

PANDEMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

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INTRODUCTION BY ALISTAIR COX, HAYS CEO PANDEMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

‘Only a crisis produces real change’ said Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman.

This can be applied to the aftermaths of numerous upheavals throughout history – the ‘Roaring Twenties following World War One and the 1918 Flu pandemic; the reshaping of Europe from the rubble of World War Two; and the economic and societal impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008.



**Collectivism
demonstrated thus far in
the recovery bodes well**

Alistair Cox



As we tentatively emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, many will be considering which of the countless changes to our everyday lives are here to stay and which will fall to the wayside. We have all witnessed and been affected by so many changes in such a short space of time, and arguably no area has been as dramatically altered by the pandemic as the world of work. At the beginning of 2020, we saw seismic shifts as labour markets around the world shifted to remote working almost overnight, global unemployment jumped despite significant support measures from governments, and several sectors were forced to shut down indefinitely. Almost every employer and their employees in every country of the world have been impacted by the pandemic, and those focused on the labour markets will be dissecting its direct effects, as well as the new opportunities and challenges arising, for years to come.

This report – Pandemic Implications for the World of Work – provides a view on such developments and looks at the changes that we believe are here to stay. It comprises research from across the globe, contextualising it using the extensive insight we have into professional employment across the 34 global markets in which we operate. Drawing on our own experience as one of the world’s leading recruitment experts, the report examines:

- The pandemic’s instant impact on employment, vacancies and working trends globally and across Hays’ markets.
- Its more significant impact on our youth and female demographics.
- Its potential longer-lasting influence on the future world of work, including the permanent adoption of hybrid working and the potential for borderless jobs.

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Immediate impacts

The world witnessed dramatic changes during the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred often with little notice and impacted so many different sectors and industries. While some businesses were forced to either close or operate at a reduced capacity, others needed to quickly implement at-home working measures to continue to operate. Even with extraordinary intervention from governments across the globe, we saw a significant downward shift in demand for labour in a number of sectors, which in turn impacted job vacancies, wages, and unemployment around the world.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, each country's rate of employment and average hours worked have been inversely correlated with both the speed and prevalence of coronavirus infections within their borders. It's also clear that this crisis has affected some sectors more severely than others, with employment in people-facing service industries such as retail and hospitality more adversely impacted, along with travel and leisure industries.

However, in the past six months we have started to see a recovery in some of the other industries most impacted, particularly in the construction sector, where job vacancies continue to grow. We are seeing rapid recoveries in other markets and industries – in some cases demand is above pre-pandemic levels. Since the pandemic began, people's reliance on technology has increased drastically, it has become more integral to everybody's day to day lives.



This has driven a sharp rise in demand for professionals with tech skills - nearly every company needs more technology experience across a wide range of skills and sub-sectors. The world will continue to become increasingly digitised as time marches on, and it will need a lot more technology talent post-COVID. But while global markets are rebounding, perhaps the more worrying trend is the pandemic's impact on the number of people active in the labour market. Participation has fallen across Hays' labour markets, and this can have longer term, scarring implications.

Effect on our youth and female workforce

Another concern is the pandemic's effect on our younger generations. At the start of the pandemic, youth unemployment rocketed well above national averages, which could lead to long-term implications similar to those we saw following the GFC. While it is true that young people disproportionately work in sectors more heavily impacted, it is also the case that future generations of talent have found it more difficult to move into careers that suit their skillset, potentially giving them less opportunity and lower wage growth in the future. In addition, this crisis is having a greater impact on more female-orientated sectors than male-oriented – resulting in female employment declining at a greater rate than national averages across Hays' markets.



Future implications

The pandemic and the subsequent policy responses of governments around the world will have long-term implications for the future world of work. It is said that it takes just 66 days to make a habit permanent, and lockdowns around the world are causing a shift in people's preferences towards wanting to work from home in some capacity in the future. Businesses around the world are currently in transition between home and office working, while there is limited evidence on whether employers will fully support this notion moving forward, each one will be challenged to strike the right balance between productivity and flexibility.

Our ability to work from home successfully has been supported by a worldwide adoption of technology and collaboration software, notably through Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which is now promoting the potential for employees to successfully work from anywhere in the world. This 'telemigration' of workers could not only have positive effects on their wellbeing but could also provide employers with much greater and diverse talent pools and have further implications for how we communicate and interact within the workplace in the long term. In addition, as we continue to adopt new technologies it is feasible that we could start to see significant variations in how organisations are structured, how outputs are delivered and how global value chains are created.

Real change is coming and in the case of the world of work, it can be for the better for employees around the world, as well as their employers. The pandemic has caused so much devastation and disruption for too many, but the collectivism demonstrated thus far in the recovery bodes well. Such an attitude can fundamentally reshape the world of work in the coming years.



AREAS OF FOCUS

Using the research laid out within this report, there are three key areas business leaders and policy makers need to focus their attention on as we emerge from the pandemic. Focusing on these three areas will help to ensure that the potentially damaging long-term implications of the pandemic are minimised, valuable lessons are captured and embedded and that the forced evolution of the world of work is seen as an opportunity for all.

Youth unemployment

Business leaders need to ensure that the young people who have been out of work are helped back into the workforce. This can be achieved by creating jobs for younger workers with built-in-training, as well as working with educational institutes to provide up-to-date careers guidance and advice on what skills are currently needed - helping young jobseekers to understand what opportunities are available to them. Alongside this, governments need to invest in building support networks for young people, and training programmes and partnerships with the business community - all with the aim of ensuring young people have the necessary information and resources to increase their employability and skills.

Make employment accessible to wider talent pools

Policy makers and organisations alike need to prioritise investments in education, life-long learning and reskilling programmes. This will go some way to developing the skillsets of workers and making sure their skills are relevant and up to date with evolving market demand. Organisations can also offer return to work schemes, to encourage those who have left the workforce on a temporary basis back into employment. These steps are designed to ensure the potential talent pool organisations are choosing from is increased, providing them with more options and a better chance of finding the key skills they need.

Embracing new ways of working

Hybrid working is here to stay, and it is up to business leaders to harness the many benefits it can bring. There is the potential for a happier and more productive workforce if implemented correctly. However it's important to understand that it doesn't appeal to everybody, some people do prefer working in an office full time while others never want to return. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to this. But by finding the right balance, businesses can use flexibility as an additional benefit to help attract and retain key talent and it can be used to plug skills gaps by employing talent from more distant locations when the necessary skills aren't available locally.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the way in which governments and people responded to it, heavily impacted the skilled labour market in 2020.

The number of people in employment fell sharply, leading to a rise in unemployment. There was a major shift, almost overnight in many cases, to people working from home. While some of the changes seen in 2020 and 2021 will be temporary, others may have changed the world of work for ever. This report looks at the impact of the pandemic on the 34 featured labour markets, as well as examining some of the potential longer-term implications.

The following report identifies and analyses the key themes.





Employment fell
3.8%
 between Q4 2019
 and Q4 2020.

Demand for labour was significantly impacted by a combination of government policies to contain the spread of COVID-19, and changing habits, as consumers avoided spending their money in person, in stores or other establishments, or were prevented from doing so by government restrictions.

Labour supply was also affected, as fears around catching and spreading the virus, the need to look after children or act as carers, and challenging conditions for jobseekers, led to some people exiting the labour market entirely, if only temporarily. Across the featured markets for which there are quarterly data, employment fell by 3.8% between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.¹

The unemployment rate rose across all of the featured regions in 2020.² Across all markets, it stood 1.1 percentage points higher in Q4 2020 than Q4 2019. The most significant losses of employment occurred in North America, and Latin America, where the unemployment rate increased by 3.2 and 1.6 percentage points respectively over the same period.

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¹ Figure includes all Hays markets except China, India, Mexico, UAE.

² The featured regions are as follows: ANZ (Australia and New Zealand), Asia, EMEA (Europe, the Middle East and Africa), GSCNR (German Speaking Countries and Nordics), UK&I (United Kingdom and Ireland), North America, and LatAm (Latin America).



Young people have been hit harder than older generations.

Younger members of the workforce were more likely to work in sectors which were harder hit by the pandemic, or be in temporary roles. As a result, the unemployment rate among young people aged between 16-24 rose by more than the rest of the labour force across all of the featured regions. Following the general theme, this trend was most pronounced in North America, where the youth unemployment rate peaked at 27.4% in April 2020, before declining back to 13.1% by December. These high unemployment levels could continue to impact the earnings and careers of young people for years to come through labour market scarring effects. Long periods spent out of work in youth are often associated with lower likelihoods of employment later in life and lower potential wages when in work.

North America
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in April 2020

Women were also more significantly affected by the crisis.

In most of the regions, female employment fell by a higher percentage than for males. This is likely due to a number of factors, including female employment being more concentrated in worse-hit sectors, and women being more likely to take a greater role in childcare and caring for family members, meaning they were more likely to exit the labour market during the crisis.



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Up to
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from home...

The pandemic caused a shift towards home or remote working.

Survey evidence has suggested that 42% of the labour force in the USA and up to 50% in Europe were working from home in the first wave of the crisis in Q2 2020. To put this into perspective, just 5.4% of people usually worked from home across the EU27 in 2019.³

Looking forward, working from home is expected to continue in some form.

Many workers have adapted to working from home and wish for it to continue in some capacity in the future; many organisations are also on board. For workers, it saves them commuting time and allows them to devote more time to family, exercise, or hobbies; businesses, meanwhile, may benefit from additional productivity. However, working from home is not without challenges. It makes it harder to onboard newer employees and effectively train them. Lack of monitoring may lead to a lack of, or unequal, promotions. Working from home also leaves some workers feeling isolated. There is a debate as to the optimal policy going forward. Some favour a hybrid working model in which work is divided between the office and home, but questions remains as to what is the best length of time of each. And should it be compulsory or a privilege?

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³ Eurostat, Employed persons working from home as a percentage of the total employment. Available [Here](#)



While COVID-19 has impacted the labour market in 2020 and 2021, it remains to be seen whether its long-term impacts are more significant.

Increased working from home, borderless jobs and possibly reshoring could be here to stay.

The pandemic may have also sped up the process of technological advancement, as organisations have been forced to improve their technological infrastructure, remote hiring, and training.

The shift to working from home may lead to a shift to working from anywhere.

Some companies have allowed their employees to work from any location. This may make workers happier, as well as lowering their living costs. Organisations also benefit from lower attrition rates and lower operating costs. However, for workers this may be a double-edged sword—as remote work increases, businesses will have more opportunity to hire from all over the world. Workers in developed nations may face increased competition from ‘telemigrants’ in developing countries who may be cheaper to hire. This trend will only accelerate as technology improves. The pandemic may have also sped up this technological advancement, as organisations have been forced to improve their technological infrastructure, remote hiring, and training.

The role of global supply chains may also be re-examined.

Global supply chains have played a vital role in fostering global economic growth over the past few decades. However, the pandemic has highlighted potential weaknesses, with supply chains amplifying the effect of the coronavirus shocks. Various potential future paths have been projected, including a rise in reshoring, increased diversification of suppliers, an increase in regional supply chains, and replication of production lines across countries. All have implications for the location and type of employment in the future.

LABOUR MARKET IMPACT IN 2020

It is no surprise that the coronavirus pandemic had a major impact on the labour market in 2020 and 2021.

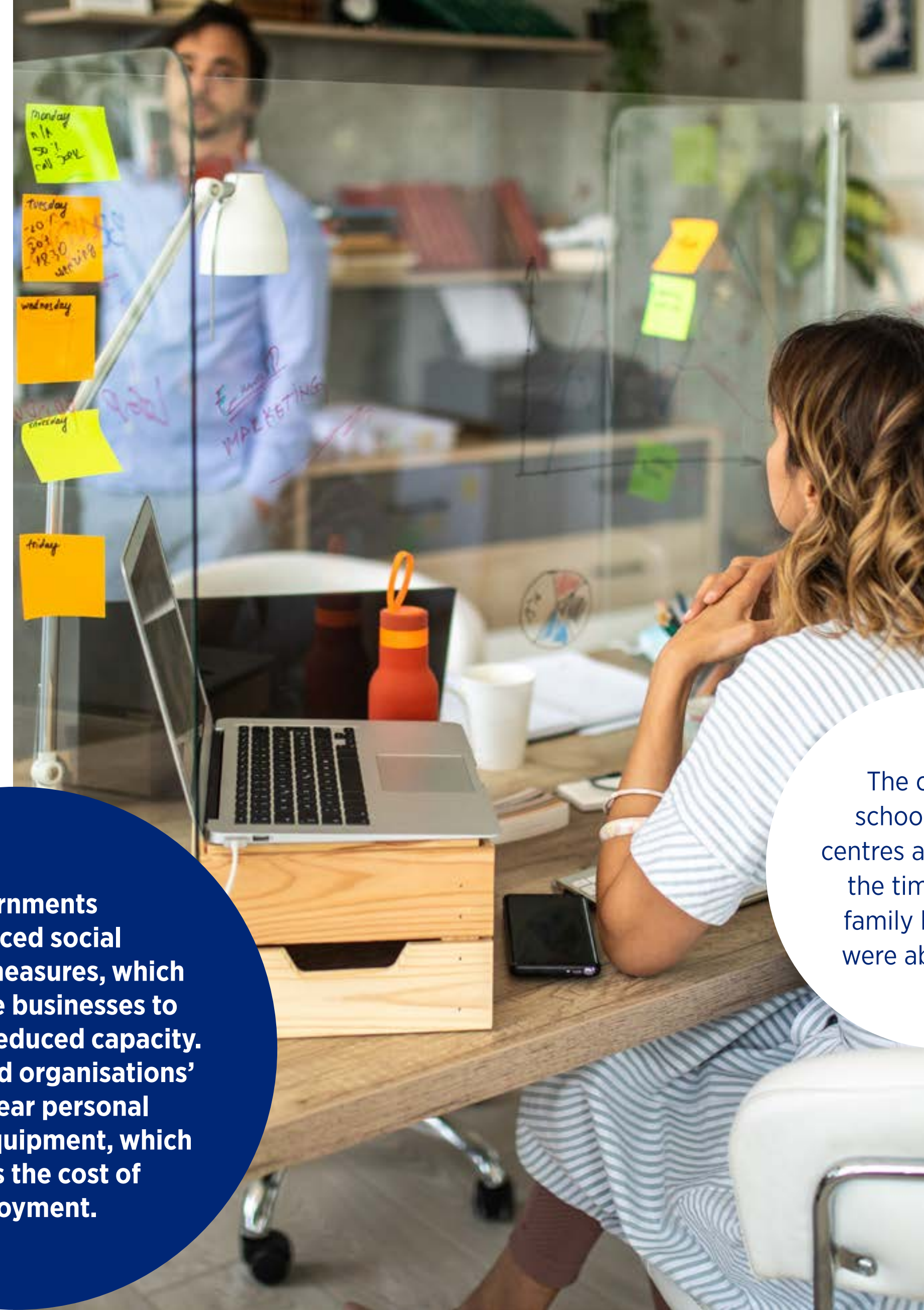
It saw unprecedented government intervention in many economies, with organisations in different industries forced to either close, operate at reduced capacity, implement costly social distancing practices, or adjust rapidly to their staff working from home for sometimes extended periods. There were also significant changes in the demand and supply of labour, as people's priorities and spending patterns changed. This chapter investigates the impact on employment, wages, vacancies, and unemployment across the 34 featured markets.



To help and try to reduce the spread of COVID-19, governments across the globe had to intervene in their labour markets. In September 2020, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) observed that “94% of the world’s workers currently live in countries with some sort of workplace closure measure in place.”⁴ Governments also introduced social distancing measures, which forced some businesses to operate at a reduced capacity. Many required organisations’ staff to wear personal protective equipment, which increases the cost of employment. To prevent the decline in the demand for labour which all these measures prompted, some governments introduced employment support schemes. There was also an increased need to work from home, rather than in the office or usual workplace.

The demand for labour was also impacted by the change in consumer behaviour during 2020. Spending on social consumption (hospitality), work-related spending (such as fuel and public transport), and durables (such as white goods) declined. The demand for recreational travel was impacted due to restrictions, as well as fears over catching the virus. Moreover, consumers’ expectations of a weakening economy and potential job losses due to the crisis also contributed to a fall in nonessential spending. All decreased the demand for labour.

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The closure of schools and day centres also restricted the time adults in family households were able to work.

COVID-19 and the personal impact it had on people also affected the supply of labour. Some chose to reduce the hours they worked or leave the labour market in order to lower their risk of catching the virus. This is likely to have been particularly the case for those with underlying health issues, or who act as informal carers for elderly or vulnerable people. This effect was not consistent across occupations: it partly reflected whether the job required working close to customers or colleagues or could be done from home. The closure of schools and day centres also restricted the time adults in family households were able to work.

The following chapter looks at the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on employment and average earnings in the 34 featured markets. It then looks at how vacancies have declined. Lastly, it looks at the growth in unemployment and the extent to which that may impact on the future career prospects of those made unemployed.



⁴ ILO, September 2020, COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition. Available [Here](#).



HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED THE GLOBAL LABOUR MARKET?

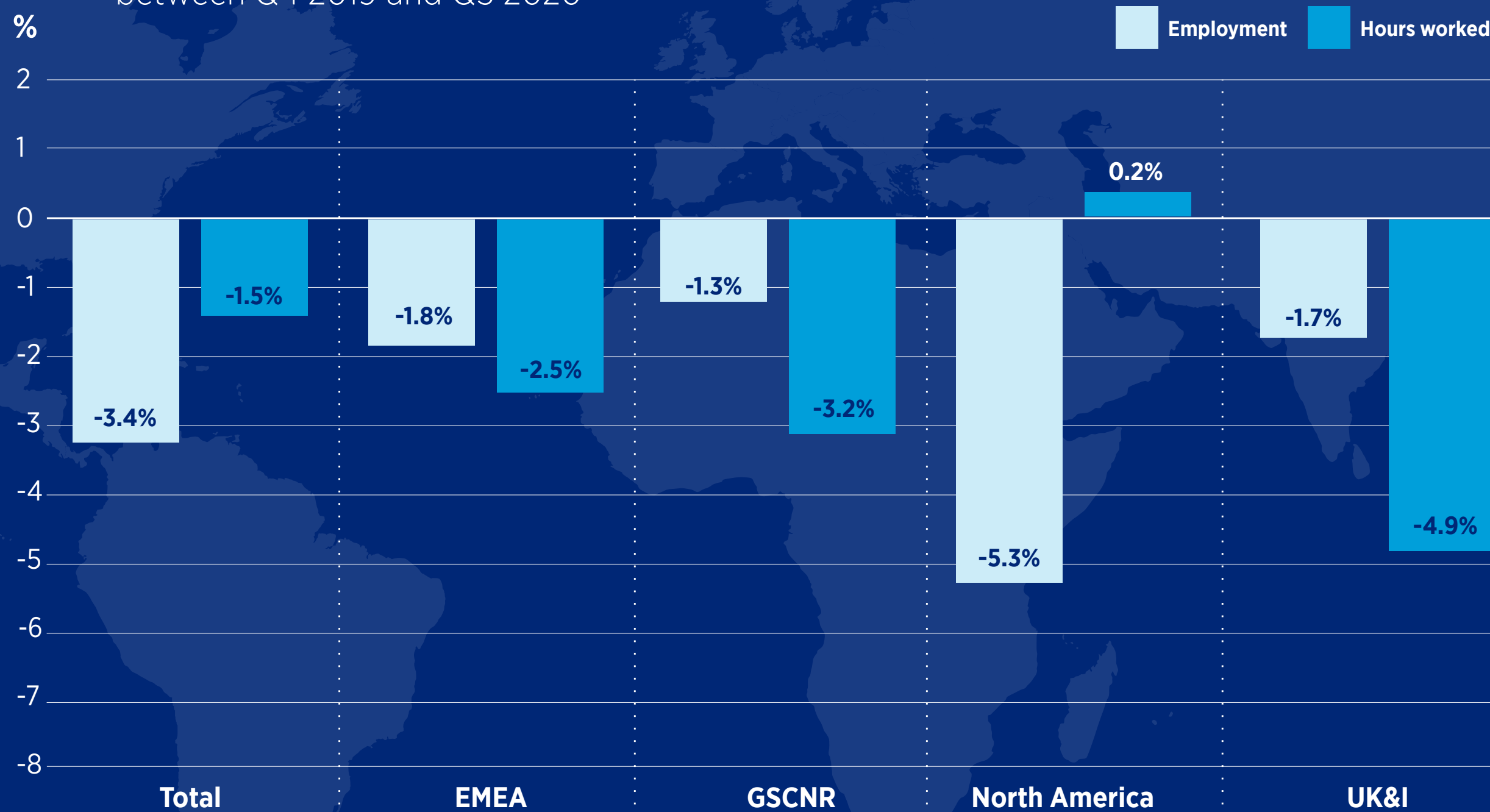
EMPLOYMENT AND WORK HOURS DURING THE CRISIS

Employment levels fell as governments implemented measures to limit the spread of coronavirus and people's spending habits and priorities shifted.

Across the featured markets for which there are quarterly data, employment fell by 3.8% between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.⁵ The decline was greatest in Q2 2020, falling by 7.4% compared with Q4 2019, with some recovery in the following quarters.

⁵All Hays markets (excluding China, India, Mexico, UAE)

Fig. 1. Percentage change in employment and average hours worked between Q4 2019 and Q3 2020⁷



Source: OECD, Oxford Economics

Workers in UK&I worked 4.9% fewer hours on average in Q4 2020 compared with the previous year.

Looking across the featured regions, the fall in employment was sharpest in the Americas. Employment fell by 8.7% in the Latin America (LatAm) region over the year, compared to 5.3% in North America. The Australia and New Zealand (ANZ) region showed the smallest impact on employment with a 0.6% fall across the same time period.

For a smaller set of countries, where quarterly data are available, average working hours for those in work fell by 1.5% between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 (Fig. 1).⁶ There was however, deep disparity between regions. Whilst workers in UK&I worked 4.9% fewer hours on average in Q4 2020 compared with the previous year, workers in North America and ANZ were the exception to the falling work hours trend, working 0.2% and 3.8% more hours in the same time period.

The speed of the fall in employment and average working hours across the different regions reflects not only the speed and prevalence of coronavirus infections, but also institutional and legal frameworks in different countries' labour markets and their government's policy response. In the USA for example, firms tended to lay staff off during the crisis, enabling them to claim social security benefit. In contrast, European labour market policy was far more focused on preserving employment relationships. So called "Kurzarbeit" programmes encouraged organisations to maintain

⁶Countries included: Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.
⁷Countries included in Fig. 1. Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

the employment of staff with fewer hours. Often, European governments provided compensation to employees to replace a percentage of their lost earnings due to reduced hours.⁸

As a result of coronavirus-related falls in economic activity, ILO research suggested that total working-hour losses in Q2 2020 were “17.3%, or 495 million full-time equivalent jobs relative to the fourth quarter of 2019.”⁹ This drop in labour hours led to a decline in workers’ total earnings of 10.7% over the same period.

Understandably, given the lower demand for labour, wage growth slowed, and there have even been wage cuts in some cases. The ILO’s 2020/21 Global Wage Report (GWR) found that “around two thirds of countries for which short-term statistics are available showed decreasing wages or slower average wage growth.”¹⁰ However, this was not the case everywhere. The GWR suggests that because a high degree of job losses occurred in low-income occupations, average wages actually rose despite increasing unemployment rates, which was the case in Brazil, France, and the USA for example.

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⁸ Article [here](#).

⁹ ILO, September 2020, COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition.

¹⁰ ILO Global Wage Report 2020/21, available [here](#)

THE CRISIS AFFECTED SOME SECTORS MORE SEVERELY

The coronavirus crisis hit employment in some industrial sectors more than others.

In broad terms, sectors which could both produce and deliver their output with less risk of coronavirus transmission between workers, customers, or both, tended to be less susceptible, regardless of whether this was caused by government policy or changes in consumer behaviour. On average, the service sector, which includes a significant component of in-person services, saw the greatest declines in employment during the crisis. Sectors such as accommodation and food service activities, the arts, entertainment and recreation, and personal services were particularly hard hit.

In the featured markets for which monthly data is available, employment fell by 10.6% in the service sector between February and April 2020 (Fig. 2).¹¹ The manufacturing and construction sectors also saw significant, but slightly less severe falls in employment over the same time period, at 6.7% and 8.4% respectively. There was some recovery of the lost employment between April and November 2020, particularly in the construction sector,

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where employment returned to 0.9% above March 2020 levels as policy changed and firms adjusted more to new ways of working, although the situation worsened towards the end of 2020 and in early 2021. There was also considerable disparity in how employment reacted. For example, in Japan, employment in the service sector only fell by 1.7% between February and April, compared to the 14.2% decline in the USA.



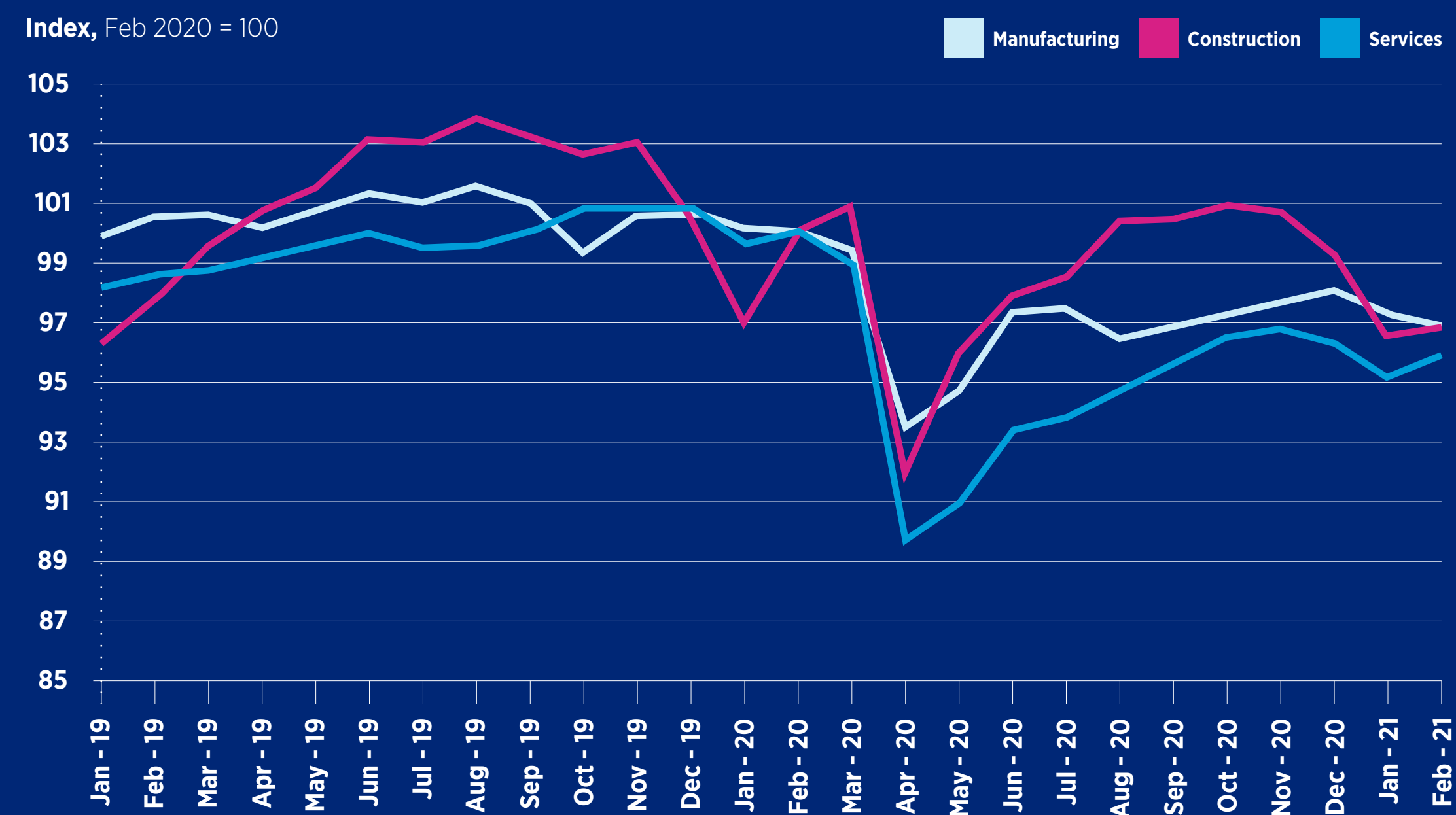
Analysis conducted by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) scored job roles according to the worker's average proximity to others, and potential level of exposure to diseases.¹³ Naturally, many healthcare roles including doctors and nurses scored the most highly in both these measures. Outside the healthcare sector, in-person service roles - generally less skilled - most commonly appear near the top of the list - those such as beauticians, hairdressers or fitness instructors. Some more highly skilled occupations such as construction and building trades supervisors, conference and exhibition managers, and education professionals also score highly in this measure. This analysis illustrates clearly why these sectors were most likely to be hit by the pandemic and measures brought in to stop its spread.

Occupations that ranked lowest in terms of proximity to others and potential exposure to diseases were dominated by high-skilled, professional roles. These include legal professionals, marketing associate professionals, finance and investment analysts and advisers, financial accounts managers, IT business analysts, architects, and systems designers. These occupations lend themselves more easily to remote working which would suggest a greater level of adaptability to the coronavirus pandemic, and hence a lower fall in employment.

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Fig. 2. Employment in broad industry categories in five featured markets that have monthly employment data¹²



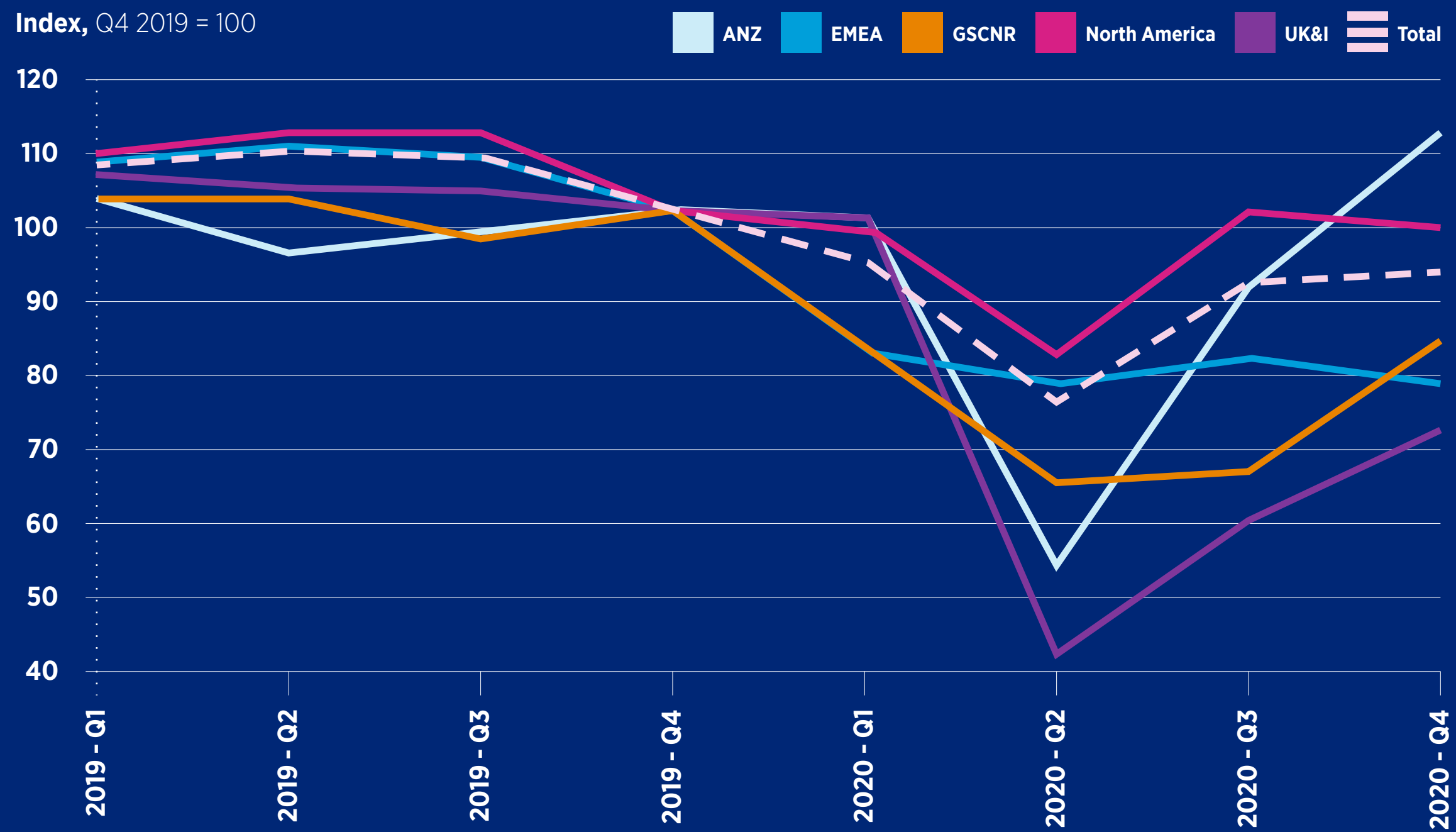
Source: ILO

¹¹ Markets included were Austria, Canada, Japan, Sweden, USA.

¹² Markets included in graph: Austria, Canada, Japan, Sweden, USA.

¹³ ONS Occupational exposure to the coronavirus (COVID-19) Available [here](#)

Fig. 3. Job vacancies in the featured markets¹⁶



Source: National statistics agencies, Eurostat

Vacancies fell by
25%
 across 34 featured markets.

IMPACT ON VACANCIES

The negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic - and policy response to it - on the demand for labour can also be seen in the vacancy statistics.

Across all 34 featured markets for which data are available, vacancies fell by 25% between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020.¹⁴ By Q2, vacancies in the UK&I region had declined by 58% when compared to Q4 2019 levels (Fig. 3), 46% in Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), 35% in the German Speaking Countries, Nordics and Russia (GSCNR), 23% in Europe and the Middle East (EMEA), with North America experiencing a much more limited drop, at just 19% over the same period.¹⁵

In all regions, vacancies rebounded in the second half of 2020 to differing extents, although North America and EMEA saw slight drops in the fourth quarter. In Q4 2020, they stood 8% below their level of Q4 2019 in all the featured markets. In North America, they had returned to their pre-coronavirus crisis level. In contrast, there was no recovery in the EMEA region, perhaps reflecting the greater adoption of policies to protect employment in the region.

¹⁴ Markets included: Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, USA, Canada, Australia, Singapore.

¹⁵ Hays EMEA region includes Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and UAE. The GSCNR region includes Austria, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

¹⁶ Countries included: Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Sweden, USA. Asia region was excluded from Fig. 3, as only Singapore data were available.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND INACTIVITY

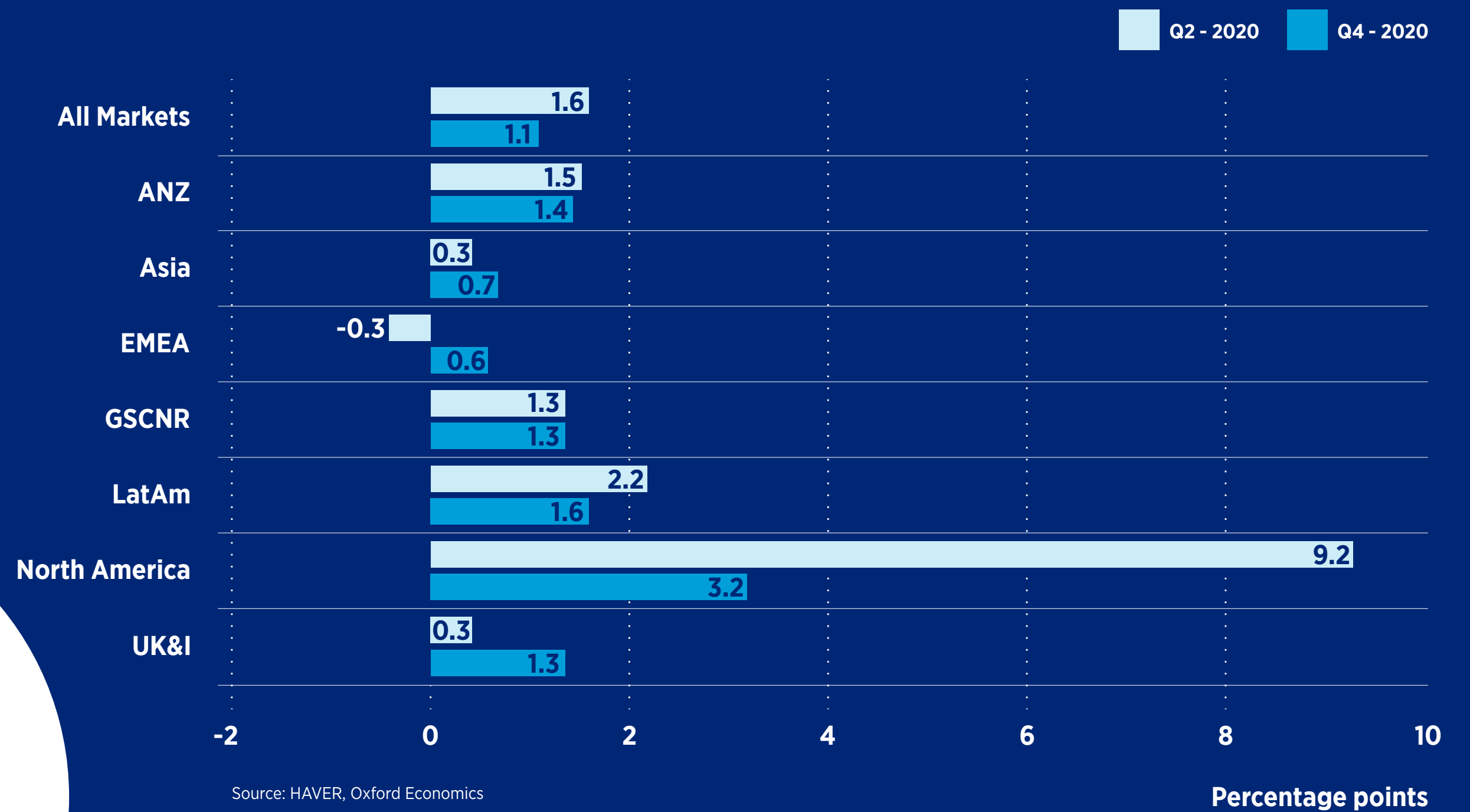
Across all 34 featured markets, unemployment rose from 4.3% in Q4 2019 to 5.5% in Q4 2020.¹⁷

The sharpest increase was in North America, where the unemployment rate rose by 3.2 percentage points, from 3.8% to 7.0% over the same period (Fig. 4). However, the rise in North America was much larger in the second quarter, which saw a 9.2 percentage point increase in unemployment from Q4 2019. In the Asia and EMEA regions, the scale of the increase over the year was much lower at 0.7 and 0.6 percentage points respectively, so the rate stood at 4.2% and 8.2% by Q4 2020.

The coronavirus crisis also had a negative impact on the proportion of people active in the labour market. Across all featured markets where quarterly data are available, participation rates (showing the percentage of working-age people active in the labour market) fell by 0.9 percentage points between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.¹⁸ In the same time period, all regions except ANZ saw people exiting the labour market.¹⁹ This was more pronounced in North America where the participation rates declined by 1.6 percentage points, compared to 0.4 and 0.1 percentage point falls in the EMEA and Asia regions respectively.

Participation rates in the labour market fell by **0.9** percentage points between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.

Fig. 4. Changes in unemployment rates by region compared to Q4 2019



¹⁷ All markets present (excluding India, UAE)

¹⁸ Markets included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Romania, Sweden, UK, USA.

¹⁹ Australia saw a 0.7% growth in the size of its labour force between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.

LONGER-TERM EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Whilst unemployment has immediate consequences for workers in terms of lost income, being out of work for any significant period of time “has negative long-term impacts on their labour market outcomes.”²⁰

Spells of unemployment lower the probability an individual will get a job in the future and the wage they are likely to earn if their application is successful. Economists refer to this as “unemployment scarring.” This can be due to the loss of firm-specific skills when people part from their employer (such as knowledge of internal processes and ways of working), or the erosion of skills which are not being used while a person is unemployed. It can also reflect the stigma surrounding unemployment, either in the confidence levels and behaviour of the individual, or perceptions of them.

The decreases in employment resulting from the coronavirus crisis will likely cause some unemployment scarring effects. The scale of these longer-term impacts are unknown. They are likely to reflect the length of time the pandemic and our response to it continues. But they may also reflect the extent the economy has been more structurally impacted during the pandemic.



Some commentators have argued the crisis may induce permanent or semi-permanent shifts in the composition of employment between different parts of the economy. For example, Barrero et al. (2020) suggests that in the USA, 42% of job losses due to the crisis may not return, due to shifts in demand caused by the coronavirus crisis and organisations being forced to close for good, such as in air transport or hospitality, where firms faced an extended period of significantly reduced revenue.

When workers who had lost their jobs search for new ones, many may need to switch industries or occupations, based on where the demand for labour exists, raising the prospect of skills mismatch, whereby jobseekers don't have the necessary skills for the available jobs. Whilst permanent job losses will come from the industries most hit by the virus, it remains to be seen which industries will see the most benefit from the reallocation of workers in the longer term.

²⁰ Borland, 2020. Scarring effects: A review of Australian and international literature. Australian Journal of Labour Economics, Volume 23, Number 2.

There are risks of adverse impacts from unemployment scarring and skills mismatch if the structure of the economy remains significantly changed as the world recovers from the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The coronavirus crisis has had wide-reaching effects on labour markets around the world.

It has reduced the demand for labour, particularly in the service sector, which led to an increase in unemployment and a decline in the number of people participating in the labour market in 2020. How long lasting the impacts will be is yet to be seen. There are risks of adverse impacts from unemployment scarring and skills mismatch if the structure of the economy remains significantly changed as the world recovers from the pandemic.



HAS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 BEEN WORSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LABOUR MARKET?

An area that will likely be of concern to policymakers is the disproportionately large impact the coronavirus crisis has had on the employment of young people.

An ILO report published in August 2020 suggested that worldwide, “one in six young people aged 18-29 (17.4%) had stopped working since the beginning of the crisis.”²¹ The figure is even more stark - 23.1% - when limited to the 18-24 age group. This chapter examines some of the characteristics of youth employment and the contracts they typically have, which have been put forward as explanations. Finally, it explores the long-term scars youth unemployment inflicts, in the form of more frequent unemployment spells and lower wages in later life.

²¹ ILO. 2020. Youth and COVID-19 impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being; Survey report page 13.



YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT DURING THE CRISIS

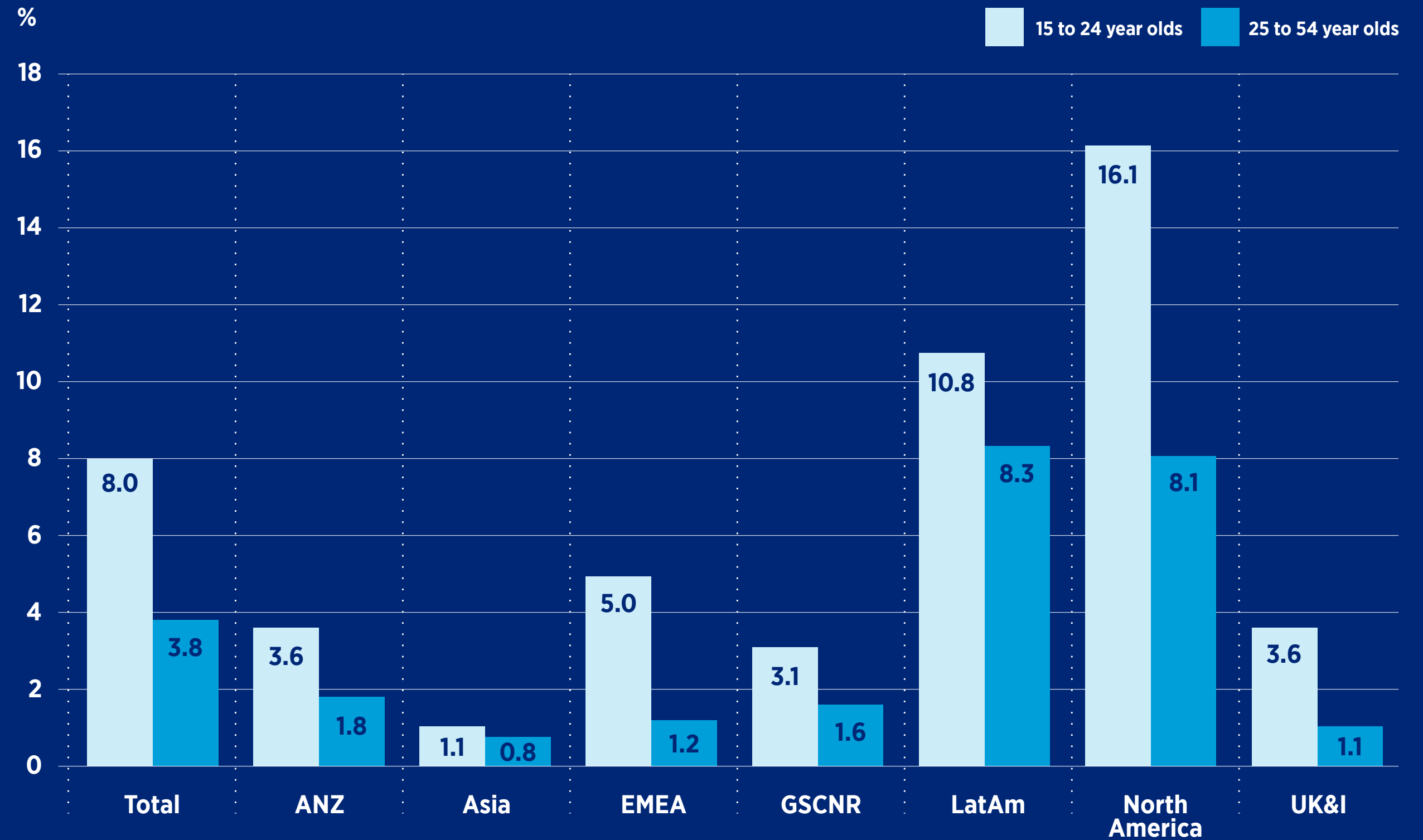
Younger workers have been harder hit by the impact of coronavirus on the labour market than their older counterparts.

For 25 of the featured markets where data are available, employment among those aged 15 to 24 years old fell by 17.4% between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020, although this had recovered by 5% by the end of 2020.²²

As a result, the youth unemployment rate across the featured markets was 3.3 percentage points higher in Q4 2020 than it was in Q4 2019. This growth is much larger than the 1.9 percentage point rise in the unemployment rate for 25 to 54 year olds. However, the peaks in unemployment came earlier in the year, at different points across regions, predominantly driven by the varying severity of the pandemic between countries (Fig. 5).

Employment among those aged 15 to 24 years old fell by **17.4%** between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020

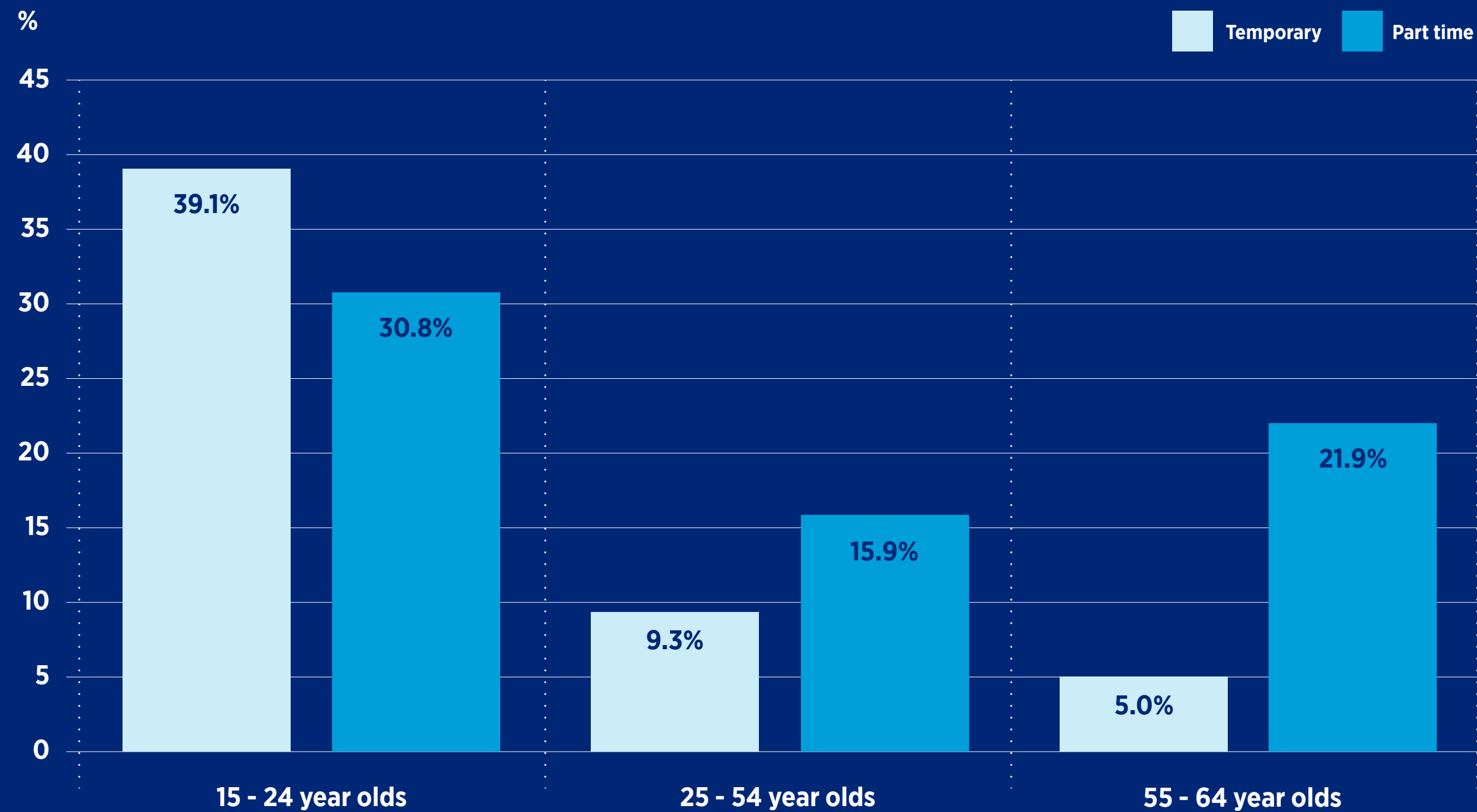
Fig. 5. Change in the unemployment rates of different age groups between Q4 2019 and peak in 2020, by region²³



Source: OECD

²² Markets included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

Fig. 6. Percentage of European workers in part time or temporary employment by age group, in 2019



Source: Eurostat, Oxford Economics

The factors associated with the specific occupations and types of employment contracts that are common among younger workers can be used to explain why they have fared worse during the crisis.

The relatively greater loss of younger workers' jobs compared to the average for workers of all ages, occurred across all featured regions. Although the scale of the increase in the youth unemployment rate was most pronounced in North America, the rise in the rate when compared to older workers is most extreme in EMEA. The rise in the youth unemployment rate between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 was over four times higher than that for older workers in EMEA.

The factors associated with the specific occupations and types of employment contracts that are common among younger workers can be used to explain why they have fared worse during the crisis. The ILO has argued that younger workers are more likely to be employed in highly affected occupations, which they list as support, services and sales-related occupations.²⁴ In addition, young people are significantly more likely to be working in temporary or part-time jobs or on zero hour contracts (Fig. 6). These offer less employment security, as employers are likely to get rid of these roles first. For example, some 39.1% of youths in employment in 17 European countries were in temporary roles in 2019. This is over four times the share for workers between 25 and 54 years old.

²³ Markets included in graph: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA. Data for the Asia region were only available for Japan.

²⁴ ILO. 2020. Youth and COVID-19 impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being; Survey report page 15.

UNEMPLOYMENT SCARRING IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Being unemployed when young not only imposes costs on the individual but also on society well into later life. This ‘scarring’ impact can show up in terms of lower pay, higher unemployment and reduced life chances.²⁵

There are multiple reasons as to why unemployment scarring during a person’s youth is likely to be particularly significant.²⁶ A new entrant to the labour market who is unable to get a job will not be able to develop their skills and work behaviours, which will reduce their employment prospects and earnings potential in the future. Unemployment early in one’s working life may also set low expectations about one’s employability or earning potential, reducing a person’s self-belief in their ability to get better jobs or wages in the future. Young people trying to find employment may also, in a crisis, take on poorer quality jobs or those to which their skills are less well matched, which may make it difficult to bargain for better paid jobs or transfer into their desired career in the future.²⁷



Some commentators have argued that even those lucky enough to get a job will be paid less for a considerable number of years if they enter the labour market in a recession. Borland (2020) indicates that graduates entering employment in a downturn may experience as many as 10 years of reduced wages compared to those entering in normal times.²⁸ The potential for young people to be starting their careers in less suitable roles also raises the question of whether we might see an increase in job movements between industries within this age group in the next decade.



²⁵ McQuaid, R. 2017. *Youth unemployment produces multiple scarring effects*. February 18th, 2017. Available [here](#) [Accessed: 26 March 2021]

²⁶ As above.

²⁷ Borland 2020. *Scarring effects, a review of Australian and international literature*. Available [here](#).

²⁸ Andrews et al. 2020. *The career effects of labour market conditions at entry*. Australian Treasury. Available [here](#).

HAS COVID-19 MORE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET?

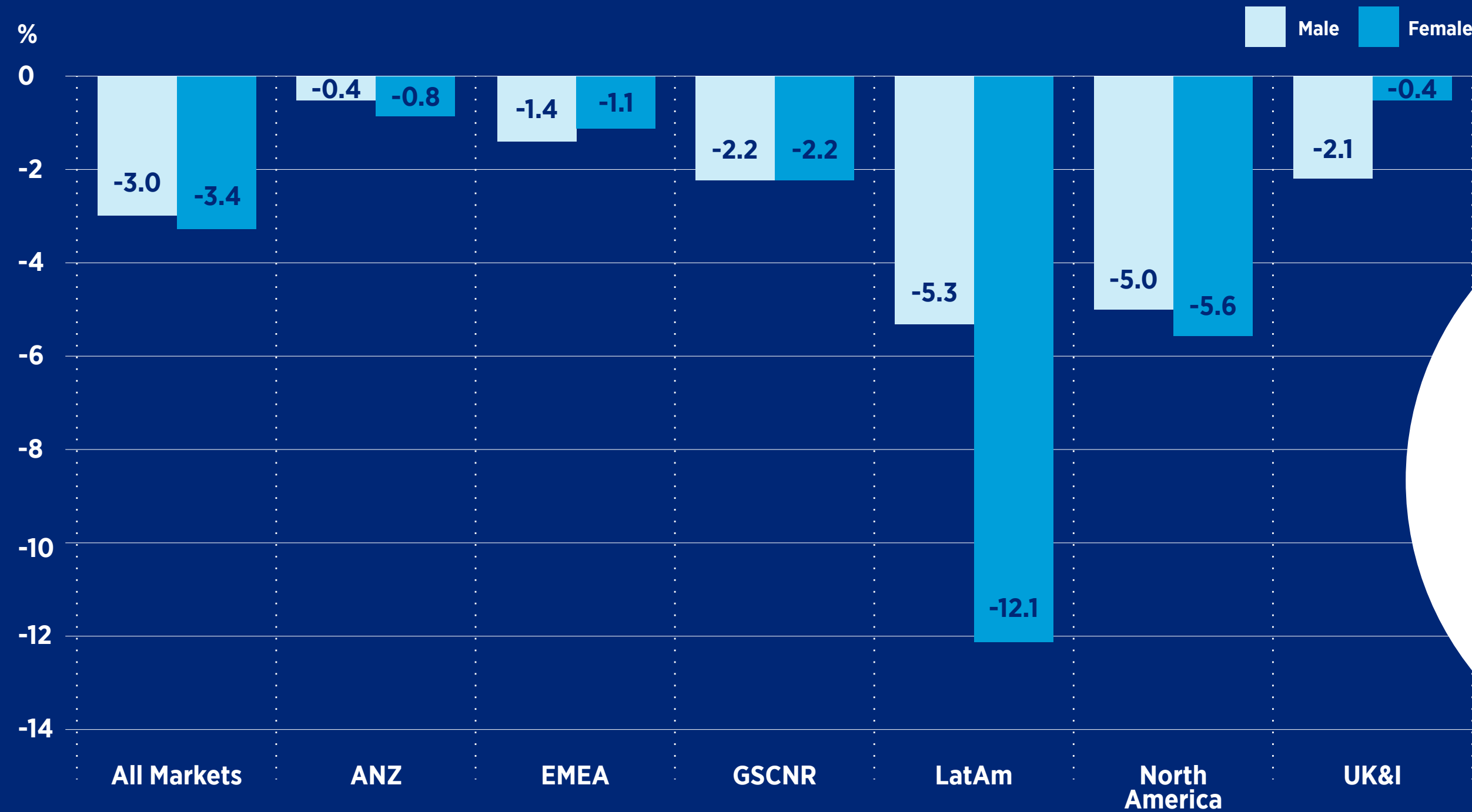
This chapter looks at how men and women in the labour market have been affected differently by the coronavirus crisis. Research published in July 2020 by the OECD argues that “this crisis, unlike the previous one, appears so far to have affected the labour market prospects of women more strongly than men.”²⁹

This section explores whether this is true.

²⁹ OECD Employment Outlook 2020. Available [here](#).



Fig. 7. Percentage change in employment between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 by gender³¹



Source: OECD

LatAm region female employment fell 6.8 percentage points more than the fall in male employment over the same time period.

EMPLOYMENT DECLINES IN 2020 BY GENDER

Between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 female employment declined by a greater percentage than male employment across the 34 featured markets.

Across 24 of the 34 markets for which data are available, female employment fell by 3.4% between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 (Fig. 7).³⁰ This is a 0.4 percentage point larger decline than the fall in male employment, although the gap was far larger at the peak of the crisis in Q2 2020, when female employment had fallen by 1.3 percentage points more than male employment across the featured markets.

The finding holds true in the majority of regions. The impact was most severe in the LatAm region, where female employment fell by 12.1% between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020. This was 6.8 percentage points more than the fall in male employment over the same time period.

Because this crisis has been driven by health concerns primarily, rather than economic or financial factors, the distribution of its impacts has been different to previous crises. The relatively greater loss of jobs occupied by females than males in 2020 is the opposite of what is observed in a “typical” economic crisis, which tends to lead to more job losses in male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing, compared with female-oriented sectors such as retail, hospitality, care and domestic work.

³⁰ Markets included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

³¹ See footnote 22 for list of markets. Only data for Japan were available for the Asia region.

LABOUR DEMAND AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

One explanation is that females are more concentrated in industrial sectors which have been harder hit by the crisis, such as retail and hospitality.

Evidence from the UK shows that women were about one third more likely to work in a sector that was shut down than men “one in six (17%) female employees were in such sectors, compared to one in seven (13%) male employees.”³²

The need for an organisation to temporarily close, either due to restrictions set by the Government in an effort to try and limit the spread of COVID-19, or through the owner’s choice, is at least partially dependent on whether its staff have to interact with customers face-to-face. ONS research found there are more women working in occupations that were more likely to be in frequent contact with people and also frequently exposed to disease.³³ Conversely, there are fewer female workers in roles that can be performed at home, compared to their male colleagues. One study found that 28% of male

³² Joyce and Xu, 2020. Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? Available [here](#).

³³ Available [here](#).

³⁴ Alon et al. 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. Available [here](#).

³⁵ Melbourne Institute’s Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia. Wave 19 (14-18th Sep 2020). Available [here](#).



ONS research found there are more women working in occupations that were more likely to be in frequent contact with people and also frequently exposed to disease.



Women were about one third more likely to work in a sector that is now shut down than men: one in six (17%) female employees were in such sectors, compared to one in seven (13%) male employees.

workers but only 22% of female workers were employed in these highly telecommutable occupations in the USA.³⁴ These findings are supported by evidence from Australia, where 54% of men surveyed reported that they were working mostly from home, compared to 45% of women, in September 2020.³⁵





FEMALES UNDERTAKE A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF CHILD REARING AND INFORMAL CARE

Other explanations as to why female employment has been harder hit than male employment focus on the amount of time each gender has to dedicate to paid employment due to other roles they fulfil.

In their work on the impact of coronavirus, Alon et al. suggest that “closures of schools and daycare centers have massively increased childcare need.” So, while childcare burdens can and are often shared among family members, on average it is more often women who take more responsibility. One study showed that on average, German women who are working from home had spent four hours a working day on child care and three hours on home schooling, which was considerably more than the 2.8 and 1.8 hours men spent on the same activities, respectively.³⁶ The significant time commitment required by childcare may have meant that more women chose to focus less on their careers or actively looking for a job, or to temporarily leave employment in 2020.

“
A study showed that on average, German women who are working from home had spent four hours a working day on child care and three hours on home schooling, which was considerably more than the 2.8 and 1.8 hours men spent on the same activities, respectively.

Evidence suggests this effect is significant in Asian markets such as Japan, where analysis from the World Economic Forum highlighted that, “women often feel compelled to take on more professional sacrifices” in response to closures or disruption to schools and childcare services, which contributed to approximately 1 million women leaving the Japanese labour force between December 2019 and April 2020.³⁷



“
Women often feel compelled to take on more professional sacrifices.

³⁶ Adams-Prassl et al. 2020. Auswirkungen der Corona-Krise auf den deutschen Arbeitsmarkt.

³⁷ Aoyagi, Chie. 2020. Guilt is fuelling Japan's gender gap - Here are 3 ways we can stop it. World Economic Forum. Available [here](#).

In addition, women are more likely to bear the burden of informal care responsibilities for elderly or vulnerable members of the family. The ILO comments “Women typically spend disproportionately more time in unpaid care work than men, irrespective of location, class and culture.”³⁸ This factor takes on even more significance in the case of black and ethnic minority women, who tend to spend more of their time on care for children and the elderly.³⁹ This takes on increased importance in the context of the coronavirus crisis, as caring for people who need to “shield” may further reduce the ability of carers to work due to fears of catching and transmitting the virus to those they care for. In Europe, the care burden meant that “many women have had to reduce or leave employment for the duration of lockdown.”⁴⁰ The data show these effects. On average for the featured markets for which data are available, the female labour force participation rate declined from 60.3% to 57.4% between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020, rebounding slightly to 58.5% by Q4.⁴¹



Women typically spend disproportionately more time in unpaid care work than men, irrespective of location, class and culture.



³⁸ ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. Quote from page 39. Retrieved from [here](#).

³⁹ European Parliament. 2020. The gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period. Available [here](#).

⁴⁰ As in footnote 37.

⁴¹ Markets included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON WORKING PATTERNS

The previous chapters have explored the impact of COVID-19 on the international labour market since the pandemic took hold. However, the pandemic, and the policy and behavioural responses to it, will have profound effects on how we work in the future.

In the second half of this report, we investigate three issues that have been at the forefront of discussions during the pandemic. These are the optimal working from home policy, whether jobs will become borderless, and whether roles within global supply chains will be reshored.





Telemigration
Remote working also raises the possibility of working remotely from abroad (termed 'telemigration')

Lockdowns and associated government advice have forced employees to work from home wherever possible in many countries. As the response to the pandemic has developed, this has rapidly become the new normal, to the point where it is extremely likely that remote work will be a standard component of work in the future. For many employees, remote work has delivered some benefits, such as a reduction in commuting time and greater flexibility in when they work. Survey evidence shows a significant proportion of employees have expressed a desire to continue to work from home to some degree in the future. However, there are concerns as to how best to implement this arrangement going forward, such that remote work might benefit both employers and employees, whilst addressing concerns about productivity, visibility, and work-life balance.

The ability to work remotely increases flexibility for both employees and employers; expanding where employees can work from, and employers can hire from, in the future. It also raises the possibility of hiring workers to work remotely from abroad (termed 'telemigration'). This increases the talent pool of workers available to organisations and may enable them to hire lower-cost labour. However, various challenges, such as customer needs, time-zones, regulation and security issues, may constrain the number of jobs that are truly borderless.

For many employees, remote work has delivered some benefits, such as a reduction in commuting time and greater flexibility over when they work.





The international trade system has been profoundly affected by the pandemic.

The international trade system has been profoundly affected by the pandemic. We explore some proposed ideas as to how global supply chains will be structured in the future, as firms seek to avoid a repeat of the disruption seen in 2020. In particular, will manufacturing jobs be ‘reshored’? And if they are, will those jobs be different from the ones that were lost with offshoring in the past, due to the rise of automation? Alternatively, will the jobs in global supply chains just be moved to elsewhere around the world, to lower the risk of disruption in the future?

WORKING FROM HOME

WORKERS' VIEWS ON WORKING FROM HOME

As a result of lockdown measures and office closures, many people have been forced to work from home.

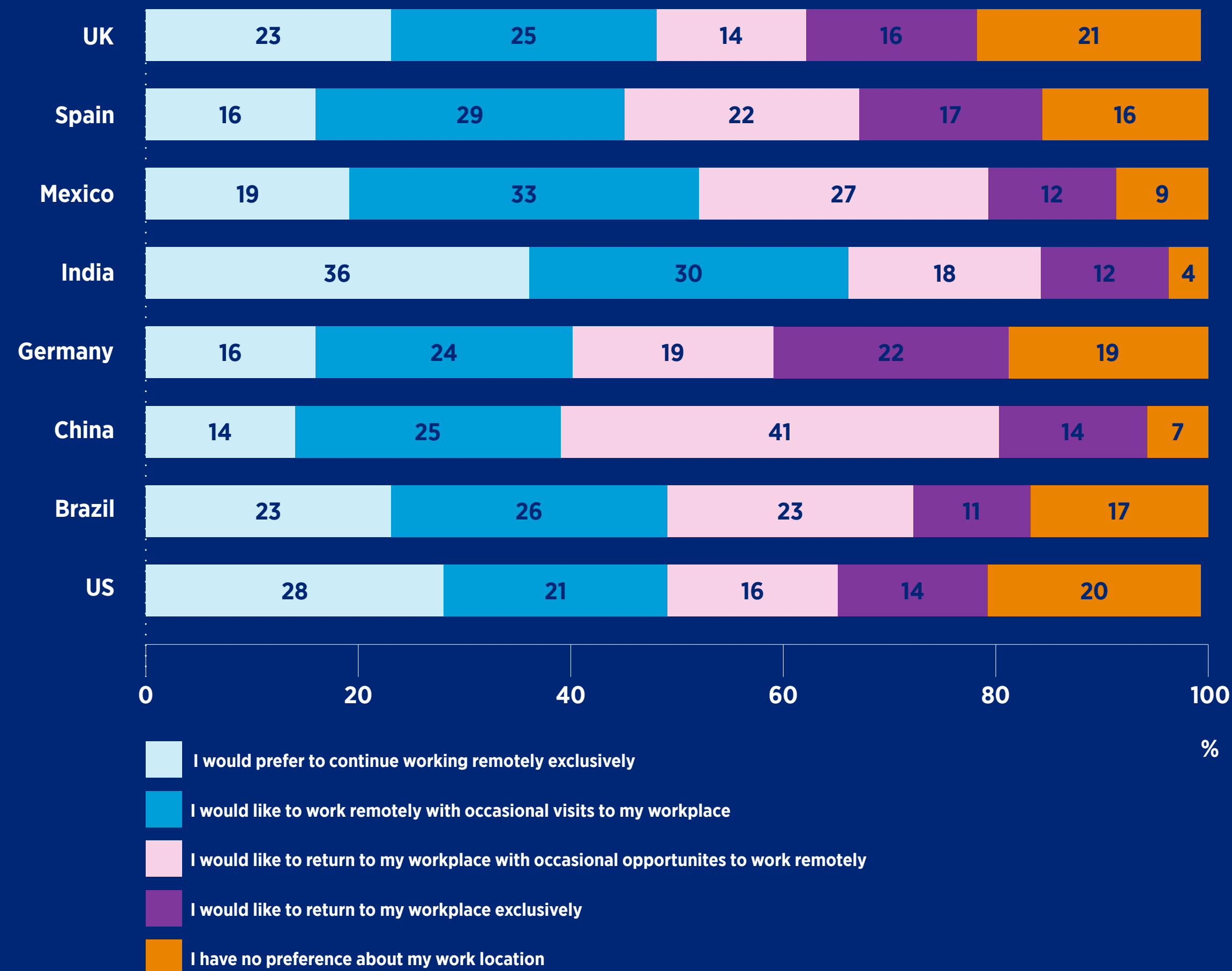
This was a drastic shift in the way many workers had been used to working. However, it appears that many are not only getting used to it, but would prefer to see some form of working from home in the future. Bloom (2020) found that 60.6% of USA workers wanted to work at least one day a week from home in the future after the pandemic ends while 24.2% said they wanted to work from home for a full five days a week.⁴² A survey conducted by IBM (2020) about working preference in eight countries found a large preference for working from home (see Fig 8).⁴³ In each of the eight countries surveyed, around half of workers stated that they wanted to mainly work from home in the future (the lowest share was 39% in China, whilst the highest was 66% in India).



⁴² Bloom, N. 2020. *How working from home works out*. Policy Brief (June, 2020). Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR). Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁴³ IBM. 2020. *COVID-19 Consumer Survey*. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]

Fig. 8. Employee opinions on remote working, September 2020



Source: IBM Institute for Business Value COVID-19 Consumer Survey (September 2020)

Remote working during the pandemic led to **62.4million** fewer hours of commuting per day for working Americans.

Preferences for home working are not a new phenomenon—an academic study of call centre workers by Mas and Pallais (2017) conducted before the pandemic found that the average worker would be willing to take an 8% pay cut in order to be able to work from home, and that 25% of workers would take a 14% pay cut.⁴⁴ However, the pandemic has amplified the discussion around remote work and has reduced the stigma previously associated with it.

Taneja, Mizen and Bloom (2021) found in a survey of UK residents, 40% of respondent’s perceptions about working from home had substantially improved since the pandemic began; for 17%, their perceptions had hugely improved.⁴⁵

Part of the reason workers want to continue with working from home in the future may be due to the reduction in commuting hours. A study by Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020a) estimated that remote working during the pandemic led to 62.4 million fewer hours of commuting per day for working Americans.⁴⁶ These are hours that workers can devote to other activities: while more than a third (35.5%) of the hours saved are devoted to working on the individual’s primary job, 18.6% was devoted to indoor leisure, 15.5% to home improvement or chores, 11.1% each to both childcare and outdoor leisure or exercise, and 8.4% working on a second job.

⁴⁴ Mas, A. and Pallais, A. 2017. *Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements*. *American Economic Review*, 107(12): 3722–3759, available here. [Accessed 22 April 2021]

⁴⁵ Taneja, S., Mizen, P. and Bloom, N. 2021. *Working from home is revolutionising the UK labour market*. 15 March 2021. Available here. [Accessed 22 April 2021]

⁴⁶ Barrero, J. M., Bloom, N. and Davis, S. J. 2020a. *60 million fewer commuting hours per day: How Americans use time saved by working from home*. VoxEU, 23 September 2020. Available here. [Accessed 22 April 2021]



With the ability to work from home, individuals' schedules become more flexible, meaning whilst they spend time they would have been commuting on work, they break up their day more to fit in chores and exercise.

The same study finds that those who work from home worked fewer hours on average during the pandemic than compared to before (32.0 hours versus 36.4 hours). The report reconciles these findings with the observations that the way people work has profoundly changed.⁴⁷ With the ability to work from home, individuals' schedules become more flexible, meaning whilst they spend time they would have been commuting on work, they break up their day more to fit in chores and exercise. However, it is possible to argue that without set office hours, workers may inadvertently begin to blur their work and personal lives, potentially making it harder to switch off outside of work hours, especially without the barrier between work and home life that separate locations and a commute provide.



It is possible to argue that without set office hours, workers may inadvertently begin to blur their work and personal lives.

⁴⁷ Financial Times, 2020. *Is it time to cut back our working hours?* 13 September 2020, available [here](#).

EMPLOYERS' VIEWS ON WORKING FROM HOME

There is more limited evidence on what employers think with regards to home working following the pandemic. Although, a raft of recent corporate announcements anecdotally seem to suggest that many employers are on board with working from home in the future in some capacity.

Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020b) find from a survey of workers that their employers are planning to allow working from home for 21.5% (or roughly one day a week) of their working time.⁴⁸ However, this was far less than the 44% of time that the employees wanted. A survey of around 1,000 company directors found that 74% of respondents planned to keep increased working from home in the future.⁴⁹ In June 2020, a Boston Consulting Group survey found that companies expected 40% of employees to be working remotely in some capacity in the future, and that 37%



A survey of around 1,000 company directors found that 74% of respondents planned to keep increased working from home in the future.



37% of companies expect at least a quarter of their employees to operate under a hybrid model of work from home and onsite work.

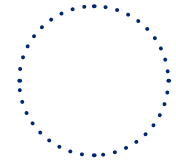
of companies expect at least a quarter of their employees to operate under a hybrid model of work from home and onsite work.⁵⁰ A survey of CFOs by Gartner found that 74% of CFOs planned to move at least 5% of their workforce (that had been onsite prior to the pandemic) into permanently remote positions after the pandemic; 23% of CFOs planned to move 20% or more of their workforce to remote positions.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Barrero, J. M., Bloom, N. and Davis, S. J. 2020b. *Why Working From Home Will Stick*. BFI Working Paper, 02 December 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁴⁹ Institute of Directors. 2020. *Home-working here to stay, new IoD figures suggest*. 5 October 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]

⁵⁰ Boston Consulting Group. 2020. *Remote Work Works—Where Do We Go from Here?*. 30 June 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]

⁵¹ Gartner. 2020. *Gartner CFO Survey Reveals 74% Intend to Shift Some Employees to Remote Work Permanently*. 3 April 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]



IS THERE AN OPTIMAL WORKING FROM HOME POLICY?

If working from home, or outside of an office environment, is to become routine, how should it be conducted in the future?

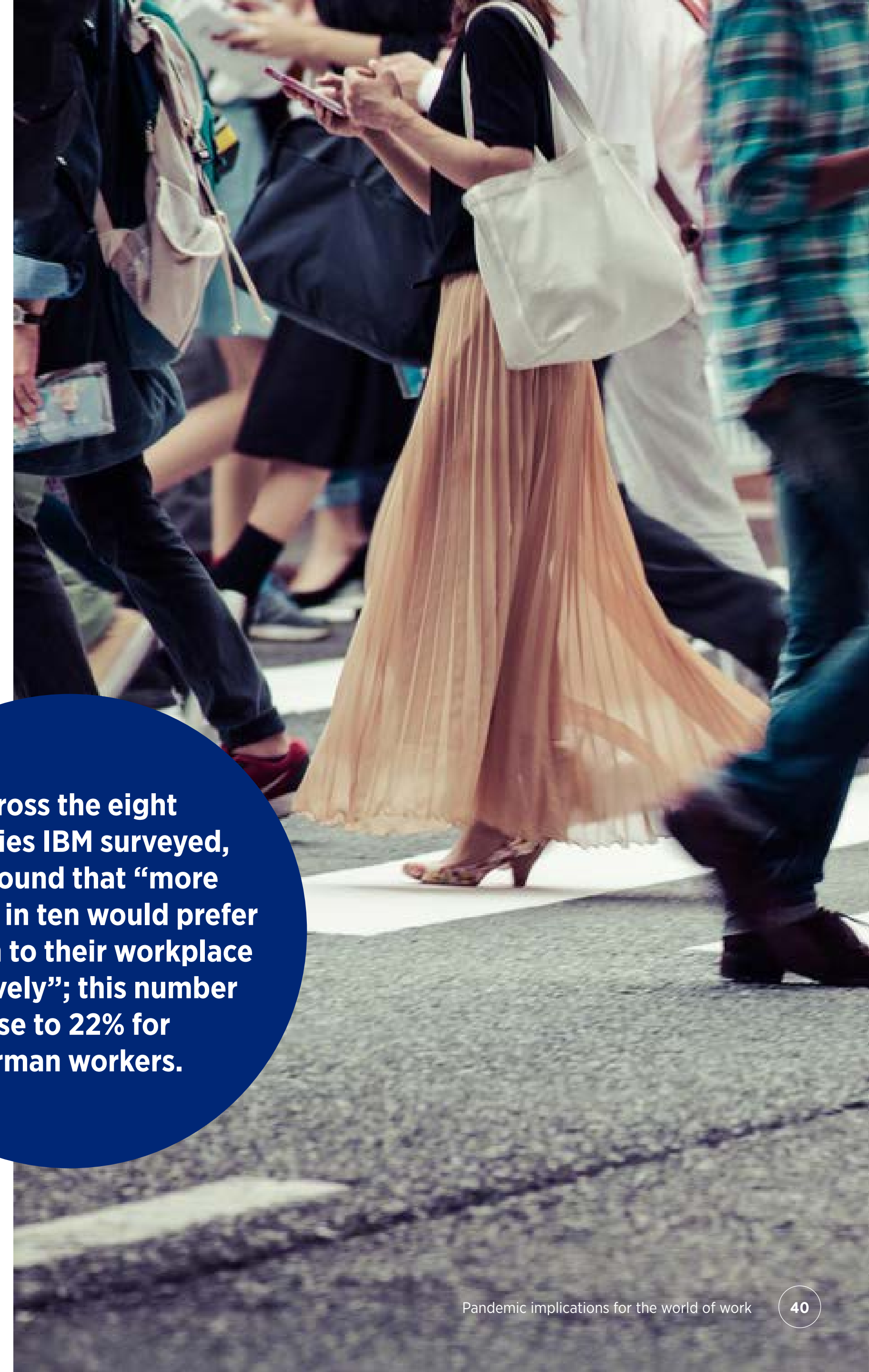
Bloom (2020a) offers some advice. Firstly, staff should only work from home for part of the week, operating in a hybrid working model. He recommends for about one to three days a week. This allows workers to get the best of both worlds—quieter days with no commuting time when working from home; collaboration and interaction when working at the office. This may also help to tackle some of the major challenges associated with working from home, namely, onboarding and training new staff members, and monitoring performance and promotions.

Bloom (2020a) offers some advice. Firstly, staff should only work from home for part of the week, operating in a hybrid working model.



Secondly, working from home should be optional. Many workers do not want to work from home to begin with as they miss the in-person social interaction with their colleagues. Alternatively, working from home may not be ideal due to a number of external factors. Bloom (2020) found that 20.3% of workers never want to work from home in the future. Across the eight countries IBM surveyed, they found that “more than one in ten would prefer to return to their workplace exclusively”; this number rose to 22% for German workers.

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Of 141 workers who worked from home, 23% stated they started to get lonely over time.

When firms are thinking about the office space they require, it is important to consider that workers' views may change over time. In a 2015 paper, Bloom et al. investigated working from home in an experiment with workers in a travel agency call centre. In a follow-up survey with 141 workers who worked from home, 23% stated they started to get lonely over time.⁵² Pew Research (2020) found a substantial minority of workers expressed dissatisfaction with working from home; for example 36% stated that they found it somewhat or very difficult to feel motivated to do their work, whilst 32% found it somewhat or very difficult to get work done.⁵³ New hires may also benefit from working in the office to begin with; it may make it easier to ask for help if they can talk to someone in person, which may improve on-the-job learning.

Thirdly, firms need to monitor how staff perform whilst working from home versus in the office. Bloom et al. (2015) found that working performance rose by 13% when workers worked from home. Similarly, Emanuel and Harrington (2020) found that call centre workers forced to work from home due to the pandemic became 7.6% more productive compared to those who were already working remotely.⁵⁴ Overall, Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020b) predicted a 2.4% increase in productivity post-pandemic.

Overall, Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020b) predicted a 2.4% increase in productivity post-pandemic.

Who chooses to work from home also needs to be considered. Emanuel and Harrington found that during lockdown, workers who selected to work remotely pre-lockdown were 18% less productive than those who selected to work on site pre-lockdown. Productivity is likely to vary across industries and jobs, and so workers should be monitored, and any adjustments made to allow workers to work as productively as possible.



⁵² Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J. and Ying, Z. J. 2015. *Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment*. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 130 (1), pp. 165-218. [Accessed 22 April 2021]
⁵³ Pew Research. 2020. *How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has - and Hasn't - Changed the Way Americans Work*. 9 December 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]
⁵⁴ Harrington, E. and Emanuel, N. 2020. *"Working" Remotely? Selection, Treatment and the Market Provision of Remote Work*. Working Paper, 12 November 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 22 April 2021]

HIGHLY SKILLED WORKERS IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES MOST LIKELY TO WORK FROM HOME

There are vast differences across countries when it comes to working from home. The ILO (2020) estimated “close to 18% of workers worked in occupations and lived in countries with the infrastructure that would allow them to effectively perform their work from home.”⁵⁵

However, those in developed economies are able to work from home at a higher rate. Solely looking at the occupational structure, the roles of 23% of workers in developed economies can be done at home, compared to 13% for developing countries. Once differences in social, physical and information technology infrastructure are taken into account, the difference increases (to 27% versus 12%).

Looking at jobs in the USA, Dingel and Neiman (2020) find that higher-income workers are more likely to be able to work from home. The 37% of jobs across the USA that they estimated can be done from home account for 46% of wages.⁵⁶ This is backed up by data from the UK which shows that “the median hourly earnings of employees in the 20% of the workforce most likely to be able to work from home is £19.01, compared with £11.28 for workers in the 20% of workers in jobs least likely to be adaptable to home working.”⁵⁷

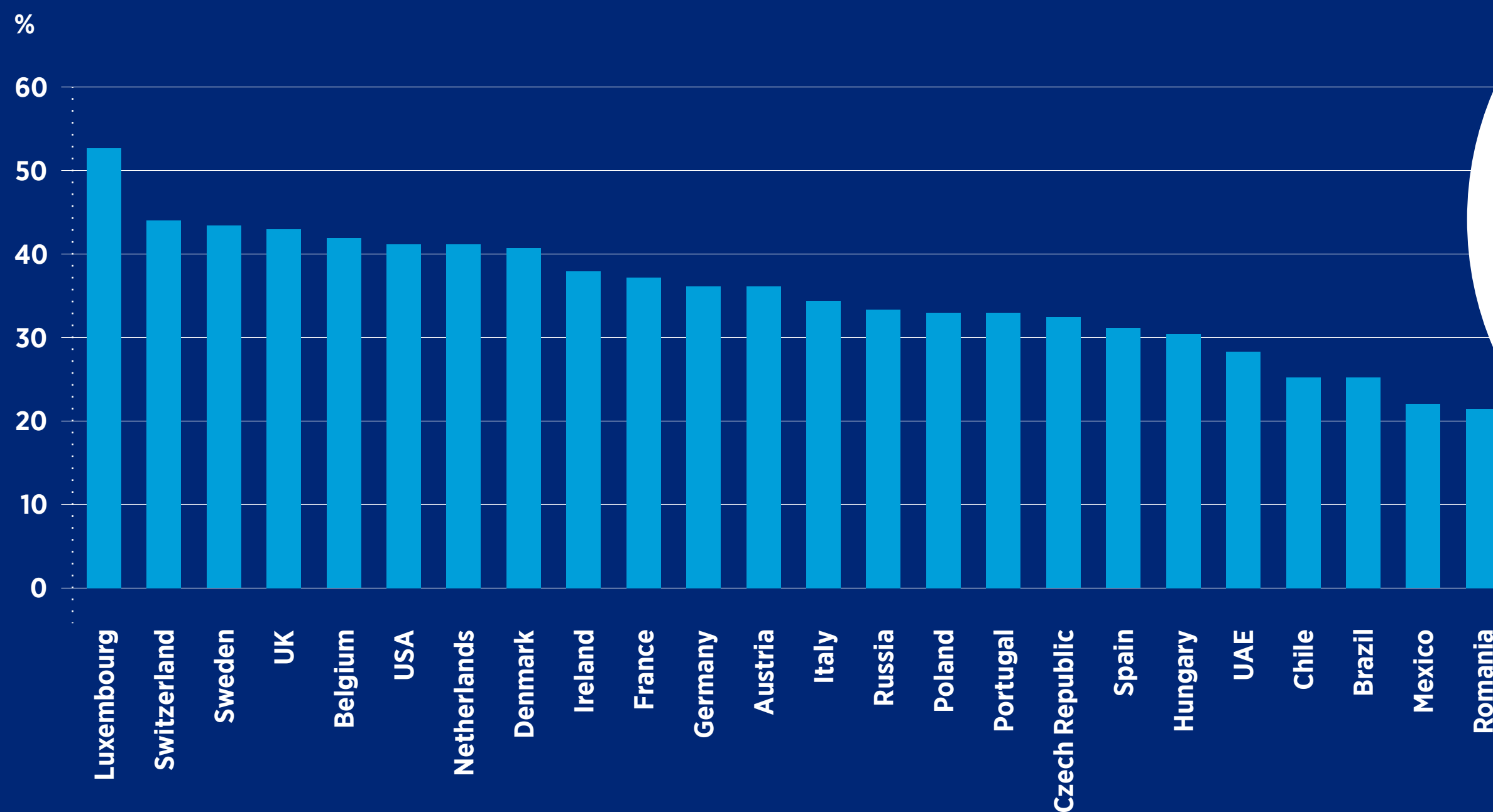


⁵⁵ ILO. 2020. *Working from Home: Estimating the worldwide potential*. Policy Brief, April 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]. Quote from p.2.

⁵⁶ Dingel, J. and Neiman, B. 2020. *How Many Jobs Can be Done at Home?* White Paper, 19 June 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁵⁷ ONS. 2020. *Which jobs can be done from home?* 21 July 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

Fig. 9. Estimates of the share of the working population that can work from home, by country



Source: Dingel and Neiman (2020)

Employees' demands for working from home were most in line with their employers plans to allow it in higher paying jobs, and for workers with higher levels of education.

Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020) found employees' demands for working from home were most in line with their employers plans to allow it in higher paying jobs, and for workers with higher levels of education. Bloom (2020) found that of those with four or more years of college education, 57.8% said they worked from home during coronavirus; for those who didn't graduate high school it was 1.2%.

Figure 9 presents the Dingel and Neiman (2020) estimates of the proportion of the working population in each country that can work from home in the featured markets.⁵⁸ Of the countries available, Luxembourg has the highest share at 53.4%, followed by Switzerland at 44.9% and Sweden at 44.2%. The average working from home share across all countries in Dingel and Neiman's (2020) sample was 26.4%; for featured markets it was higher, at 35.8%.

⁵⁸ 24 countries were available.

WORKING FROM ANYWHERE AND TELEMIGRATION

WORKERS MAY CHOOSE TO WORK FROM ANYWHERE

If companies are to offer the ability to work away from the office, then it is only natural that workers will begin to reconsider where they conduct their remote work.

This is something we saw during the pandemic itself, with workers using the shift to remote work as an opportunity to live in a foreign country.⁵⁹ Remote work has also likely made it easier for migrant workers to return home to family to conduct their work. We can expect this trend to continue after the pandemic; for example, Spotify recently announced its 'Work From Anywhere Program', which gives its employees more flexibility regarding the country they work in.⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ The Guardian. 2020. *Foreign offices: the Britons who work from home – abroad*. 19 September 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁶⁰ Spotify. 2021. *Introducing Working From Anywhere*. 12 February 2021. Available [here](#).



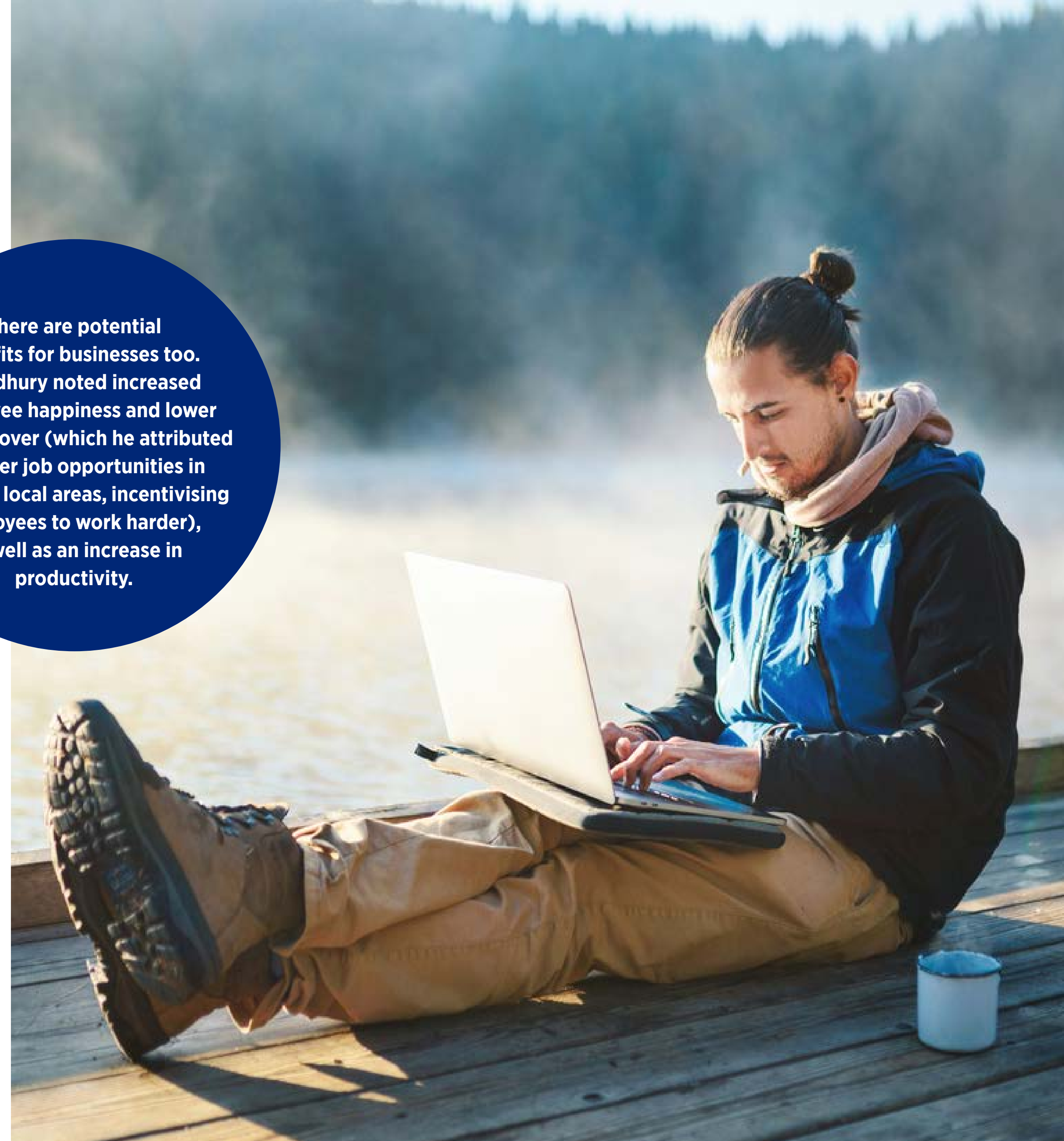
Younger people saw the benefits of being able to travel while still working and experience a 'digital nomad' lifestyle.

This can have a number of benefits, as discussed in Choudhury (2020).⁶¹ For couples, it can relieve the challenge of having to find two jobs in the same city. For others, it can improve their personal life, being able to be closer to family, or live somewhere warmer or with more recreational activities. Younger people saw the benefits of being able to travel while still working and experience a 'digital nomad' lifestyle. Individuals also stated that lower cost of living was a big benefit, making their salaries go further by living in a cheaper location. Working remotely also removes the need for individuals to acquire visas, making it easier to gain work at some companies.

There are potential benefits for businesses too. Choudhury noted increased employee happiness and lower staff turnover (which he attributed to fewer job opportunities in workers' local areas, incentivising employees to work harder), as well as an increase in productivity.

Choudhury, Foroughi and Larson (2019) looked at workers in United States Patent and Trademark Office and found that a transition from working from home to working from anywhere resulted in a 4.4% increase in output.⁶² As with working from home, employers save money on office space and associated overheads.

There are potential benefits for businesses too. Choudhury noted increased employee happiness and lower staff turnover (which he attributed to fewer job opportunities in workers' local areas, incentivising employees to work harder), as well as an increase in productivity.



⁶¹ Choudhury, P. 2020. *Our Work-from-Anywhere Future*. Harvard Business Review. Magazine (November-December 2020). Available [here](#) [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁶² Choudhury P., Foroughi C. and Larson B. 2019. *Work-from-anywhere: The Productivity Effects of Geographic Flexibility*. Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit Working Paper 19-054.

FIRMS HAVE ACCESS TO A LARGER TALENT POOL

Choudhury notes that through ‘work from anywhere’ schemes, organisations have access to a wider pool of talent.

This means businesses can better address skills shortages within their organisations, and it opens domestic employees up to competition from across the globe for certain occupations. Economist Richard Baldwin also discusses this idea in his book, *The Globotics Upheaval: Globalization, Robotics, and the Future of Work*.⁶³ He uses the term ‘telemigration’ to describe the idea of workers being able to work for firms across the globe, with physical commutes being replaced by digital software; a notion that he argues will radically change the way that organisations hire and operate.

These workers can often be much cheaper, Baldwin notes, and whilst they might not be as productive as a domestic worker, the reduction in costs can often more than compensate. Telemigrants can often earn more working for companies located abroad than they can working in their own domestic economy.



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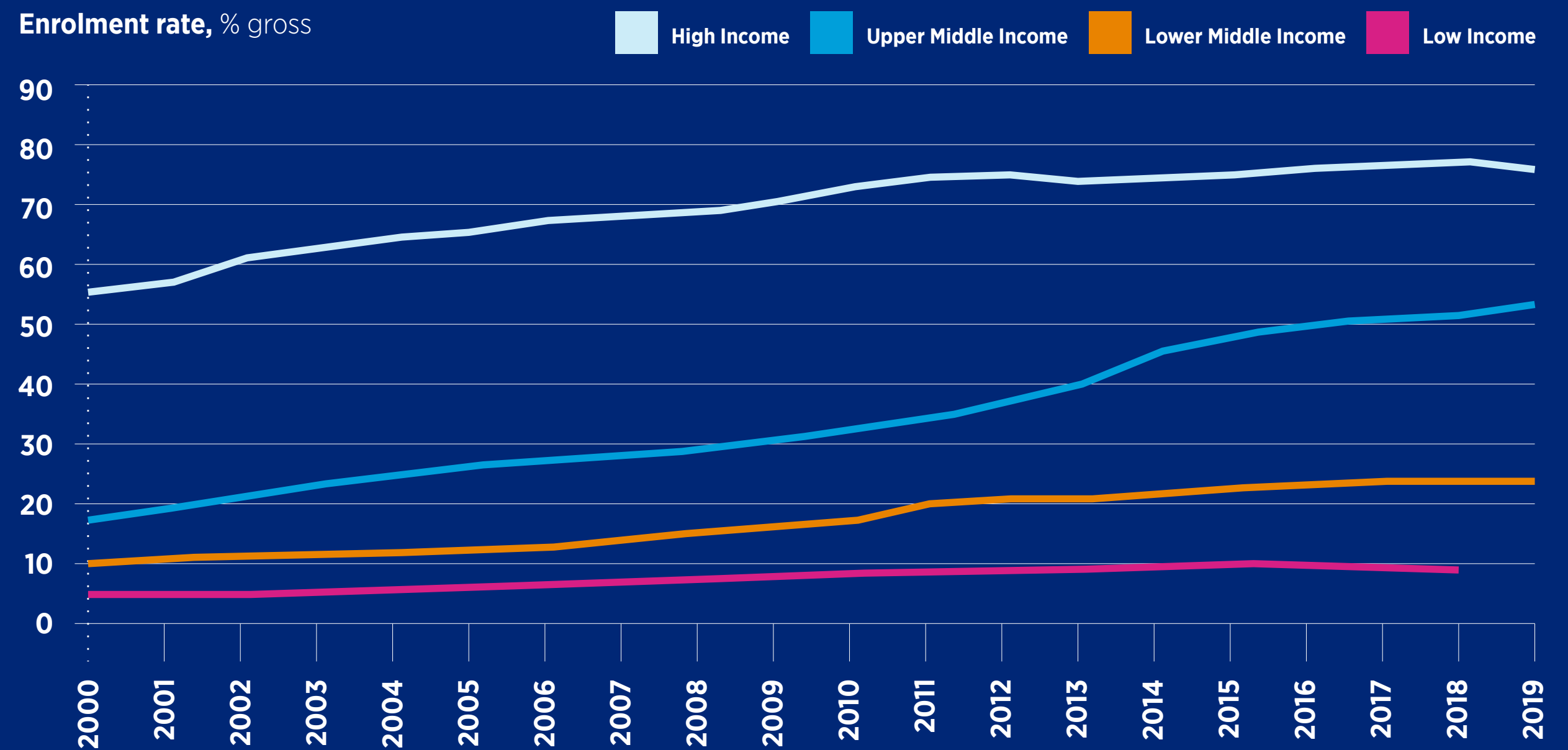
⁶³ Baldwin, R. 2019. *The Globotics Upheaval: Globalization, Robotics, and the Future of Work*. Oxford University Press.

The availability of high-quality workers abroad is also likely to boost telemigration. Figure 10 shows the share of population enrolled in higher education (post-secondary) for high to low-income countries.⁶⁴ The gap in enrolment rate between high and upper-middle income countries has been falling since 2000, increasing the pool of qualified workers to hire from non-high income countries relative to high-income countries.

Baldwin says a few things have made this possible. Firstly, there has been a rapid and considerable advancement in the quality of translation software. This helps break down the language barrier and makes it easier for workers to communicate across the globe in real time. Secondly, there have been large advancements in collaboration and management software, making it easier for employees to work together. Advances in augmented reality and virtual reality software should further break down any barriers presented by the geographic distance between workers. One example Baldwin believes could be a possibility in the future is holograms, which are 3D video projections, giving the impression that the person you are speaking to is in the room with you, even if they are on the other side of the world.

The availability of high-quality workers abroad is also likely to boost telemigration.

Fig. 10. Share of population enrolled in higher education, 2000-2019⁶⁵



Source: World Bank

⁶⁴ World Bank. 2021. *World Development Indicators*. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁶⁵ Specifically, this is data for the Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education which is "the ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown. Tertiary education, whether or not to an advanced research qualification, normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level."

It is clear then that the composition of the workforce is likely to change going forward, moving towards a split between the domestic and foreign workforce. Baldwin notes that technology is likely to change the relationship between employers and employees, with organisations hiring more workers on a project-by-project basis. He also notes that remote work is also likely to accelerate; as firms get more used to hiring remote workers, they adapt their practices and structures to further make remote work easier, incentivising the further hire of more remote workers.

So, who is safe from the telemigration future? Baldwin (2020) argues that for jobs where face-to-face communication matters, it is better being in the same room than operating remotely.⁶⁶ In addition, work where local or cultural knowledge is important is difficult to send abroad.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, R. 2020. *Covid, hysteresis, and the future of work*. VoxEU, 29 May 2020. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]



There are likely to be some barriers to telemigration in the short term. Choudhury notes that cyber security and data regulation concerns must be considered, as must any local labour laws and regulations. Insurance is another consideration, especially if the insurance is location dependent; likewise tax liabilities for employees are likely to be affected by where they work. Technological infrastructure in some countries may not be good enough to facilitate telemigration, and time-zone differences will limit the extent to which employees can work together at the same time. However, assuming these can be addressed and overcome, we are likely to see a rise of a truly global workforce.



WILL THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC SPEED UP THE TECHNOLOGICAL TAKEOVER?

In an article published in 2020, Baldwin argues that the pandemic will have permanent effects on the labour market, and that even after it has ended, we will continue to see a shift in the way that work is conducted. In particular, he offers four channels through which the coronavirus pandemic will lead to a rise in ‘telemigration’ and automation.

Firstly, he points to the large amount of unemployment potentially caused by the pandemic may change how firms hire. The key idea is that retaining a worker and hiring a new worker are not equivalent decisions—retaining a worker is cheaper, as you do not have to spend time training them up to the organisation’s needs. Businesses deciding to hire new workers would instead have to be willing to make a costly investment in their workers’ skills, and so may turn to alternatives (like automation or telemigration) that are cheaper and more efficient.

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During this process, organisations have invested a large amount of capital into digital infrastructure, and workers have developed the skills required to work remotely. This, Baldwin argues, is an investment that is not going to simply fade away.

Secondly, the pandemic has resulted in a large number of remote workers. During this process organisations have invested a large amount of capital into digital infrastructure, and workers have developed the skills required to work remotely. This, Baldwin argues, is an investment that is not going to simply fade away, and instead this investment makes it easier for organisations to switch to telemigration, given they now have the physical and organisational infrastructure in place.

Thirdly, if social distancing restrictions continue, or workers have developed preferences for greater personal space in the pandemic, there is likely to be a demand for more office space per worker. As such, office space should become a more costly resource; firms may shift to telemigration to cut costs.

Finally, the recession caused by the pandemic may incentivise firms to pursue new cost-cutting measures and look to telemigration as a potential method.

WILL THE CORONAVIRUS LEAD TO THE RESHORING OF JOBS?

CORONAVIRUS HAS LED ORGANISATIONS TO RECONSIDER HOW AND WHERE PRODUCTION IS ORGANISED

One of the factors that has driven global economic growth in the last few decades has been the expansion of global value chains (GVCs).

These occur when a product is manufactured using inputs from several countries, which make up the product's GVC. The share of GVCs in international trade has grown from around 37% in 1970 to a peak of over 50% just before the financial crisis, falling back by about 10% since then.⁶⁷

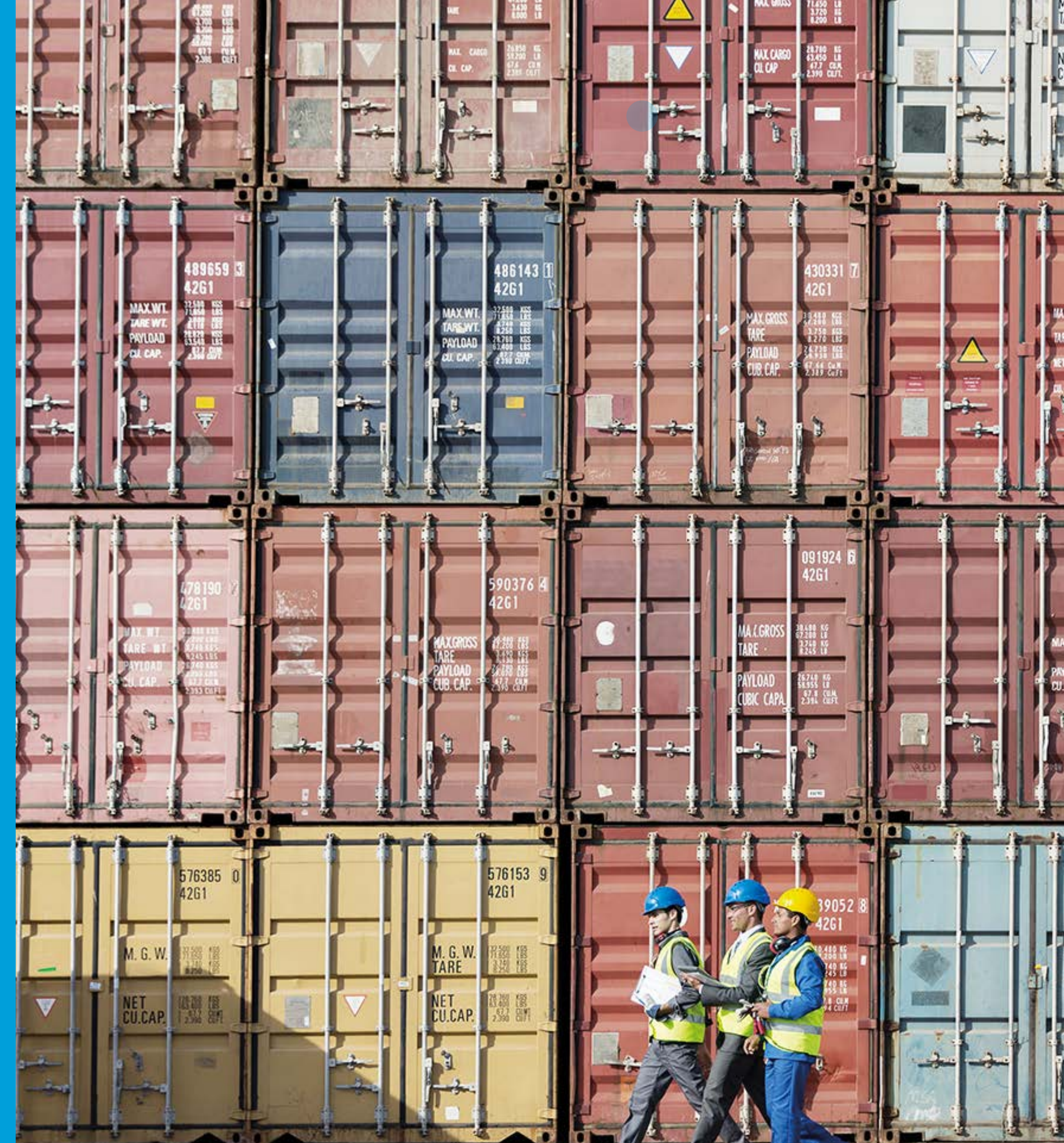
The coronavirus pandemic has, however, highlighted one of the weaknesses of GVCs, with disruptions to manufacturing and transport systems in one country amplified across the global supply chain; Baldwin and Tomiura (2020) call this 'supply chain contagion'.⁶⁸ The effect can be substantial—in May 2020, Bonadio et al. (2020) estimated an average 29.6% drop in GDP across countries they studied, with about a quarter attributable to global supply chains.^{69, 70}

⁶⁷ World Bank. 2020. *World Development Report 2020: Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains*. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁶⁸ Baldwin, R. and Tomiura, E. 2020. *Thinking ahead about the trade impact of COVID-19*. In *Economics in the Time of COVID-19* ed. Baldwin, R. and Weder di Mauro, B.

⁶⁹ Banadio, B., Huo, Z., Levchenko, A. A. and Pandalai-Nayar, N. 2020. *Global Supply Chains in the Pandemic*. NBER Working Paper 27224. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]

⁷⁰ Even though there was an average 29.6% drop in GDP due to COVID, the authors estimate that even without trade the effect would have been a 30.2% drop in GDP. This is because firms would have depended on local inputs, which were also affected due to lockdowns; in fact the authors argue that trade may be better during a global pandemic as foreign inputs are less affected than domestic inputs.



THE LABOUR MARKET IMPLICATIONS OF RESTRUCTURING GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS

The coronavirus pandemic has led some to re-evaluate how supply chains should be constructed in the future.

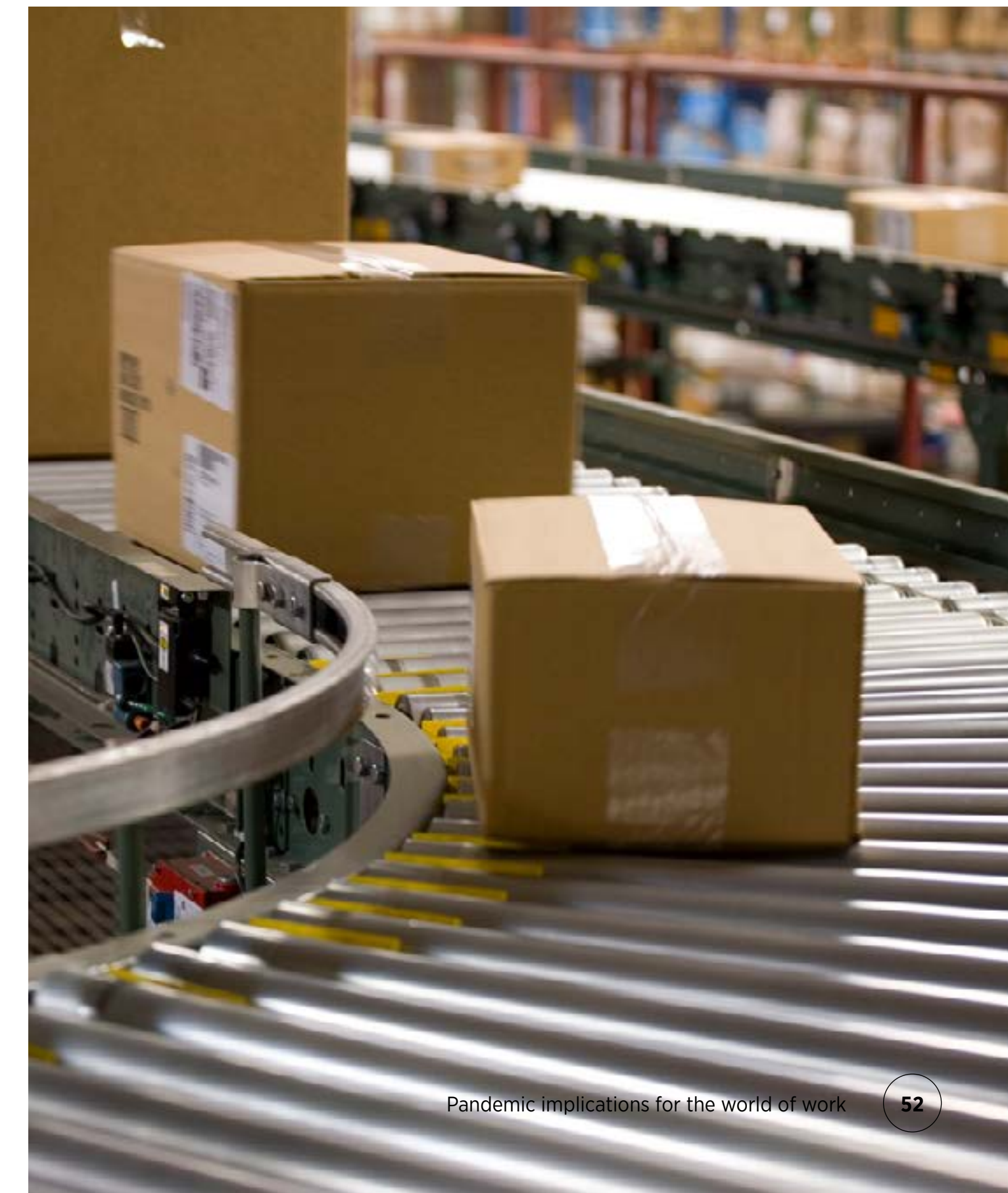
Four possible options were highlighted in UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2020.⁷¹ Each has different implications for the location and type of employment across developed and developing economies.

The first is reshoring, or switch from overseas production to domestic. Sectors that could see reshoring are the machinery, automotive, and electronic sectors, which are currently high technology- and GVC-intensive. Other sectors are those that provide essential goods, such as medical equipment, and "lower value added services, such as parts of retail and wholesale value chains and transportation and logistics value chains." A second alternative, similar to reshoring, is regionalisation. This means recreating global supply chains at a regional level. Food and beverage industries to some extent already do this, as perishable products need supply chains close by; these industries may further develop this idea.

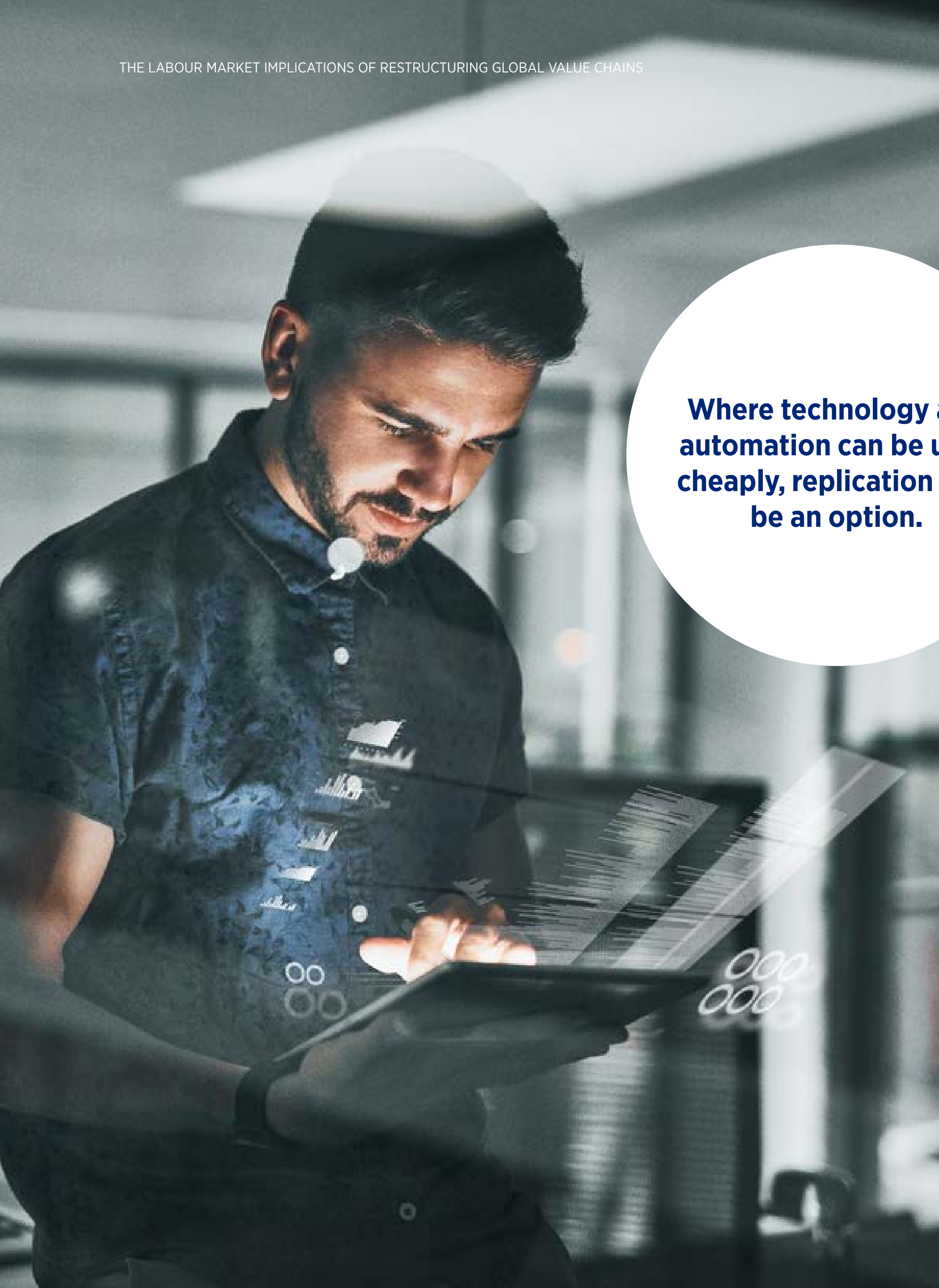
Sectors that could see reshoring are the machinery, automotive, and electronic sectors, which are currently high technology- and GVC-intensive.

One of the main appeals of offshoring is the availability of cheap labour overseas.

One of the main appeals of offshoring is the availability of cheap labour overseas, which organisations won't have access to if they reshore or regionalise their operations. Businesses may address this problem with automation, which is becoming cheaper and more efficient. This will affect the types of jobs that will be created in developed economies in the future. The skills that will be needed more will be those that involve applying expertise, managing, and interaction.



⁷¹ UNCTAD, 2020. *World Investment Report 2020*. Available [here](#). [Accessed 23 April 2021]



Where technology and automation can be used cheaply, replication may be an option.

At the opposite end of the spectrum to reshoring and regionalisation, we could see the global economy going down another two paths—diversification and replication. Diversification entails organisations expanding the locations of suppliers in their supply chain to lower the risk of disruption from individual countries (for example, from natural disasters). This may be particularly attractive in sectors where automation cannot replace labour, such as the high-end fashion industry or finance.

Where technology and automation can be used cheaply, replication may be an option. Replication is the process of manufacturing close to the market, setting up many production points around the globe. Industries that will benefit are those that have relatively less complex manufacturing processes, such as food or apparel. Pharmaceuticals is an example of an industry that is already following this model, with centralised R&D but production spread out around the world.

If supply chains are to expand, digitalisation will be key. Organisations will require better coordination and control of their increasingly diverse networks of suppliers. Digitalisation may help with monitoring input availability, tracking and planning business operations, and managing people and processes overseas. Digitalisation may also aid replication, which relies on some degree of global cooperation; while goods are produced locally, ideas and services must be traded easily to make the replication process work. If this happens, there will be an increased demand for workers with digital skills.



If supply chains are to expand, digitalisation will be key.



Diversification and replication are likely to increase the complexity of supply chains, placing a premium on workers with good management capabilities.

Overall, the future of the skilled labour market will be partly determined by which trajectory the world of global value chains takes.

We can also speculate that diversification and replication are likely to require workers with specialist local knowledge, in order to set up and manage production networks in new countries—for example in procuring local supplies and labour, or in understanding and adapting to the intricacies of local markets. In addition, diversification and replication are likely to increase the complexity of supply chains, placing a premium on workers with good management capabilities. Overall, the future of the skilled labour market will be partly determined by which trajectory the world of global value chains takes. Where companies decide to locate their supply chains will impact where labour is demanded, whilst the path they follow will impact which skills are sought after. This is a space that must be watched intently in the future.

CONCLUSION

Since the pandemic began, it has been an extremely challenging time for the world of work. The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to limit its spread caused a sharp reduction in the demand for labour in 2020.

This led to a decline in employment and a rise in unemployment or hours worked. The impact has hit some sectors harder than others, meaning that young and female workers have been particularly badly affected. Some of these impacts may be long lasting.

However, as 2021 has progressed, there are rising hopes that the labour market is emerging from the pandemic, thanks to the roll-out of the vaccine and the lifting of restrictions in some markets. We have even started to see recoveries in some sectors, with vacancies growing. But rather than a 'return to normal', employers should expect some permanent changes in the way that the labour market operates. This report has identified three key shifts.



1. A high proportion of workers want to continue to work from home in some capacity.

Early research suggests employers are on board with working from home in the future in some capacity. However, it will need to be implemented in a careful manner to avoid some of the potential downsides. Some have suggested that the optimal policy mix should include: working from home for a proportion of the week; working from home being optional; and greater thought being given to how to effectively monitor workers.

How exactly the hybrid working model will operate in the longer term hasn't been fully established yet, but it is safe to say it's here to stay. There isn't a standard approach that will suit all businesses, it is up to each individual organisation to find a solution that works for them and their workforce - while realising that just because it worked pre-pandemic doesn't mean it will succeed in the new world of work. Hybrid working opens lots of possibilities, it can be extremely beneficial to attracting talent and it can open up the potential pool of talent wider. Organisations are in a war for talent, and they need every bargaining tool available to attract and retain key talent.

2. The possibility of remote work also opens the door to work from anywhere.

This should give employees more flexibility regarding where they work—workers can move to more affordable locations, away from cities for a change in lifestyle, or can work for a wider range of companies. However, just as flexibility for workers will rise, so will it rise for employers too. This could lead to a 'telemigration' revolution, whereby firms hire workers outside of the country in which they are based. This boosts the size of the talent pool from which they can hire. Improvements in digital technology such as translation software, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality will make it easier for workers to work across borders. While there are still many barriers to telemigration, such as cybersecurity risks, insurance, and tax liabilities, an increasing number of jobs will be borderless as the trend towards digitalisation increases.

The pandemic has led to a much wider adoption and advancement in collaboration and management tools, allowing colleagues to work closer together across borders and removing any geographical barriers. The world is struggling with acute skills shortages and as organisations are unable to source skills locally, telemigration provides businesses the opportunity to tap into labour forces further afield, giving them access to a larger global talent pool. There are several sectors in which borderless jobs are relevant to plug skills gaps, including the technology sector. There are potential barriers to this that organisations will need to overcome, such as cyber security, embedding their culture remotely, and ensuring they comply with local labour laws. But if these can be navigated, then the potential for accessing talent pools that encompass the globe is huge.

3. The disruption caused to the international supply chain during the pandemic has led some to re-evaluate how it will operate in the future.

For example, we may see a rise in:

- reshoring, where organisations relocate production back to the countries from which they originate;
- regionalisation, where firms attempt to recreate global supply chains within regions;
- diversification, where organisations expand the number of suppliers to counteract potential disruption; and
- replication, where organisations manufacture close to the market.

These changes to supply chains are likely to be accelerated by advances in automation and digitalisation. These will make it cheaper and more efficient to adapt. Each option has different implications for the distribution of jobs across the globe and the types of skills in demand from workers.

As the labour market moves into a post-pandemic era, employers and employees alike must adapt to the potential longer-term implications of the crisis. Current and future cohorts of highly skilled workers will be subject to the effects of these three structural shifts — working from home, telemigration, and new global supply chains. The reshoring of manufacturing roles will see the rise in demand for particular skills in parts of the world, local labour markets need to ensure that they can meet this demand with the necessary skills. Employers can work with local governments and educational institutes to make sure that they know what skills will be needed and which are a priority. As a short term solution, governments need to ensure that businesses have the ability to attract foreign talent to plug local skills gaps.



Changes to supply chains are likely to be accelerated by advances in automation and digitalisation.

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