change their everyday lives completely. This is accompanied by significant changes in the world of work – short-time work changes working hours, and home-office changes in work content and forms of communication.

Overcoming female unemployment is a challenge. There are clear concerns in occupational areas that are more typical of women and in the level of requirements for a vocational qualification. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate whether these are old thought patterns in the job choice or the employers. In addition, a policy advice is needed on approaches and strategies to promote women's employment.

There are various approaches to this – on the one hand, to reduce female unemployment and, on the other hand, to increase women's participation in the labour market. Since the German Federal Gender Equality Act already provides the framework, the following recommendations deal with operational approaches for employers, politicians, networks and those affected.

Increasing women's participation in the labour market should be accelerated through re-entry programmes. Employers have a unique role to play here. When companies offer targeted measures for returnees, this promotes women's participation in the labour market and contributes to employer attractiveness.

The fundamental prerequisite for returning to working life after a family-related break is sufficient care facilities for children and people in need of care. In addition to a quantitatively sufficient supply, transparency is needed. Public administrations and network partners are called upon to do this.

Another starting point is to educate people about gender-related stereotypes of gender mail streaming. This also includes the cliché-free choice of profession, training and workplace. The Federal Employment Agency has a unique role in counselling work, as balancing the fundamental right of free choice of occupation and opportunity-oriented placement has to be performed here. The starting point, however, is the high level of expertise of career counsellors, who need to know such analyses to increase women's chances in the labour market.

A final starting point is the promotion of independent livelihood financing. The equalisation of wage differences and equal rights in career opportunities fall in particular to employers and politicians in operational implementation.

These concrete approaches are solutions related to the situation in the labour market, especially for women's employment.

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