

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON
Women in the Four County Region
DECEMBER 2021



Complete Analysis

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

4

INTRODUCTION

5

LOCAL LABOUR MARKET CHARACTERISTICS

6

GENDER ANALYSIS

7

AGE COHORT ANALYSIS

16

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

24

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ANALYSIS

30

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN SURVEY

34

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

36

RECOMMENDATIONS

37

CONCLUSION

40

APPENDIX A

41

APPENDIX B

42

Acknowledgements

The Four County Labour Market Planning Board (Planning Board) is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that specializes in providing labour market information for Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties (Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region).

We would like to express our gratitude to the stakeholders who provided advice and support for this project. Members of the committee include Bruce County Income & Support Services, Community Foundation Grey Bruce, Conestoga Career Centre, Grey Bruce Public Health, Grey County Social Services, Huron Perth Children's Aid Society, Huron Perth Public Health, Partners in Employment, Perth County Housing and Social Services, United Way of Bruce Grey (Poverty Task Force, Children's Alliance), United Way Perth Huron (Social Research and Planning Council), VPI Working Solutions (Walkerton), and YMCA Owen Sound Grey Bruce Employment Services. We also want to thank childcare services in Bruce County, Grey County, and Huron County for their consultations.

This report relies on the quantitative data available from Statistics Canada, primarily through the Labour Force Survey and Employment Insurance data.

*The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.
This publication was prepared by Tingting Zhang.*

Introduction

In March 2020, Canada introduced lockdowns and other public health measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. From the demand side, many businesses shut down or closed temporarily, especially those with close customer contact. As a result, more than 3 million Canadian workers lost their jobs or had their working hours reduced in March 2020.¹ From the supply side, closing of childcare and schools pushed parents, predominantly mothers, to stay at home to take care of their children and families. The availability of workers was also greatly affected by the travel restrictions and potential illness from COVID-19. Therefore, both labour demand and supply have been negatively affected by the pandemic, which was unprecedented in recent times. At the time of this publication in December 2021, the pandemic continued, and the possibility of future business closures and public health restrictions is likely. This report summarizes the impact of COVID-19 between February 2020 and October 2021, at which point the crisis continues to significantly impact the labour market.

Many studies have suggested that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on women's employment. According to the RBC report, "The pandemic has pushed women's participation in the labour force down to its lowest level in three decades, with 1.5 million women losing their jobs in the first two months of the recession."² Labour Market Information Council also indicated that "Women accounted for 51% of the initial job losses compared to 17% in previous recessions. More than 70% of the job losses among women during this period were in lower-earning occupations."³ Furthermore, women are overrepresented in the hardest hit sectors such as food and accommodation services that have been slow to recover as the economy reopens.⁴ Considering the fact that women often carry greater care and domestic responsibilities, they were trying to work full-time and parent full-time, the longer the pandemic continued, it became increasingly unsustainable for most. The travel restrictions, stay-at-home quarantines, school and daycare closures, and the increased risks faced by elderly relatives can all impose additional burdens on women. With these negative impacts on the female workforce, employers providing flexible workplace policies can help women stay engaged in the labour market under these unusual circumstances.

1 "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Canadian Labour Market." Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020028-eng.htm>.

2 "Pandemic Threatens Decades of Women's Labour Force Gains." RBC Economics. July 16, 2020. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/pandemic-threatens-decades-of-womens-labour-force-gains/>.

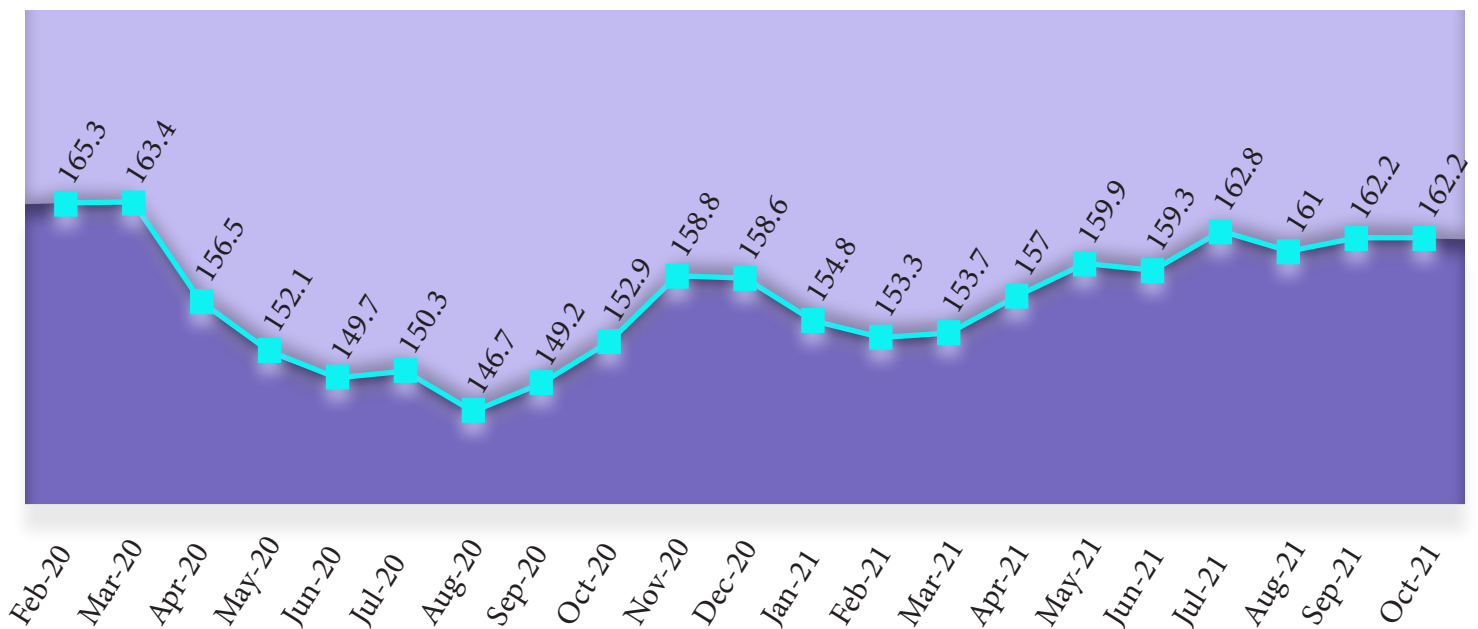
3 "Women in Recessions: What Makes COVID-19 Different?" Labour Market Information Council. March 2021. <https://lmi-cimt.ca/publications-all/lmi-insight-report-no-39/>.

4 "Pandemic Threatens Decades of Women's Labour Force Gains." RBC Economics. July 16, 2020. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/pandemic-threatens-decades-of-womens-labour-force-gains/>.

Local Labour Market Characteristics

In March 2020, when the pandemic hit the economy and the first lockdown was introduced, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region (ER) immediately lost 6,900 workers between March and April (Chart 1). This loss continued until the total employment reached its lowest at 146,700 in August 2020, a decrease of 18,600 compared to February 2020 (pre-pandemic). The region then experienced a steady recovery between August and November 2020. However, the employment recovery has been unstable due to consecutive lockdowns and stay-at-home orders to combat the virus and its variants. When the second wave of COVID-19 hit the economy in December 2020 and January 2021, total employment decreased from 158,600 in December 2020 to 153,300 in February 2021, a drop of 5,300 workers. This time, the impact of the pandemic was less severe compared to during the first wave. After February 2021, employment began to increase over time. In April and May of 2021, the third wave of COVID-19 occurred and public health restrictions were tightened again. However, the region did not suffer another drop in employment until June 2021 when health measures were lifted. Despite a decrease of 600 workers, the impact of the third wave on the labour market was much milder compared to the previous waves. As vaccination rates increased and the province entered its multi-staged reopening path, total employment began to recover. As of October 2021, total employment in the region was 162,200, which was 3,100 fewer than the pre-pandemic level.

CHART 1: TOTAL EMPLOYMENT, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X 1,000)



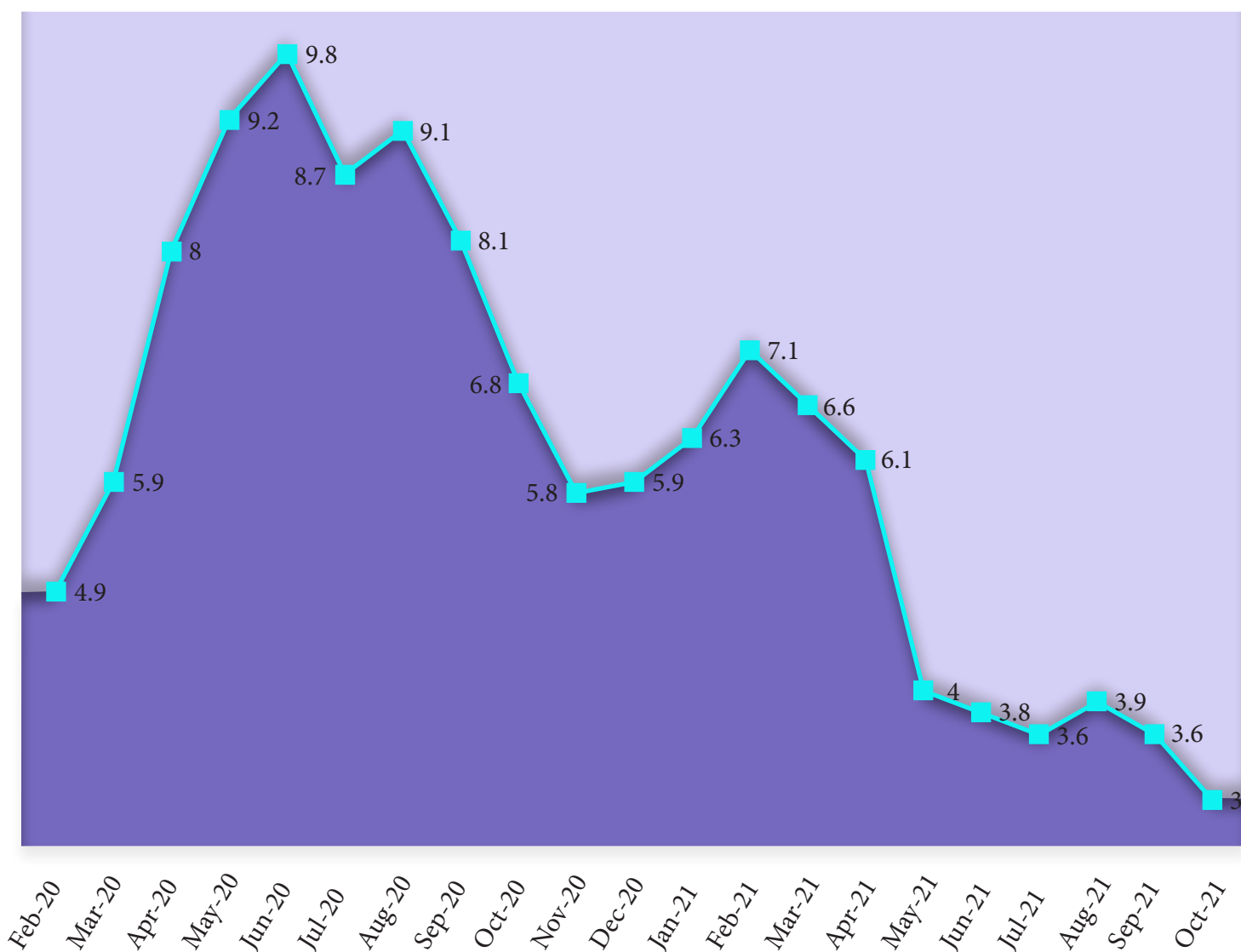
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Gender Analysis

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY SEX

In the past 20 months, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER saw its unemployment rate rise from 4.9 percent in February 2020 to the peak of 9.8 percent in June 2020 (Chart 2). When public health restrictions were eased in June 2020, many businesses started to reopen and rehire their employees. After August, the local unemployment rate gradually decreased, dropping to 5.8 percent in November. Due to the reintroduction of containment measures to combat the second wave of the pandemic in December 2020, the unemployment rate started to increase again to 7.1 percent in February 2021. The unemployment rate continually decreased in the following months of 2021, reaching 4 percent in May 2021 which was below the pre-pandemic level. Since then the unemployment rate has continued to decrease and remained the lowest in Ontario. As of October 2021, at the time of this writing, the unemployment rate in the region was 3 percent, the lowest since the pandemic's onset.

CHART 2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA, BOTH SEXES (15 YEARS AND OVER)

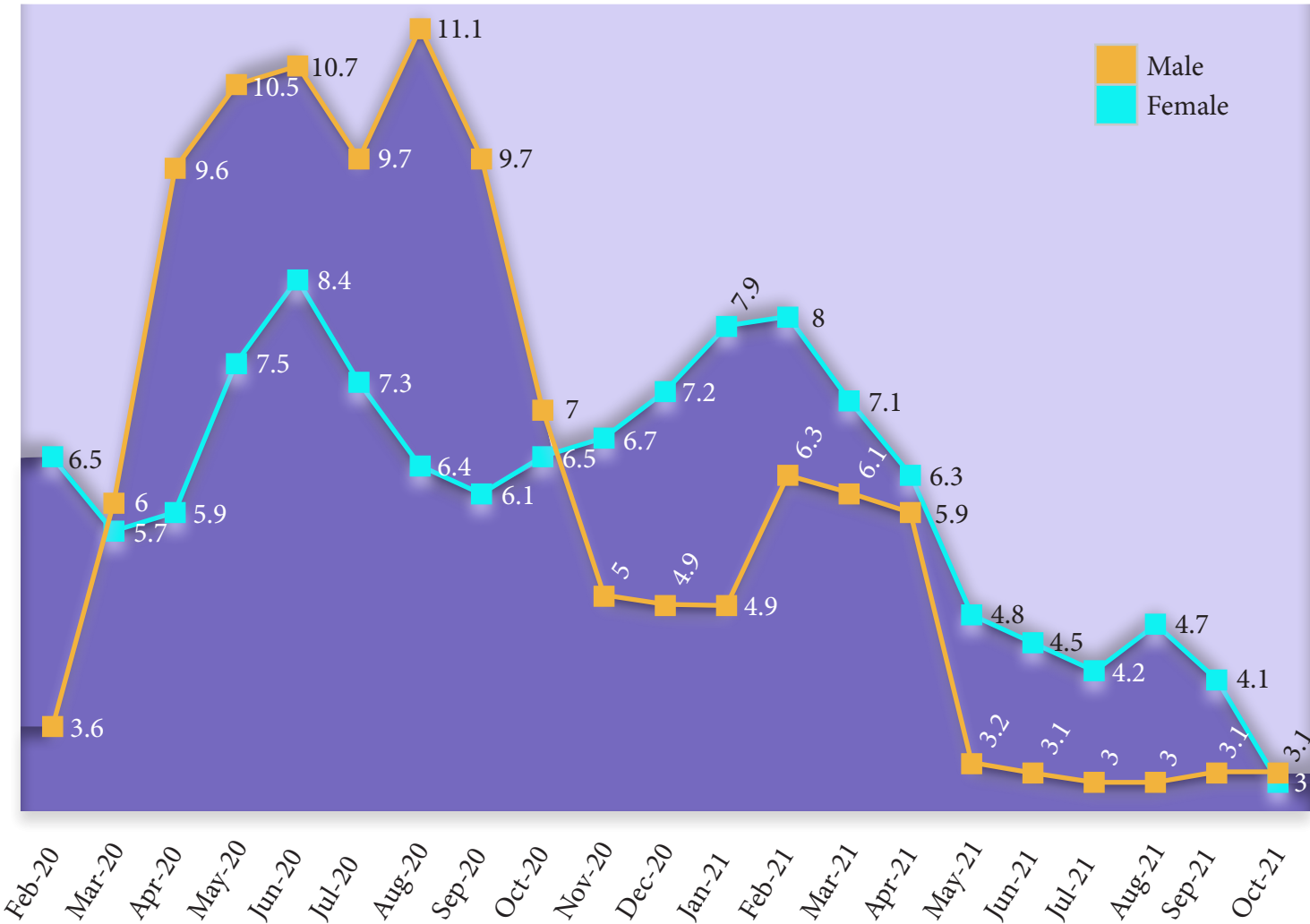


Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

When divided by gender (Chart 3), the unemployment rate was higher for females than for males in February 2020. Between March and October 2020, female unemployment rate remained lower than that of males. This may imply that there were not many female workers looking for jobs during this time period. Interestingly, the male unemployment started to drop after August 2020. In October 2020, it dropped to a level that the female unemployment rate surpassed the male unemployment rate and remained this way until October 2021. This high female unemployment rate suggests a relatively higher availability of female workers in the labour market. It was possibly caused by the second wave of COVID-19, where female predominant service sectors were adversely affected again by COVID-19. Also, stress associated with COVID-19 started to build up for working moms when schools turned to online teaching in September 2020. All of these would highly likely affect women’s career choices. When the second wave ended in February 2021, the female unemployment rate started to decrease. Even with the third wave of the pandemic impacting the local market in April and May, the female unemployment rate continued to decrease to 3 percent in October 2021.

Changes in the unemployment rate, however, do not reveal the full extent of the crisis. The following sections will look at the employment numbers and not in labour force indexes by sex in order to fully capture the impact of the pandemic on the local labour market outcomes.

CHART 3: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (15 YEARS & OVER)



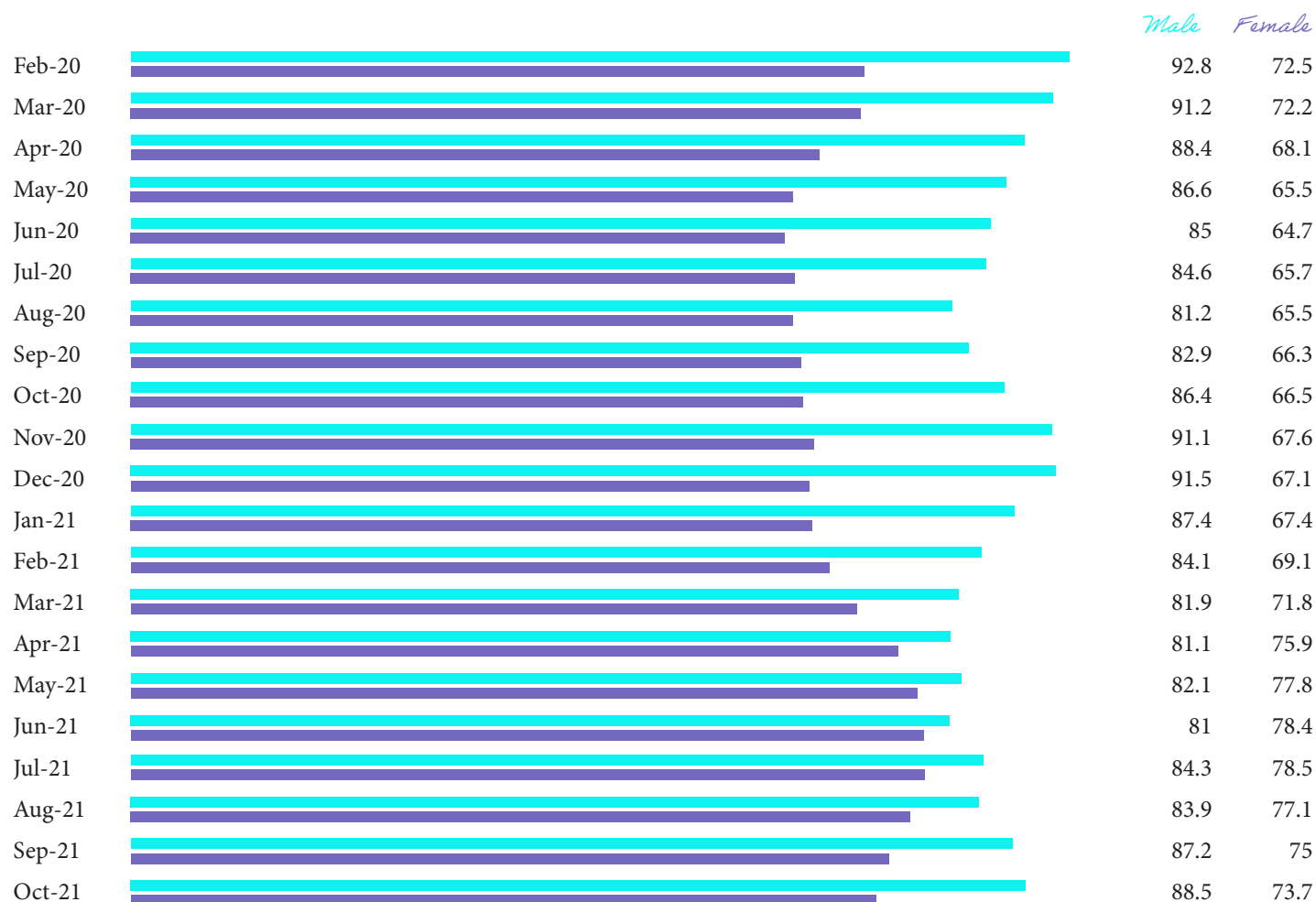
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

EMPLOYMENT BY SEX

Looking at employment by sex, it is clear that male employment has fluctuated more than female employment in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER. Between February 2020 and August 2020, both male and female employment experienced decreases and reached their lowest points. While male employment saw a sharp decrease of 11,600, female employment experienced a relatively small decrease of 7,000 during the same period of time (Chart 4). Beginning in August 2020, female employment slowly but gradually recovered with a slight drop in December 2020, possibly due to the second lockdown. Since then, women saw a quick rebound of employment in the spring of 2021, bringing their employment beyond the pre-pandemic level in April 2021 (75,900 vs 72,500). It reached the highest level during the pandemic at 78,500 in July 2021. Though it has dropped since then, female employment still remains higher than its pre-pandemic level. In October 2021, it was 1,200 (+1.7%) higher than February 2020.

Although we see women's employment fully rebounded from the pandemic, this does not reflect the whole story. National and provincial findings have indicated that women face a weaker recovery than men from the pandemic and many women have removed themselves from the labour force. This part of the story in our region will be explained in the "Not in Labour Force" section below.

CHART 4: EMPLOYMENT BY SEX, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X 1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

NOT IN THE LABOUR FORCE BY SEX

As we are aware, unemployment, employment, and not in the labour force together comprise the working population. While employment and employment rates measure workers who are counted in the labour force, such analysis only explain part of the story. This COVID-19 pandemic has uniquely impacted women and driven many of them to stay at home. As a result, many female workers dropped out of the labour market completely and were not counted in the labour force. This part of the story needs to be explained by the number of men and women who report being “not in the labour force” during the pandemic. Individuals who are not in the labour force are those people who are neither employed nor are they looking for work. They include individuals that are “students, homemakers, retired workers, seasonal workers in an ‘off’ season who were not looking for work, and persons who could not work because of a long term illness or disability.”⁵ This group can also include individuals who are unable to work due to illness, family or child care responsibilities. These data are captured in Chart 6.

Ever since the pandemic’s onset in March 2020, there were about 11,700 women added to the “not in the labour force” category from February to October 2020 in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER (Chart 5). This is a 23 percent increase in the number of women who reported they left the labour force during the same time period when 6.8 percent of women reported losing employment (Chart 4). From these data, we can see that the employment losses among women during the initial phases of the pandemic were more severe than what was seen from the lens of unemployment— people who still actively look for work.

In contrast to women, there were only about 3,000 men reporting they were not in the workforce between February 2020 and August 2020. Between August 2020 and December 2020, there were even fewer men added to the “not in the labour force” category (41,000 vs 35,900), implying that more men joined the labour force instead of leaving. This echoes the RBC report, where findings concluded that men “were picking up jobs at a faster rate than women amid the pressures and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic”⁶.

Between February 2020 and August 2020, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER saw a nearly 4:1 ratio of women leaving the labour force compared to men. In other words, when one man left the labour force, there were four women withdrawing from the workforce. In some months such as March to June 2020, women accounted for 100 percent of the increases in the number of people who are not in the labour force as there were fewer men who reported they were “not in the labour force” than the pre-pandemic level. Therefore, women were more likely to leave the workforce than men, which put them “at higher risk of long term job-separation and future wage penalties.”⁷

After October 2020, more women participated in the labour force, so the “not in labour force” index slightly decreased. However, it increased again when the second and third waves of COVID-19 hit the labour market. As a result, the employment recovery has been unstable and particularly weak among

5 “Not in the labour force.” Statistics Canada. June 2, 2021. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/ref/dict/pop101-eng.cfm>.

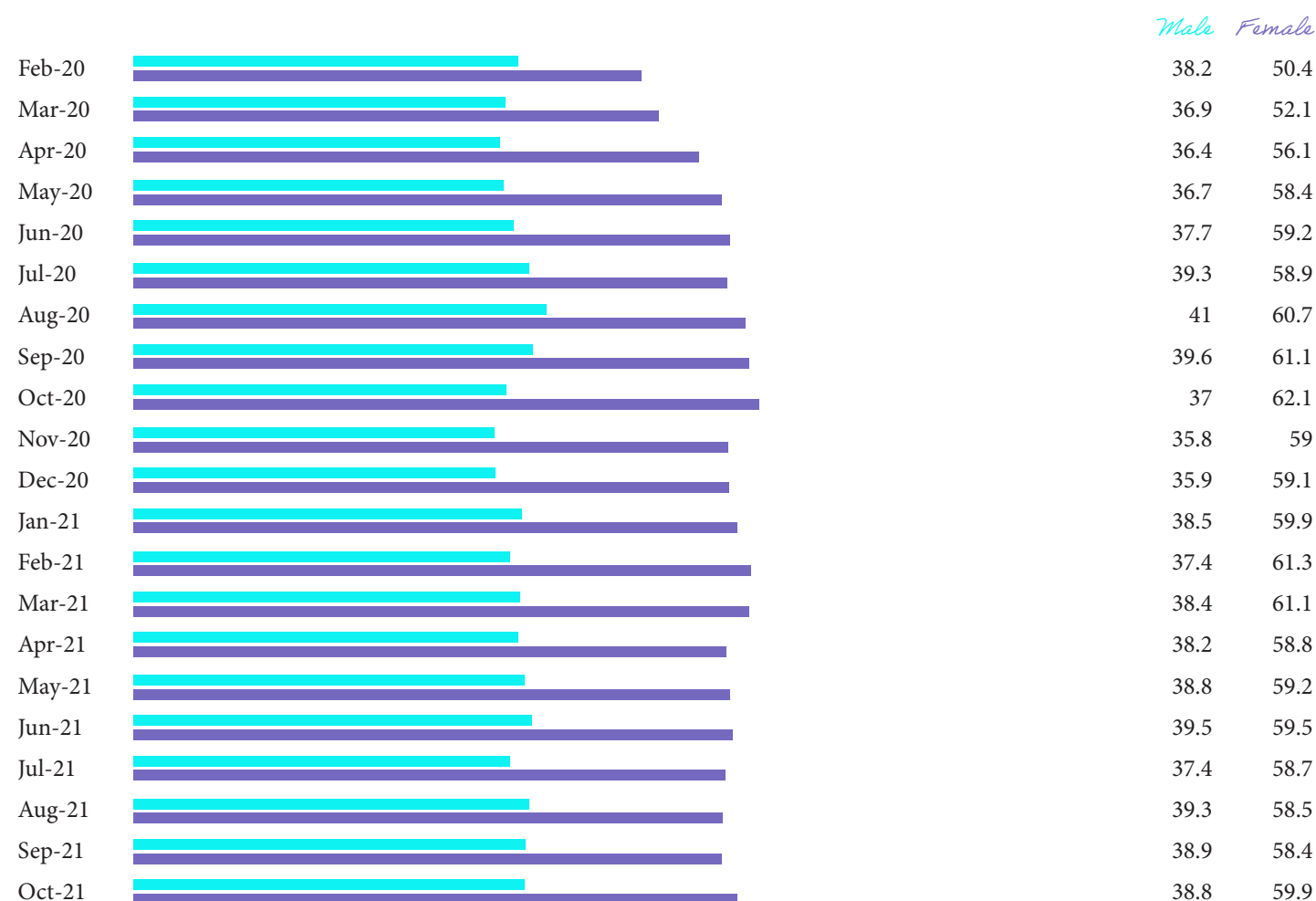
6 Desjardins, Dawn and Carrie Freestone. “Canadian Women Continue to Exit the Labour Force.” RBC Economics. November 19, 2020. https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/canadian-women-continue-to-exit-the-labour-force/?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=economics&utm_campaign=special+report

7 Ibid.

women. By October 2021, there were still 9,500 more women who reported not being in the labour force compared to the pre-pandemic level. Indeed, the number of women who are out of the labour force has increased 18.8 percent since February 2020.

In contrast, October 2021 only saw 600 more men who reported being not in the labour force. It remains unclear whether the women who left the workforce over the past 20 months were the same group of female workers. But one thing is clear, “The longer these women are out of the labour force, the greater the risk of skills erosion, which could potentially hamper their ability to get rehired or to transition to different roles as the economy evolves.”⁸ In the Industry section below, we will explain more about how sectors in which women are predominantly employed were negatively affected as a result of the pandemic and relevant public health measures.

CHART 5: NOT IN THE LABOUR FORCE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

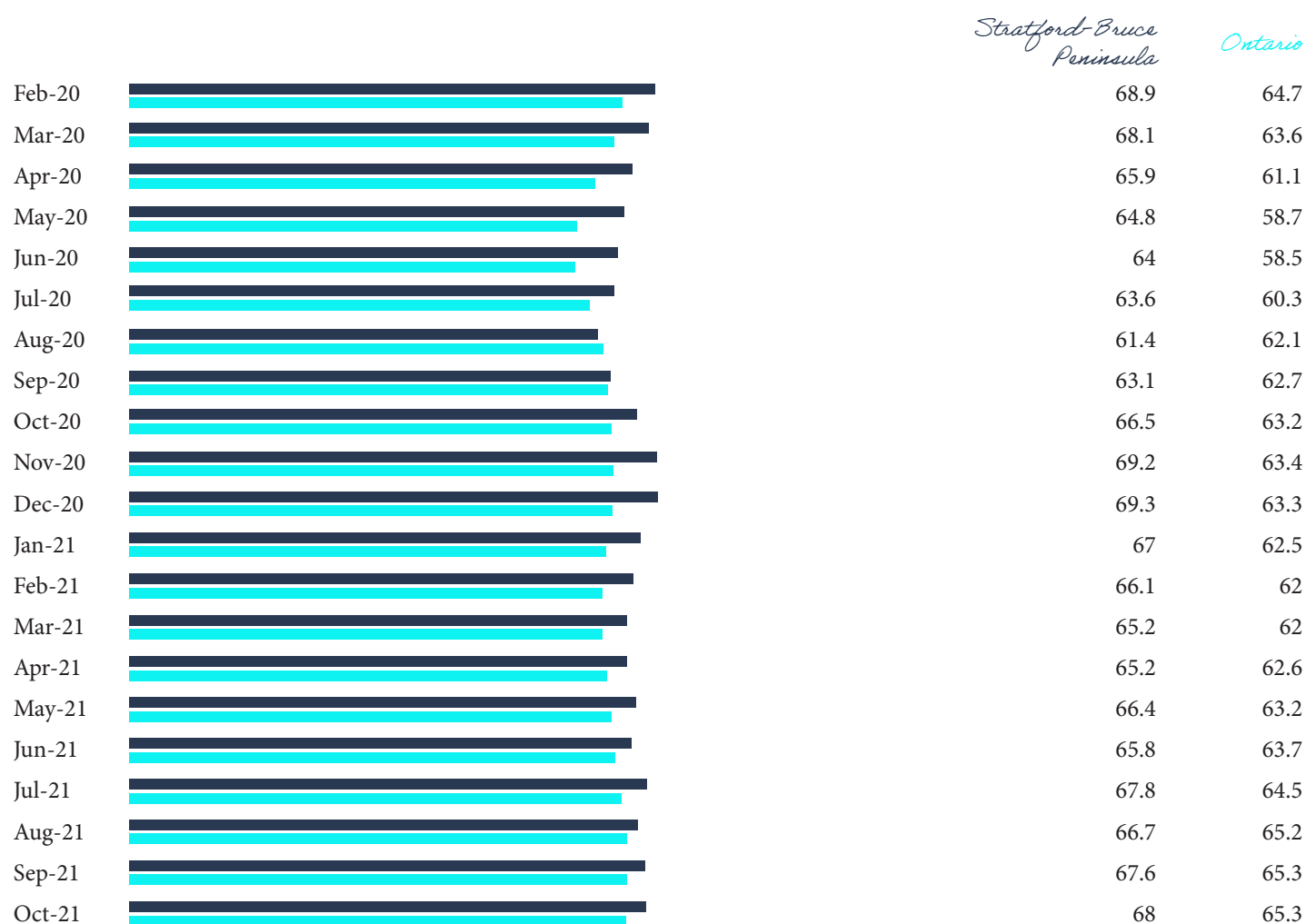
⁸ Desjardins, Dawn and Carrie Freestone. “COVID Further Clouded the Outlook for Canadian Women at Risk of Disruption.” RBC Economics. November 19, 2020. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/covid-further-clouded-the-outlook-for-canadian-women-at-risk-of-disruption/>

EMPLOYMENT RATES BY SEX

The employment rates (the number of persons employed expressed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over) by sex presented in Chart 6 echo the findings from the “Employment” section. During the first half of 2020, the employment rate of male workers in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER dropped from 68.9 percent to 61.4 percent, but recovered back to 69.3 percent in December 2020. With the impact of the second lockdown, it dropped again to 65.2 percent in April 2021. Then it started to increase in May even though there was a decrease in June which was possibly caused by the negative effect of the third wave. The October 2021 employment rate of male workers was 68 percent, 0.9 percent lower than the February 2020 benchmark.

Over the last 20 months, the employment rate of male workers in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER was always higher than that in Ontario, except for in August 2020. This indicates that our region has a higher proportion of males workers employed in our labour market.

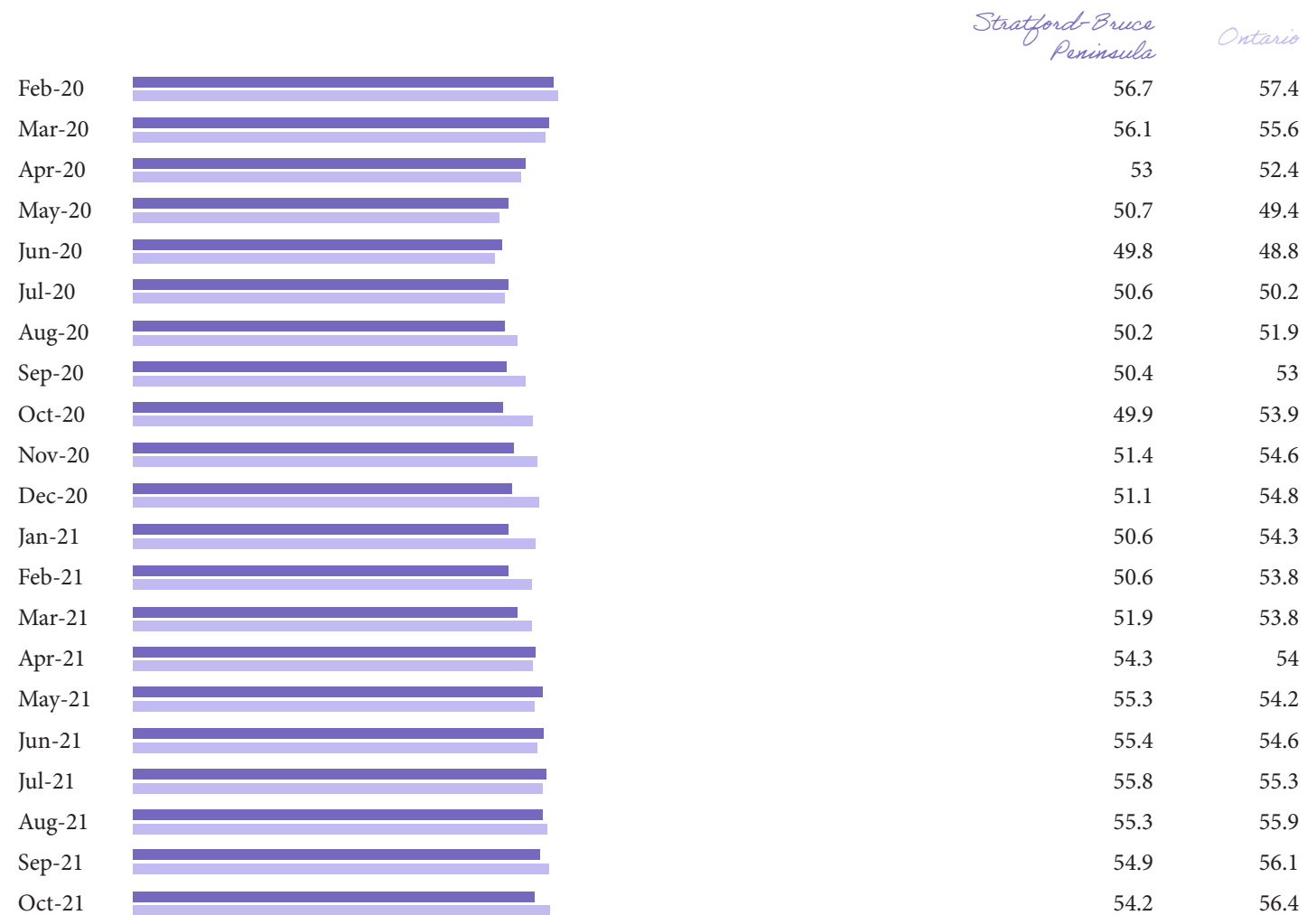
CHART 6: MALE EMPLOYMENT RATE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA AND ONTARIO (%)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Relative to the employment rate for male workers, the values for females in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER were about 11 percent lower initially in February 2020 (Chart 7). The gap widened up to 18 percent in December 2020. Over the past 20 months, the employment rate of female workers was relatively stable, within 6 percent fluctuation. Compared to the provincial level, the female employment rate in our region was slightly lower. This gap widened between August 2020 and April 2021, with the provincial level being no more than 4 percent higher than the local rate. After May 2021, the two rates became close. In October 2021, the employment rate for female workers in our region was 54.2 percent, 2.5 percent lower than its pre-pandemic level, and 2.2 percent lower than the provincial level.

CHART 7: FEMALE EMPLOYMENT RATE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA AND ONTARIO (%)



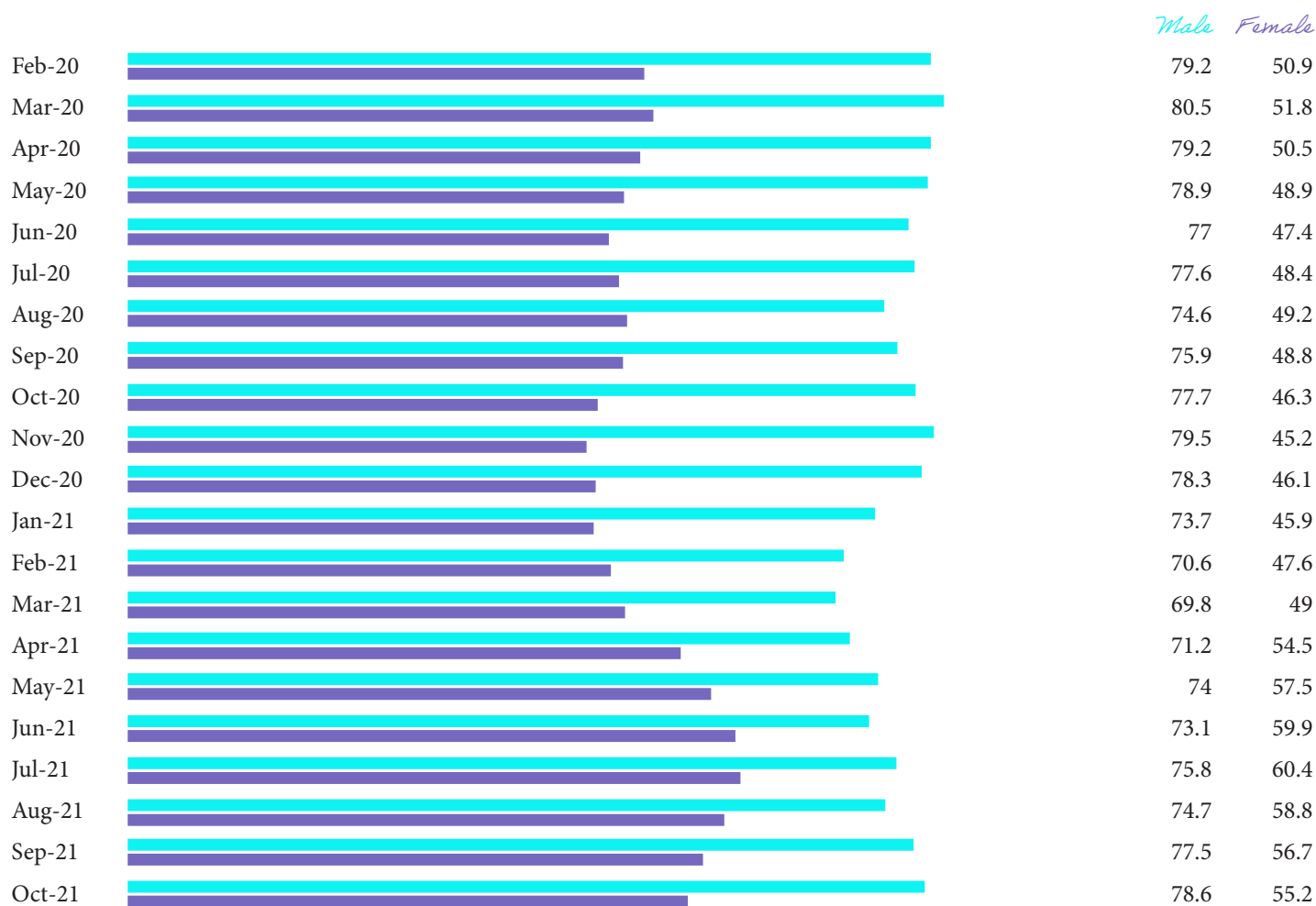
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY SEX

Charts 8 and 9 show the employment losses for women and men working full-time and part-time compared to their employment prior to the pandemic.

From Chart 8, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER saw a decrease of female full-time employment following the onset of the pandemic. The number of female workers working full-time decreased from 50,900 in February 2020 to 45,200 in November 2020, with a few months of recovery in between. While the second and third waves of COVID-19 hit the local labour market in early 2021, female full-time employment continued to recover steadily. It increased in January 2021 with 45,900 female full-time workers and rebounded beyond its pre-pandemic level in April 2021. While the male full-time employment still lagged behind due to the second wave of COVID-19, this indicates that women recovered at a faster rate than men in full-time jobs and showed the resiliency of the local labour market in facing the ongoing pandemic situation. The number of female full-time workers reached a high of 60,400 in July 2021, a gain of 9,500 workers (+18.7%) compared to its pre-pandemic level. Then it started to decrease and October 2021 saw 55,200 female full-time workers in the labour market. This was 4,300 higher than its pre-pandemic level. Differently, male full-time workers started to recover after March 2021 and reached 78,600 workers in October 2021, still 600 below its pre-pandemic level.

CHART 8: FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY SEX, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X 1,000)



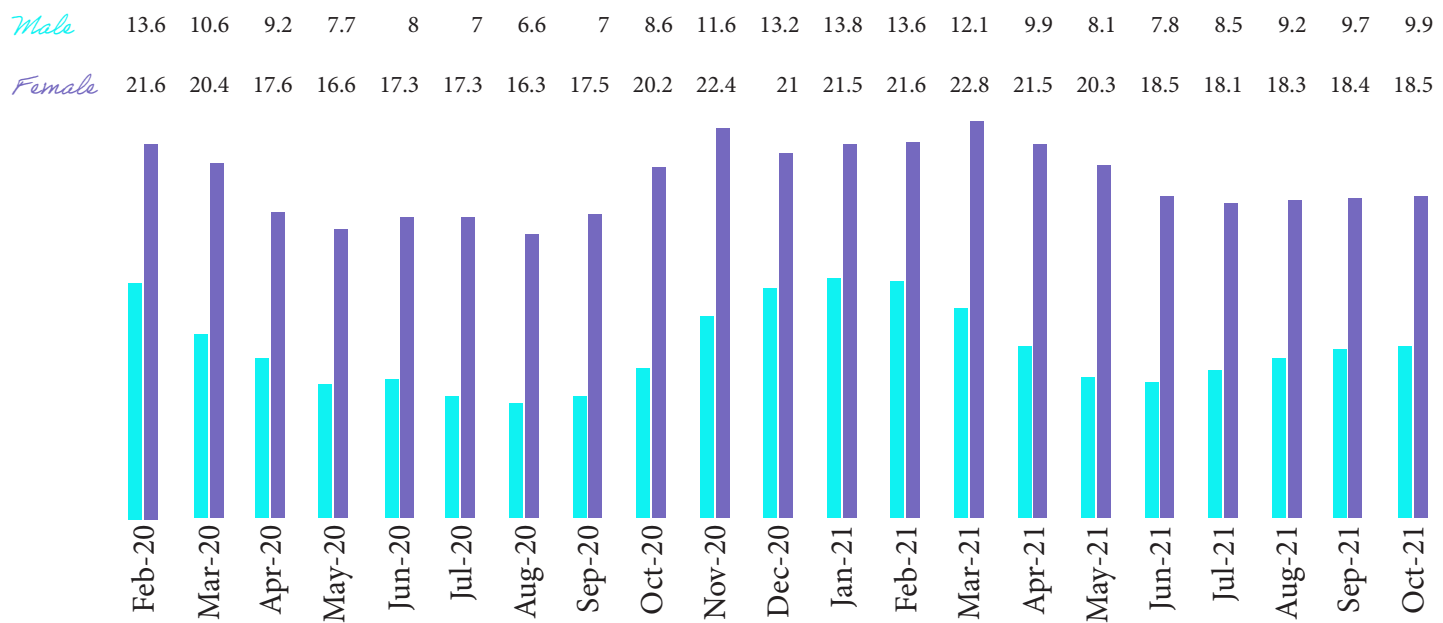
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Job losses for both male and female part-time workers have been more severe than full-time employment. As part-timers, work can be flexible while providing income at the same time, especially for women with family responsibilities such as taking care of children or elderly parents. This can explain why there are more female part-time workers than male. In the first few months of 2020, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER experienced a loss of 7,000 male part-time workers between February and August 2020, a 51 percent employment gap (Chart 9). Similarly, female part-time workers decreased from 21,600 in February 2020 to 16,300 in August 2020, a loss of 5,300 workers (-24.5% employment gap). This loss was possibly driven by the added responsibility of family and childcare falling on women’s shoulders during the lockdown.

By August 2020, both male and female part-time employment had recovered. Female part-time employment rebounded beyond the pre-pandemic level in November 2020, reaching 22,400 workers (800 higher than the pre-pandemic level). However, female part-timers were more sensitive to the second and third waves of the pandemic, resulting in decreases of employment in December 2020 and April 2021. As a result, in October 2021, there were 18,500 female workers employed part-time (3,100 below its pre-pandemic level). On the other hand, male part-time employment reached 9,900 in October 2021, which was 3,700 below the pre-pandemic level.

One should notice that some female job seekers voluntarily choose part-time work for its flexibility while some are left with no choice but starting a part-time job. As a result, more female part-time workers than male may indicate that women are more vulnerable to any changes to work environment as part-time work is less secure and more precarious. Also, the health authorities have placed restrictions on the movement of staff between healthcare and long-term care facilities in order to ensure safety and reduce transmission rates between facilities⁹. This has tremendously impacted women working in rural communities. For this reason, women who need to work many jobs to maintain their standard of living have been hit hard and their precarious employment situation may have deepened.

CHART 9: PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY SEX, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X 1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

9 Notes from the first advisory committee meeting for the project.

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY AGE COHORTS

As we know, COVID-19 not only negatively affected women, but also people with pre-existing vulnerabilities such as indigenous people, new immigrants, and people with disabilities. Unfortunately, local data on these demographic groups are not available. Even though such data is limited, we already know about some of the challenges they face. For example, we know that persons with disabilities have been more likely to report mental health concerns than the general population.¹⁰ They also often suffer from lack of financial support and insecure housing.¹¹ All of these barriers may prevent persons with disabilities to participating in the economy as workers.

With the Labour Force Survey data, we can analyze how COVID-19 influenced people in different age cohorts. Since the onset of the pandemic, both education and training institutions were greatly disrupted. Apprenticeships, skilled trades' placements and other programs that require experiential learning or work-based placements have been postponed or cancelled.¹² As a result, many youth missed on-the-job training which might affect their ability to complete their training and find a job later on. According to International Labour Organization, "entering the labour market during a recession can negatively affect young people's labour market outcomes for a decade or longer."¹³ Facing the recession caused by the pandemic, new graduates and young people will inevitably suffer from fewer job opportunities and long-lasting wage penalties. The Institute of Labor Economics indicates that "Long-term economic and social implications include weak labour force attachment or outright exclusion, poverty, and settling for lower-skilled, lower paid jobs, all of which can impact potential future earnings and the ability to pay back student loans."¹⁴ Moreover, "young people are more likely to report worsened mental health for themselves and their households than 30-49 year-olds."¹⁵

At the pandemic's peak, youth employment (15-24 years old) in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER declined by 22.3 percent (Chart 10), from 22,000 workers in February 2020 to 17,100 workers in June 2020. Since then, it gradually recovered, reaching beyond the pre-pandemic level in November 2020 with 22,600 workers. However, the second wave of COVID-19 hit youth employment again and caused decreases. After March 2021, youth employment started to rebound and reached the highest of 26,400 in July 2021. As of October 2021, there were 25,300 youth aged 15-24 years working in the labour market (+15%).

Different from youth, the initial impact on the core-working population (25-44 years old) was much more limited with a loss of only 800 workers between February and June 2020. However, the employment of this group continued to suffer from the pandemic in the third and fourth quarters of

10 "The Mental Health of People with Disabilities." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/features/mental-health-for-all.html>

11 Abel, Carolyn, and Jonathan Lai. "Disabled Canadians ignored in policies on COVID-19." Policy Options. October 2, 2020. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2020/disabled-canadians-ignored-in-policies-on-covid-19/>

12 Tobin, Steven and Arthur Sweetman. "IZA COVID-19 Crisis Response Monitoring Canada." Institute of Labor Economics. November 2020. https://www.iza.org/wc/files/downloads/iza_crisismonitor_countryreport_ca_202011.pdf

13 "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition." International Labour Organization. May, 27, 2020.

14 Tobin, Steven and Arthur Sweetman. "IZA COVID-19 Crisis Response Monitoring Canada." Institute of Labor Economics. November 2020. https://www.iza.org/wc/files/downloads/iza_crisismonitor_countryreport_ca_202011.pdf

15 "Young people's concerns during COVID-19: Results from Risks That Matter 2020." OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). July 6, 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/young-people-s-concerns-during-covid-19-results-from-risks-that-matter-2020-64b51763/>

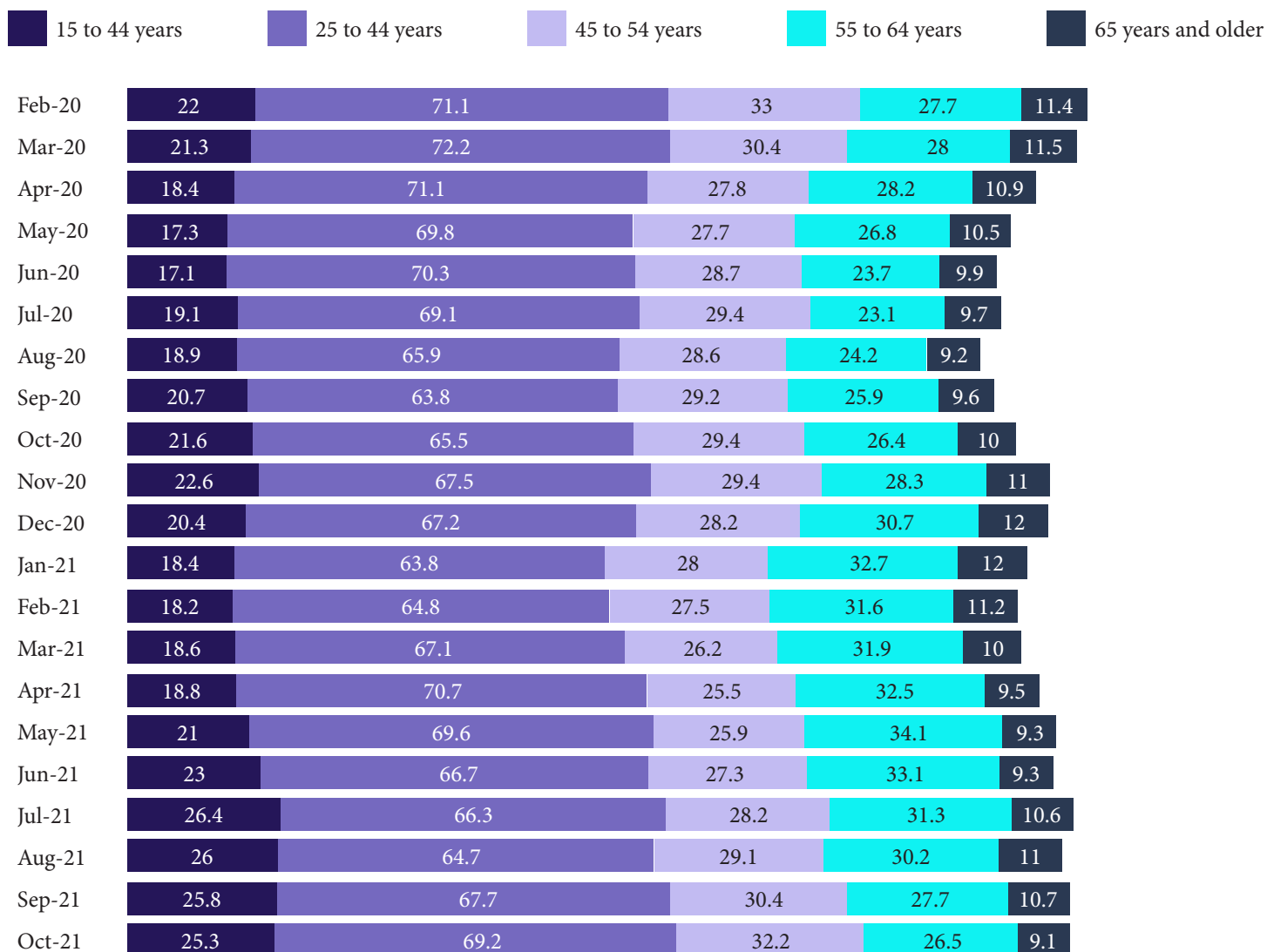
2020. It decreased to 63,800 in January 2021, a loss of 7,300 people compared to February 2020. In 2021, employment among core-aged workers gradually rebounded even with the minor impact of the third wave of COVID-19. The current level of employment for core-aged workers was 69,200 (-2.7% employment gap in October 2021).

Among all age groups, employment for people aged 45-54 dropped the most in the beginning of the pandemic. In the first two quarters of 2020, its employment decreased by 4,300 from 33,000 in February to 28,700 in June. In the third and fourth quarters of 2020, employment among 45-54 years old decreased by another 500. When entering 2021, it continued to decrease to the lowest record of 25,500 in April 2021. Then, employment of workers aged 45-54 recovered and reached 32,200 in October 2021 (only 800 away from the pre-pandemic level).

Interestingly, employment among people aged 55-64 increased the most from the pandemic. Its employment suffered from a loss of 4,000 in the first two quarters of 2020. However, it quickly recovered in the third and fourth quarters and reached beyond the pre-pandemic level in December 2020 (30,700 compared to 27,700 in February). In 2021, employment for this age group continued to rise, reaching 34,100 in May 2021, which was 6,400 higher than its pre-pandemic level. One possibility for such an increase could be that people aged 55-64 were the early recipients of COVID-19 vaccines, thus more confident in working in the labour market than other age groups. From June 2021, however, employment of people aged 55-64 years old started to decrease as other age groups joined the market and increased the competition. As of October 2021, there were 26,500 workers aged 55-64 in our region (1,200 fewer than February 2020).

Similarly, employment among people aged 65 years old and over first decreased due to the pandemic and then it rebounded in the third and fourth quarters of 2020. In 2021, this age cohort had fewer and fewer people working. The employment level for people aged 65 years old and over in October 2021 was 9,100 (2,300 below its pre-pandemic level). It is possible that other age groups (such as people aged 25-44 and 55-64) started to get vaccinated and return to the job market. As a result, there were job replacements between these generations. Another possibility for this decreased employment is that people aged 65 years old and over may have chosen to retire early and stay at home for safety and health reasons as COVID-19 variants were developing.

CHART 10: EMPLOYMENT BY AGE, BOTH SEXES, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA
(X 1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

FEMALE EMPLOYMENT BY AGE COHORTS

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected women in all age groups. For young women aged 15-24, employment immediately dropped by 1,300 between February and June 2020 as a result of COVID-19. Some female workers were negatively affected due to cancellations and delays of WIL programs or childcare burdens. However, employment among young women quickly rebounded to the pre-pandemic level in July and August 2020 and continued to increase until reaching a high of 9,500 in November 2020 (1,200 more workers compared to February 2020). Then the second wave of COVID-19 brought the female youth employment down to 6,800 again in January 2021. With two months' recovery, female workers aged 15-24 increased to the pre-pandemic level in March 2021 and continued to increase to 15,600 in July 2021. This 87 percent employment increase (compared to February 2020) was likely caused by the seasonality of summer service jobs and more relaxed health measures. With many youth returning to school in September, the employment level of female youth decreased and there were 13,000 female youth working in our region in October 2021 (4,700 higher than the pre-pandemic level).

Women aged 25-44 tend to shoulder a heavier burden with childcare and homeschooling. According to the RBC report, "In the last year, 12 times as many mothers as fathers left their jobs to care for toddlers or school-aged children."¹⁶ This is consistent with our findings from Chart 11— employment among women aged 25-44 suffered from losses in 2020. After January 2021, however, employment of this age group rebounded at a fast speed. It exceeded the pre-pandemic level in February 2021 and continued to increase until the third wave slowed it down. The current employment level of women aged 25-44 was 33,400 as of October 2021 (+7.1%).

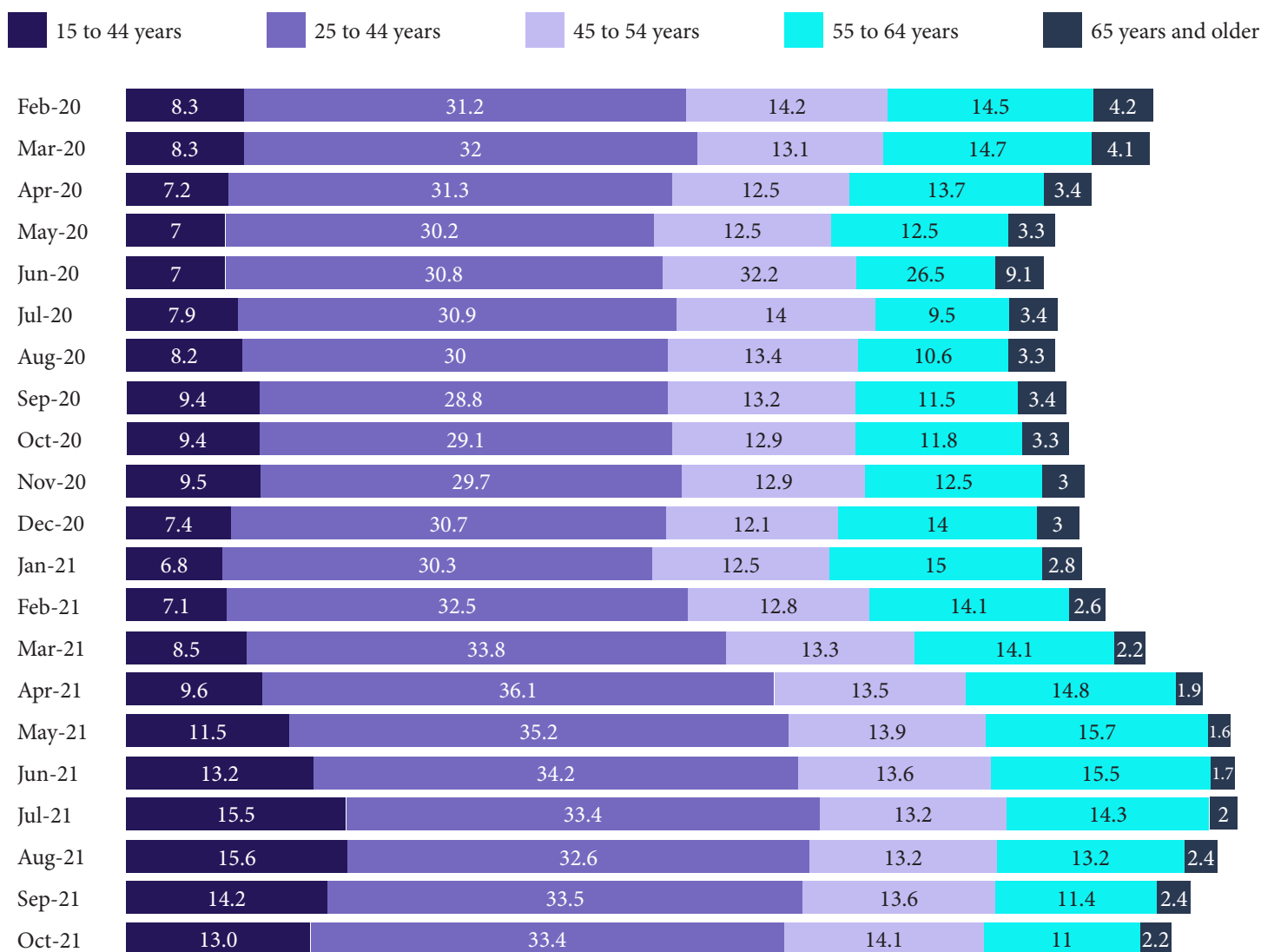
Among women aged 45-54, employment decreased first as a reaction to the first lockdown and health measures. Then it recovered slowly as consecutive lockdowns in 2021 hindered full recovery. In July 2021, there were still 1,000 female workers in this age cohort below the pre-pandemic level. However, it increased in the following months and reached almost pre-pandemic levels by October 2021.

For women aged 55-64, employment suffered the most due to the initial impact of the pandemic. A loss of 5,000 workers (-34.5%) was seen between February and June 2020. Nevertheless, it rebounded steadily even though the second and third waves of COVID-19 took place in 2021. The current employment among women aged 55-64 was 11,000 in October 2021, 3,500 workers below its pre-pandemic level.

Employment among women aged 65 and over experienced a drop of 900 workers in the first 3 months of the pandemic. While there was some recovery, the second and third waves of COVID-19 also had a negative impact on this group of workers. As a result, there were only 1,600 female workers aged 65 years and over in May 2021 (-61.9% compared to February 2020). After June 2021, it recovered and reached 2,200 in October 2021. But still, this was 2,000 below its pre-pandemic level, almost halved.

¹⁶ Desjardins, Dawn and Carrie Freestone. "COVID Further Clouded the Outlook for Canadian Women at Risk of Disruption." RBC Economics. March 4, 2021. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/covid-further-clouded-the-outlook-for-canadian-women-at-risk-of-disruption/>

CHART 11: EMPLOYMENT BY AGE, FEMALES, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X 1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY AGE COHORTS

Compared to February 2020, full-time workers increased the most in the 15-24 age cohort with a gain of 4,900 workers. People aged 25-44, however, experienced the most loss with 1,500 workers between February 2020 and October 2021. Over the past 20 months, workers among 65 years and over have been relatively unchanged.

For male full-time workers, the biggest loss came from the 25-44 age cohort with 3,900 fewer workers compared to February 2020. In the meantime, males among 45-54 experienced the most gain with 1,900 more full-time workers. In contrast, the number of female youth (aged 15-24) working full-time increased the most (+5,200) over the past 20 months. Females aged 55-64, however, decreased the most with 3,000 fewer workers in October 2021.

TABLE 1: FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY AGE, BOTH SEXES, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA (X1,000)

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Both sexes</i>			<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change
15 to 24 years	11.8	16.7	4.9	9.4	9.2	-0.2	2.4	7.6	5.2
25 to 44 years	63.3	61.8	-1.5	37.2	33.3	-3.9	26.1	28.5	2.4
45 to 54 years	27.3	29.5	2.2	16.2	18.1	1.9	11.1	11.4	0.3
55 to 64 years	22.2	20.2	-2	12.4	13.4	1	9.7	6.7	-3
65 years and over	5.5	5.6	0.1	4	4.5	0.5	1.6	x	N/A

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Note: X means that any data below 1,000 was suppressed for confidentiality concerns; Same as below.

Compared to February 2020, only people aged 55-64 experienced an increase of part-time workers. All other age cohorts experienced losses over the past 20 months to various degrees (Table 2). The biggest loss came from the 45-54 age cohort, with a loss of 2,900. Similarly, male part-time workers among 55-64 years old were the only group experiencing positive gains. Male part-timers aged 45-54 experienced the greatest losses (more than 1,600).

In contrast, all age cohorts of female part-timers experienced losses between February 2020 and October 2021. The biggest loss came from females aged 65 years and over, followed by youth aged 15-24 and women aged 55-64. It is not surprising to see youth part-timers experience losses as they often have more shifts cut and employers prioritize full-time employees over youth.

TABLE 2: PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY AGE, BOTH SEXES (X 1,000)

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Both sexes</i>			<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change
15 to 24 years	10.2	8.5	-1.7	4.3	3.1	-1.2	5.9	5.4	-0.5
25 to 44 years	7.8	7.3	-0.5	2.7	2.4	-0.3	5.1	4.9	-0.2
45 to 54 years	5.7	2.8	-2.9	2.6	x	N/A	3.2	2.8	-0.4
55 to 64 years	5.6	6.3	0.7	x	2	N/A	4.8	4.3	-0.5
65 years and over	5.9	3.6	-2.3	3.2	2.4	-0.8	2.7	x	N/A

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

FEMALE: NOT IN LABOUR FORCE BY AGE COHORTS

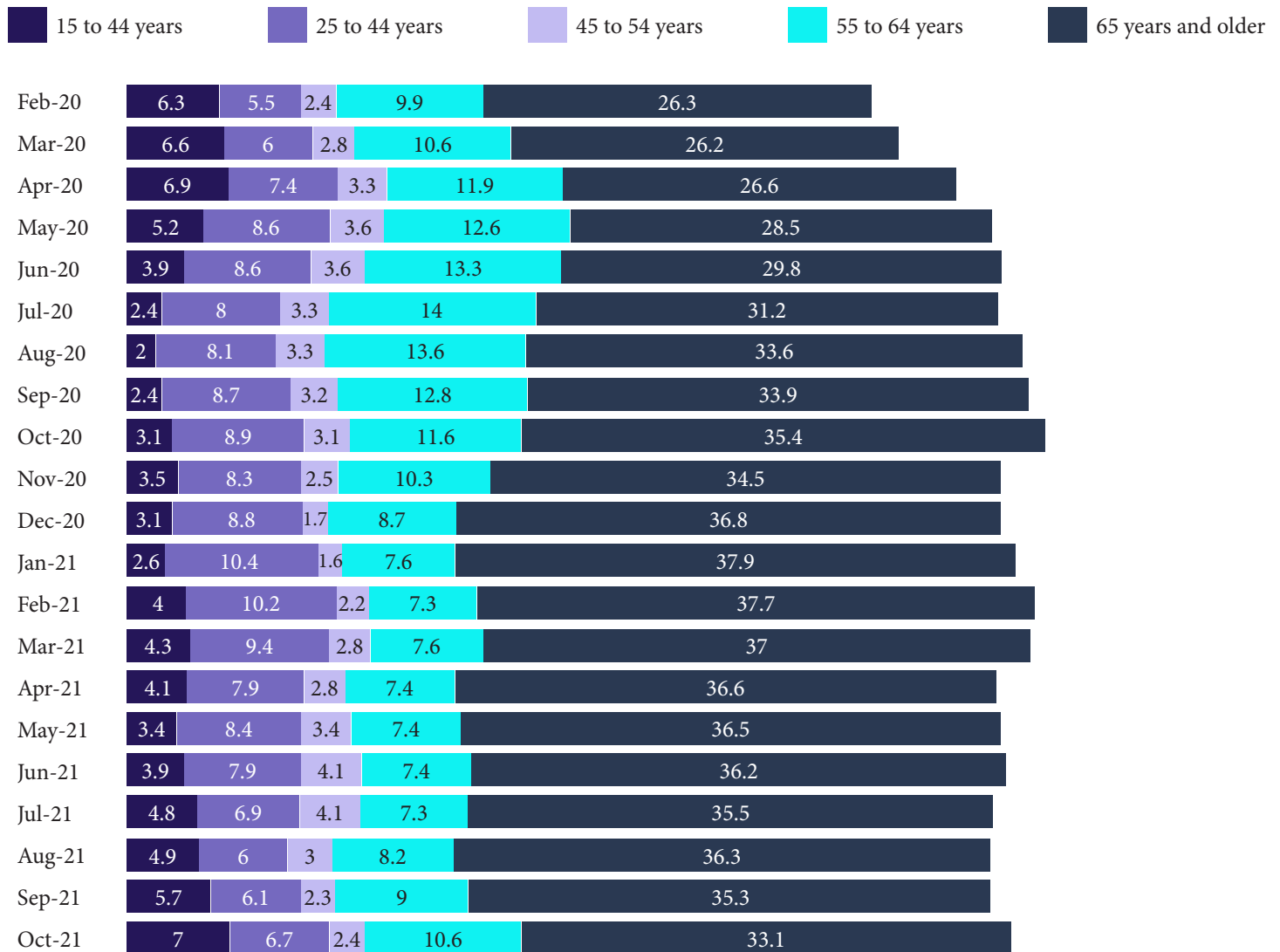
Compared to February 2020, all age cohorts of females experienced more women who reported being “not in labour force” in October 2021 except females aged 45-54 (Chart 12). The number of females aged 55-64 who reported being “not in labour force” was 2,400 in February 2020 which was the same as in October 2021.

However, women aged 25-44 experienced a different story. They were more likely than other age cohorts to abandon work or leave the job market. The research shows that “mothers with children under six only made up 41 per cent of the labour force in February and yet, they account for two-thirds of the exodus.”¹⁷ From Chart 15, the number of women aged 25-44 who reported being “not in labour force” increased from 5,500 in February 2020 to 8,600 in May 2020 (+56.4%). Though it decreased somewhat in the summer, with the second wave of COVID-19, this number increased again. There were 10,400 women aged 25-44 who indicated not being in the labour market in January 2021, almost doubled compared to the pre-pandemic level. Then it slowly decreased. As of October 2021, there were still 6,700 women aged 25-44 who were “not in labour force” (1,200 higher than February 2020).

Similar to males, females aged 65 years and over were the most likely to report being “not in labour force”. It increased gradually from 26,300 in February 2020 to 37,900 in January 2021. Since then, such number decreased but still remained higher above the pre-pandemic level. As of October 2021, there were 33,100 women who reported being “not in labour force” (6,800 higher than pre-pandemic level). With COVID-19 continuing to be a threat, this retreat is most likely related to health and safety concerns.

¹⁷ Desjardins, Dawn and Carrie Freestone. “COVID Further Clouded the Outlook for Canadian Women at Risk of Disruption.” RBC Economics. November 19, 2020. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/covid-further-clouded-the-outlook-for-canadian-women-at-risk-of-disruption/>

CHART 12: NOT IN LABOUR FORCE, FEMALES, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA
(X 1,000)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Industry Analysis


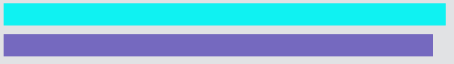




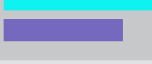
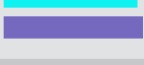

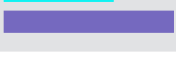
The impact of COVID-19 varies across industries. Not surprisingly, the service-sector was hit the hardest due to virus confinement measures and lockdowns. For example, accommodations and personal services had to close most often due to the consecutive lockdowns. In the following section, we aim to explore how COVID-19 has affected industries differently by gender.

In February 2020, the top 10 sectors by employment in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER were Construction, Manufacturing, Health care and social assistance, Retail trade, Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, Accommodation and food services, Professional, scientific and technical services, Other services (except public administration), Educational services, and Transportation and warehousing (Table 3). When COVID-19 hit the economy in March 2020, these sectors were negatively affected by various degrees in the first few months. However, Construction, Retail trade, and Accommodation and food service were mostly affected in the first three months. Twenty months later, employment in Construction and Accommodation and food service continue to lag behind the most compared to pre-pandemic levels, with losses of 4,800 and 4,900, respectively. Between February 2020 and October 2021, Accommodation and food service experienced the largest employment gap at negative 52 percent. Continued support is required to help these left-behind sectors recover.

On the other hand, employment has recovered in several sectors initially hit by the pandemic including Health care and social assistance, Transportation and warehousing, and Retail trade. Compared to February 2020, Health care and social assistance and Transportation and warehousing both rebounded well and beyond their pre-pandemic levels by adding 3,300 jobs.

Other industries, however, experienced different recovery patterns over the past 20 months. Overall, goods-producing sectors such as Agriculture have shown a degree of resilience to the pandemic due to their safety measures and exemptions from mandatory closures. Considering the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER is a rural area, its higher proportion of jobs in goods-producing sectors has contributed to a faster recovery of the labour market.

TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT CHANGES OF TOP 10 INDUSTRY, (X 1,000)
STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA ECONOMIC REGION

<i>Industry</i>		Feb-20	Oct-21	Employment Change, Feb 2020 to Oct 2021	Employment Percentage Change
Total, both sexes, all industries		165.3	162.2	-3.1	-2%
Construction		24.6	19.8	-4.8	-20%
Manufacturing		24.2	23.5	-0.7	-3%
Health care and social assistance		22.1	25.4	3.3	15%
Retail trade		16.5	17.4	0.9	5%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting		10.7	11.2	0.5	5%
Accommodation and food services		9.4	4.5	-4.9	-52%
Professional, scientific and technical services		8.1	6.5	-1.6	-20%
Other services (except public administration)		7.3	7.6	0.3	4%
Educational services		7.1	6.4	-0.7	-10%
Transportation and warehousing		6	9.3	3.3	55%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

FEMALE DOMINANT INDUSTRIES

As we know, the COVID-19 crisis most significantly affected many occupations and sectors that predominantly employ women. As a result, we calculated female share of employment for each sector in Appendix A. Industries with employment lower than 1,000 were suppressed for confidentiality concerns.

The female dominated industries are unsurprisingly Educational services and Health care and social assistance, with 89 percent and 84 percent of their workers as women, respectively. Accommodation and food services was also female dominated with 66 percent of workers being women, followed by Finance and insurance with 58 percent. COVID-19 restrictions unquestionably hit these service sectors harder because they tend to be more customer-facing. Among these female dominant sectors, only female employment in Health care and social assistance and Finance and insurance have fully recovered from the pandemic as of October 2021.

Educational services, which has the largest share of the female employment, experienced increases in female employment in March and April 2020 (Table 4). This could possibly be caused by the sudden shift to online learning models and schools had extra demand for teachers and staff to carry through the winter course delivery. Starting from May 2020, female employment gradually declined until it reached a low of 4,100 in October 2020. From November 2020, it recovered quickly and exceeded the pre-pandemic level, reaching 7,900 (+25%) in May 2021. Due to the online teaching model, the second and third lockdowns did not hit Educational services as hard as other sectors. From August 2021, however, female employment in this sector decreased again and reached 6,000 in October 2021 (only 300 below its pre-pandemic level).

Health care and social assistance was the second largest female dominated industry. Women who make up the majority of this industry are also frontline workers during this pandemic. As a result, female employment in Health care and social assistance generally increased between February and September 2020 due to the increasing demand for health workers. In this period, female workers in Health care and social assistance rose from 18,600 to 22,400, a gain of 3,800 (+20%). After September 2020, female employment slightly decreased but still remained at a higher level compared to pre-COVID. The current number of female workers in Health care and social assistance was 23,000 as of October 2021 (4,400 higher than the pre-pandemic level). While the employment level in Health care and social assistance remains high, the shortage of healthcare workers is always a concern. Since October 2021, the mandatory vaccination policy that has been implemented in healthcare and long-term care service has caused some staff who chose not to be vaccinated to leave their roles.¹⁸ This raises another issue related to the retention of healthcare staff. The almost two-year battle against COVID-19 has increased the workload of healthcare workers and staff are weary. This has made both retention and recruitment in this sector even more difficult.

Real estate and rental and leasing, which has the third largest share of female employment, experienced decreases in 2020. Female employment in this industry declined from 2,200 in February 2020 to below

18 "34 Staff at Grey Bruce Health Services Affected by Vaccine Policy." Grey Bruce this Week. Dec 8, 2021. <https://www.greybrucethisweek.ca/news/local-news/34-staff-at-grey-bruce-health-services-affected-by-vaccine-policy-3>.

1,000 in December 2020. In the first quarter of 2021, it recovered to above 1,000 until the third wave of COVID-19 brought it down to below 1,000 again in June 2021. Female employment in this sector remained below 1,000 until October 2021.

Women made up sixty-six of employment in Accommodation and food services in February 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic hit this sector the hardest due to its close contact with customers and public health measures. Female employment in this sector decreased from 6,200 in February 2020 to 3,900 in October 2020 (-59%). Then it rebounded beyond pre-pandemic levels in March 2021 even though the second wave of the pandemic hit the economy. The majority of job creation in Accommodation and food services happened in April and May of 2021, with 8,200 female workers in May 2021. This was mainly caused by the vaccination campaign that allowed many restaurants to reopen to indoor and outdoor dining subject to capacity restrictions. After summer, female employment in Accommodation and food services started to decrease and reached 2,900 in October 2021 (3,300 below its pre-pandemic level). This indicates that Accommodation and food services is still vulnerable to the pandemic restrictions and employment in this sector continues to be unstable.

Due to its nature of being administrative and more adaptable to remote work, female employment in Finance and insurance rose from 1,900 in February 2020 to 4,200 in August 2020 (+121%). With the second lockdown, female employment in Finance and insurance decreased the most in January and February of 2021. However, it quickly rebounded later and reached another peak in May 2021 with 4,700 female workers. Then it started to decrease and remained higher than the pre-pandemic level at 2,300 in October 2021 (400 above its pre-pandemic level).

TABLE 4: FEMALE-DOMINATED SECTORS IN ORDER, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA

<i>Month</i>	<i>Industry (2-digit NAIC)</i>				
	Educational Services	Health care and social assistance	Real estate and rental and leasing	Accommodation and food services	Finance and insurance
Feb-20	6.3	18.6	2.2	6.2	1.9
Mar-20	7.4	18.9	1.9	6.4	2.3
Apr-20	8.1	18.4	1.6	5.5	2.5
May-20	7.6	18.5	x	5.4	2.6
Jun-20	6.8	18.7	x	4.6	3.4
Jul-20	5.6	20.9	x	5	3.7
Aug-20	5.2	22	x	4.2	4.2
Sep-20	4.4	22.4	x	4.4	3.6
Oct-20	4.1	22.1	x	3.9	3.4
Nov-20	4.1	20.4	x	4.8	3.6
Dec-20	4.8	19.8	x	4.9	3.1
Jan-21	5	19.7	1.6	5	3
Feb-21	5.4	21.2	2.1	5.1	2.4
Mar-21	6.2	20.9	2.6	6.5	3.5
Apr-21	7.7	20.5	1.9	8.1	4.3
May-21	7.9	20.1	1.6	8.2	4.7
Jun-21	7.6	19.9	x	7.1	4.2
Jul-21	6	20.3	x	6.4	3.6
Aug-21	4.9	20	x	5.9	3.3
Sep-21	4.7	21.6	x	4.8	2.7
Oct-21	6	23	x	2.9	2.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Table 5 shows the Top 5 female sectors by employment size. With some of them being introduced in Table 4, Retail Trade was the second largest female industry in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER. Over the last 20 months, female employment in Retail Trade increased from 7,500 in February 2020 to 8,500 in October 2021, a gain of 1,000. Manufacturing, the third largest female industry in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula ER, experienced employment gains of 100 between February 2020 and October 2021.

TABLE 5: TOP 5 FEMALE SECTORS BY EMPLOYMENT SIZE, STRATFORD-BRUCE PENINSULA

<i>Industry</i> (2-digit NAIC)	Feb-20	Oct-21	Change	Percentage change
Health care and social assistance	18.6	23	4.4	24%
Retail trade	7.5	8.5	1	13%
Manufacturing	7.3	7.4	0.1	1%
Educational services	6.3	6	-0.3	-5%
Accommodation and food services	6.2	2.9	-3.3	-53%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures not seasonally adjusted.

Employment Insurance Analysis

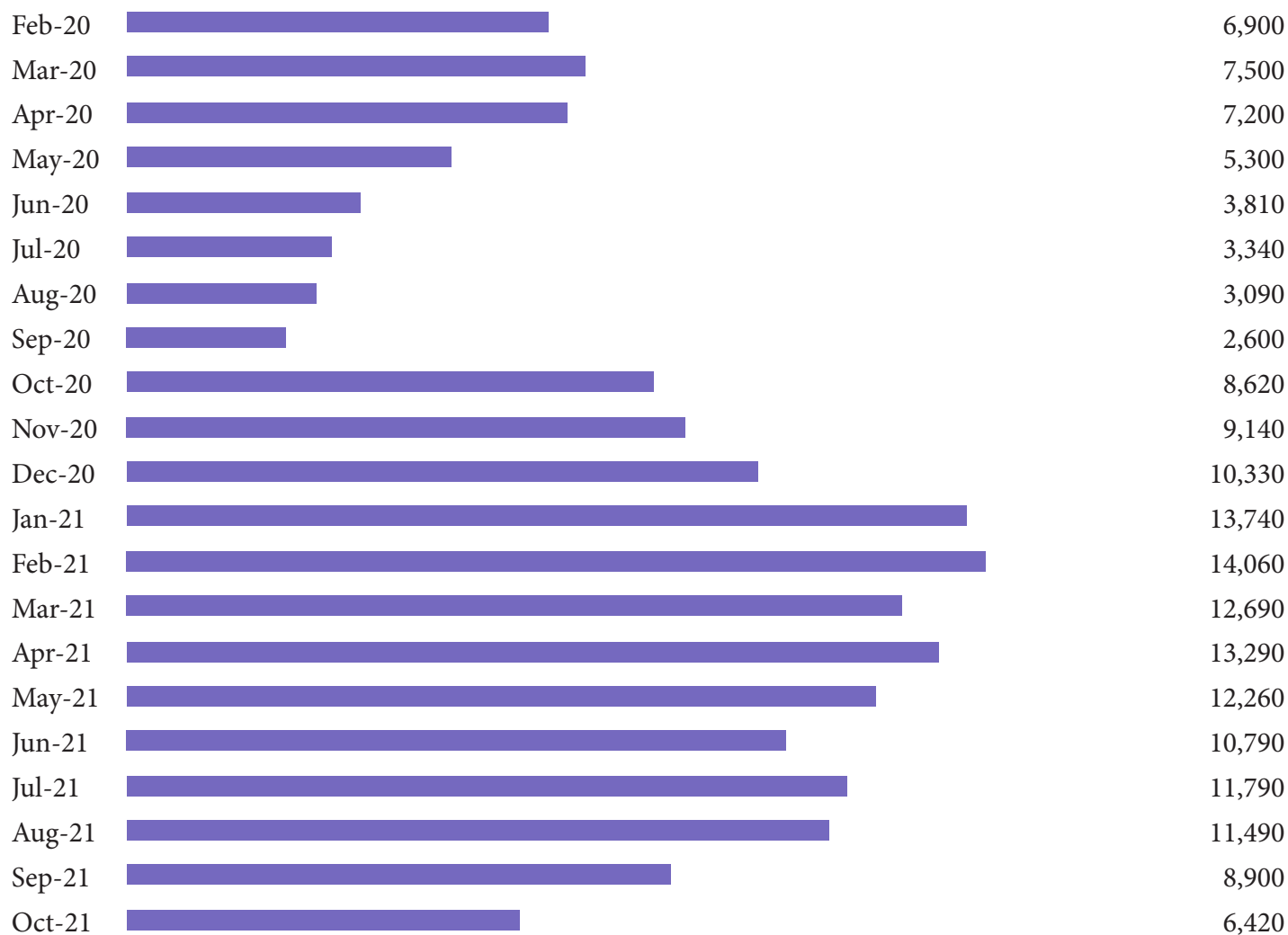
EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS BY SEX

When the pandemic hit the economy in March 2021, the federal government introduced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) that “provided financial support to employed and self-employed Canadians who were directly affected by COVID-19. Applicants received \$2,000 for a 4-week period (the same as \$500 a week), between March 15 and September 26, 2020.”¹⁹ As a result, people who were fired or experienced reduced hours of work due to the pandemic applied for CERB instead of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. Since they were eligible for CERB, they were not able to apply for EI benefits at the same time. Therefore, there were fewer EI beneficiaries from June to September 2020 (Chart 13). In October 2020 when CERB ended benefits, people started to transition back to EI, resulting in an increase of EI beneficiaries from 2,600 in September to 8,620 in October 2020, which exceeded the pre-pandemic level. The number of EI beneficiaries continued to increase after October 2020 and reached its maximum of 14,060 in February 2021, more than double compared to February 2020. This increase may suggest that the region still had significantly more people not working than it did the same time last year. In August 2021, there were still 11,490 EI recipients in the Four County region (4,590 higher than February 2020). After August, the number of EI recipients decreased over time. One possible reason is that most recipients who started to claim in October 2020 have reached the maximum number of weeks of receiving EI.²⁰ The government then introduced the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit to support individuals, which is available on October 24, 2021.

19 “Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) with CRA.” Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/apply-for-cerb-with-cra.html>

20 “EI regular benefits: How much you could receive.” Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-regular-benefit/benefit-amount.html>

CHART 13: ALL TYPES OF INCOME BENEFITS, FEB 2020 - OCT 2021
(FOUR COUNTY REGION)



Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Data

Table 6 shows the change in all types of income benefits between February 2020 and August 2021 by Sex (not seasonally adjusted). Compared to February 2020, the recipients of all types of income benefits increased among all age cohorts for both sexes except males aged 15-24 years old. There was a total increase of 200 male recipients (+5%) in contrast to 4,390 female recipients (+140%). Among female recipients, women aged 25-54 years have increased the most in numbers while women aged 55 years and over have increased the most in percentage with 287 percent between February 2020 and August 2021. From this table, we can see local females' dependency on financial support as a result of COVID-19. The concern for this situation would be how long they need to rely on EI benefits due to COVID-19 and how to help them get a job in the future.

TABLE 6: CHANGE IN ALL TYPES OF INCOME BENEFITS, FEB 2020 - AUG 2021 BY SEX
(FOUR COUNTY AREA)

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
15 years and over	200	5%	4,390	140%
15 to 24 years	-120	-23%	320	94%
25 to 54 years	130	6%	2,720	116%
55 years and over	210	19%	1,320	287%

Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Data

Table 7 shows the change in regular benefits (caused by permanent layoffs) between February 2020 and August 2021 by Sex. In August 2021, the number of people receiving regular EI benefits rose by 3,920 (+400%) among women, while there was an increase of 110 (+3%) among men. Women accounted for a larger proportion of regular EI recipients in all age groups except youth aged 15-24 years old, compared with their male counterparts.

Among female recipients, women aged 25-54 years accounted for the most increase by 2,330 (+400%) between February 2020 and August 2021, followed by aged 55 years and over (+376%). Youth aged 15 to 24 increased the least, but still accounted for a 270 percent increase. This implies that the need for female youth to claim for regular benefits was more than 2 times than last year due to COVID-19. At the time of building their career, these young women might need extra help and support to find a job.

TABLE 7: CHANGE IN REGULAR BENEFITS, FEB 2020 - AUG 2021 BY SEX
(FOUR COUNTY AREA)

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
15 years and over	110	3%	3,920	400%
15 to 24 years	-120	-24%	270	270%
25 to 54 years	40	2%	2,330	402%
55 years and over	190	19%	1,280	376%

Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Data

Table 8 shows the change in Other Benefits between February 2020 and August 2021 by Sex. According to the Government of Canada, EI benefits include regular benefits and other benefits such as sickness, fishing, maternity and parental, caregiving benefits and leave, and self-employed²¹. As a result, analysis on Other Benefits can tell how many men and women received benefits due to caring responsibilities and sick leaves.

21 Employment Insurance (EI) Program Statistics. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/statistics.html#s2>.

In August 2021, women accounted for a larger proportion of Other Benefits recipients in all age groups, compared with their male counterparts. Among female recipients, women aged 25-54 accounted for the most increase by 390 (+22%) between February 2020 and August 2021, followed by aged 15-24 (+21%). Due to widespread school closures and absence of affordable childcare services, the double burden of paid and unpaid work is intensifying for young women and working women, in particular those with small children. They are likely to spend more time on childcare, home schooling and housework, which leaves less time for them to work in paid employment. According to Kweilin Ellingrud, “Women who cut back their paid-work hours to accommodate family responsibility risk losing wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement, not to mention sleep. Taking a temporary leave of absence can also set women back. Studies have shown that women who take a year off from work after giving birth earn less women who don’t.”²²

TABLE 8: CHANGE IN OTHER BENEFITS, FEB 2020 – AUG 2021 BY SEX
(FOUR COUNTY AREA)

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
15 years and over	90	23%	470	22%
15 to 24 years	0	0%	50	21%
25 to 54 years	90	36%	390	22%
55 years and over	20	22%	40	33%

Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Data

²² Ellingrud, Kweilin. “What we lose when we lose women in the workforce.” McKinsey Company. June 3, 2021. <https://www.mckinsey.com/about-us/covid-response-center/inclusive-economy/what-we-lose-when-we-lose-women-in-the-workforce>.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Survey

The widespread closures of schools and the unavailability of childcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic created additional family burdens on working mothers' shoulders, not mentioning other care such as for elderly parents and sick relatives caused by the COVID-19 virus. The availability of other means of childcare provisions such as neighbors or babysitters also decreased during lockdowns with minimal social contact²³. Single moms and young moms with small children are likely to face more challenges with the double burden of paid and unpaid work. Women business owners and entrepreneurs also face additional pressures of childcare, home schooling and housework due to school closures²⁴. As a result, some working moms have chosen to leave the job market, as reflected by the previous LFS findings. In July 2020, we conducted a local survey and asked a few questions about women's work-life balance.

“It has been incredibly difficult to balance work-life when the two intersect with consistent interruptions throughout the day. Stress has been greatly increased during this time.”

A total of 103 valid surveys were completed from the Four County region. Women accounted for 96 percent of all responses. In terms of age, most responses came from the 35-44 age cohort as 31 percent, followed by the 25-34 age cohort as 21 percent and the 55-64 age cohort as 20 percent.

While asking how COVID-19 has impacted their work and life balance, 61 percent of respondents indicated that their mental health has been worsened. Fifty-eight (58) percent of respondents said life becomes more challenging with reduced outdoor activities/isolation, and 56 percent indicated remote working is a challenge. Most of our survey responses came from Bruce and Grey County, which means Huron and Perth County were not well represented. As a result, we also use the result of the “Rural Response to COVID-19” survey that was conducted in Huron and Perth County last year²⁵. We found that there was a “decrease in self-assessed mental health from before COVID to during COVID across all groups.” By sex, there was “a 67% increase in females who self-assessed their mental health as poor and a 71% increase in males who indicated their mental health was poor.” These findings are consistent to our survey findings that females are facing an increasing level of stress and anxiety during the pandemic.

“[It's] Extremely hard to work full time and homeschool/look after toddler children all at the same time. [The pandemic has] Impacted the quality of my work, mental health, quality of education my children ... It was very hard on our family.”

With several lockdowns throughout the last 20 months, local schools responded by switching courses to virtual learning and childcare services either closed or operated at a reduced capacity. As a result, many children stayed at home and required their parents' time and attention. This made it more difficult for

23 Alon, Titan, Matthias Doepke, Jane Olmstead-Rumsey, and Michèle Tertilt. “This Time is Different: the Role of Women's Employment in a Pandemic Recession.” Institute of Labor Economics. August 2020.

24 Cafley, Julie, Katie Davey, Tania Saba, Simon Blanchette, Ruby Latif and Valentina Sitnik. “Economic Equality in a Changing World: Removing Barriers to Employment for Women.” Future Skills Center. September 25, 2020.

25 Deacon, Leith. “Rural Response to COVID-19, Perth and Huron Counties” 2020.

working parents, especially mothers with young children and single parents, to fully participate in paid work. While asking how the closure of schools or childcare has affected their work arrangement and life since March 2020, about half of 104 survey respondents left a comment about their experiences while the other half either did not have children at home or have adult children. Most moms who responded indicated an increased level of stress while balancing full-time employment, home schooling, and childcare. Some respondents also commented that they could not accept job offers due to childcare accommodations. Even with an option of working from home, a few mothers indicated that home-schooling made it hard to maintain the same level of productivity as pre-COVID.

“More industries need to offer remote working, flex hours, and hybrid work situations. Paid ‘personal’ days should be added to annual vacation allotment to allow workers (P/T & F/T) to care for sick family members or take them to medical appointments.”

According to the Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements conducted by Statistics Canada, “Approximately 4 in 10 parents who were using regulated or unregulated child care in late 2020 reported having had difficulty finding child care.”²⁶ The most cited difficulties that parents faced were

“Recognize the commitment and sacrifices [women] have had to make during COVID. Encourage them to seek mental health support/counseling if needed prior to re-entering the labour market. Seek employment opportunities that will support their lifestyle and home life.”

finding care in their community, finding affordable care, and finding care during the pandemic. “Among parents who had difficulties finding child care and who were not currently using it, 41% had postponed their return to work.”²⁷ While most survey respondents indicated these challenges, a few of our survey respondents, however, said that their family got closer as they had this invaluable extra time with family.

In the survey, we also asked respondents for recommendations of how to help the retreated women to re-enter the labour market. The top suggestions are:

- Employers offering flexible schedule, better pay, and hybrid working arrangements
- Available and affordable childcare: more spaces and funding
- Keeping skills updated through online training
- Reaching out to local employment services for help
- Taking care of yourself/mental health first

²⁶ “Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020.” The Daily. Statistics Canada. April 7, 2021. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210407/dq210407b-eng.htm>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Focus Group Discussions

We also held consultations with childcare services in Bruce County, Grey County, and Huron County in order to better understand the childcare situations in our region²⁸. We recognize several challenges that the four counties are facing in order to provide accessible and affordable child care. Such challenges include:

- Shortages of qualified early childhood educators (ECEs)
- Retention of ECEs
- Maintaining healthcare requirements during COVID
- Families' adjustment in response to COVID restrictions
- Lack of awareness of available programs and etc.

In order to help retreated women to return to the labour market, these barriers need to be solved and relevant initiatives need to be implemented.

²⁸ We have reached to the Childcare Services in Perth County several times but did not get any reply. So we could not get any insight from Perth County. Even though, the insights provided by other three counties should be able to represent the Four County Region.

Recommendations

Existing literature reflects the benefits of female labour participation in terms of its positive impacts on economic growth, productivity, gender equality, and poverty.²⁹ Findings above indicate the need to apply gender lenses to the design and execution of programs and initiatives aimed at boosting Canada's economic recovery. It is important to break down the barriers women are facing and help retreated women re-enter the labour market. It is equally important to include women in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making, especially with women representations.³⁰

In response to the issues mentioned above, several recommendations have been made based on our qualitative and quantitative research.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

According to the previous findings, a few thousand women left the labour market and have not returned. Large-scale reskilling will be needed to pivot workers, and it will be important to identify the barriers that may prevent women from participating in training opportunities. Reskilling is especially important for sectors where there is a huge demand of workers, such as food and accommodations, some retail, and healthcare. Relevant initiatives should define critical skills and help women reskill and use their skills in order to increase their labour force participation. To ensure maximum impact, governments should “design skilling, upskilling, and reskilling programs that are responsive to women’s needs.”³¹ Conducting strategic workforce planning and creating a strong learning environment are best practices too. In the Four County region, women’s participation in the labour market is also an opportunity to address a growing shortage of talent in specific sectors such as skilled trades. In the trades, demand for workers is being driven by large-scale infrastructure projects and an aging workforce. And post-pandemic infrastructure investments will only create additional job opportunities in these sectors.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned before, this COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted youth’s current employment opportunities but also their long-term career development path. Therefore, it is important for governments to implement effective recovery measures across different age groups, especially for youth. In order to engage young job seekers, efforts should be made by:

- Enhancing public employment services to provide “job matching, counselling and career advice, and training and skilling opportunities” in order to help youth attached to the labour market.³²

29 Rosenberg, David. “Countries that kept women engaged in labour force during the pandemic will rebound faster.” Financial Post. June 15, 2021. <https://financialpost.com/fp-work/countries-that-kept-women-engaged-in-labour-force-during-the-pandemic-will-rebound-faster#:~:text=rebound%20in%20growth.,Switzerland%2C%20Denmark%2C%20the%20Netherlands%2C%20Australia%2C%20Japan%2C%20Luxembourg,rates%20from%20pre%2Dpandemic%20levels>.

30 “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women.” United Nations. April 9, 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>

31 Dessanti, Claudia. “The She-covey Project: Confronting the Gendered Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario”. Ontario Chamber of Commerce. September 2020. <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCC-shecovery-final.pdf>

32 “What Have Countries Done to Support Young People in the COVID-19 Crisis?” OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). July 6, 2021. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1099_1099609-ia84hp7m3s&title=What-have-countries-done-to-support-young-people-in-the-COVID-19-crisis

- Strengthening and supporting local youth organizations “for education and skills development covering digital skills and e-learning, work-based learning, entrepreneurship, social protection and improving rights and conditions in the workplace for young people.”³³
- “Providing targeted policies and services for the most vulnerable youth populations, including young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs); young migrants; homeless youth; and young women, adolescents and children facing increased risks of domestic violence.”³⁴
- Providing “youth-targeted wage subsidy programmes and work sharing arrangements (subsidized reductions in working hours)” which could be effective in improving long-term employment prospects for youth.³⁵
- Developing programming through stakeholders such as Launch Pad Youth Activity & Technology Center in Hanover, for example, to implement two-way mentorship; connecting students with employers through networking and helping these students develop skills to get the jobs;
- Raising awareness of summer job programs and local manufacturing jobs among local youth;
- Strengthening partnerships with local firms and developing a higher level of participation of the private sector with apprenticeship programs in order to improve trades shortage.

CHILDCARE SERVICES

With COVID-19, people have increasing awareness of the importance of childcare for working moms and how caregiving can affect women’s ability to fully participate in the workforce, especially women with young children and single mothers. In order to help women participate in training or return to labour force, it is important to improve long-term affordability and accessibility of childcare³⁶.

According to the consultation with childcare services in Bruce, Grey and Huron Counties³⁷, recruitment and retention of RECEs is the priority due to staff shortages. In 2020, Bruce County staff partnered with Grey County to develop a joint Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) Recruitment Committee that focuses on the development and implementation of both short-term and long-term RECE recruitment and retention strategies³⁸. Still, local childcare services indicate that they need provincial recruitment and retention strategies to follow. Other efforts need to be made by:

- Raising wages for childcare providers to help recruitment and retention of qualified workers;
- Increasing marketing on the needs of RECEs, including pathway career to RECEs;
- Increasing appreciation and recognition of RECEs;
- Raising awareness of RECEs’ work and their impact on children’s healthy development to attract more people working as RECEs;
- Increasing awareness of available programs and services to parents³⁹;

33 “COVID-19 and the World of Work. Fourth Edition.” International Labour Organization. May 27, 2020.

34 “Youth and COVID- Response Recovery Resilience.” OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). June 11, 2020. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134356-ud5kox3g26&title=Youth-and-COVID-19-Response-Recovery-and-Resilience

35 “Preventing Exclusion from the Labour Market: Tackling the COVID-19 Youth Employment Crisis.” International Labour Organization. May 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_746031.pdf

36 Dessanti, Claudia. “The She-covery Project: Confronting the Gendered Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario”. Ontario Chamber of Commerce. September 2020. <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCC-shecovery-final.pdf>

37 See Appendix B for contact information.

38 “Childcare & Early Years: Service System Plan: 2019-2024.” Bruce County.

39 “Childcare and Early Years Community Plan.” County of Huron Social & Property Services: Children’s Services. 2019.

- Providing clear guidelines of opening for childcare services during COVID-19;
- Integrating childcare setting in schools; adopting creative and innovative strategies such as workplace-based childcare if necessary.

LOCAL FUNDING

Funding is also crucial for services that are accessed by rural women in order to maximize their resource capacity and deliver efficient programs and services. The governments should provide targeted support for rural non-profit organizations who work on crisis response and recovery planning. Employers, on the other hand, can raise wages as incentives to motivate women to re-enter the labour market. Raising wages should improve attraction of workers, regardless of gender, particularly in industries with chronic shortages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to apply a gender lens to designing social programs and recovery planning. The longer the retreated women are unemployed or do not use their skills, the more their skills will lose value in the labour market. A higher female labour force participation rate not only improves the national GDP but also gender equality. This also aligns to the 5th, 8th, and 11th of Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Sustainable Cities and Communities. As the economy recovers from the pandemic, women's path to re-entry and reengagement in the workforce should be clear. Any local efforts can have global significance too. It is an opportunity to use this challenging time to build a new normal with greater gender equality.

Appendix A

FEMALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT (X 1,000) AS OF FEB 2020

<i>Industry</i> (2-digit NAIC)	Total employment	Female employment	Female employment share
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	10.7	3	28%
22 Utilities	5.1	2.5	49%
23 Construction	24.6	2.3	9%
31-33 Manufacturing	24.2	7.3	30%
41 Wholesale trade	5.5	2	36%
44-45 Retail trade	16.5	7.5	45%
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	6	1.8	30%
52 Finance and insurance	3.3	1.9	58%
53 Real estate and rental and leasing	2.7	2.2	81%
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	8.1	2.4	30%
56 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	3.5	2	57%
61 Educational services	7.1	6.3	89%
62 Health care and social assistance	22.1	18.6	84%
72 Accommodation and food services	9.4	6.2	66%
81 Other services (except public administration)	7.3	3.5	48%

Notes: Female share of employment is the number of employed females divided by the total number of employed.

Source: Author's own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, February 2020. Figures are seasonally unadjusted.

Appendix B

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Contact</i>
Emily Morrison	Launchpad	emily@yadc.ca
Tina Metcalfe	Children's Services Bruce County	TMetcalfe@brucecounty.on.ca
Tara Cockerill	Children's Services County of Grey	Tara.Cockerill@grey.ca
Diane Millian and Cheryl Patience	Children's Services Huron County	dmillian@huroncounty.ca



FOUR COUNTY LABOUR MARKET PLANNING BOARD
111 JACKSON STREET SOUTH, SUITE 1
WALKERTON, ON N0G 2V0

WWW.PLANNINGBOARD.CA • 519-881-2725