



Barbi Pilvre

Covid and Gender in Estonia

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About this publication

Covid-19 is not only a virus, but a social phenomenon and with a clear gender dimension. Women's weaker position in coping with the Covid-19 crisis was admitted openly by the Estonian government as early as 2021. Women have been at the forefront in the pandemic, in medicine, social work, care and education. Women's workload has also been increased by the need to take care of distance learning at home. Inequalities have grown as most families simply do not have the option of hiring nannies and tutors.

More women than men lost their jobs in 2020–21, as the tourism and hospitality industries (both female-dominated) were hit by the restrictions. The data from 2021 do not show that more women were affected by the Covid-19 crisis; both men and women who lost their jobs in 2020 found new jobs the same year.

Concerning Covid-19 deaths, the available data show that older men are more affected (Pau, 2021). Covid-19 has also had a major impact on the mental health of parents and children. Help for this from state and local governments has not been sufficient, however.

Crisis communication is regarded as very poor. For example, information on schools and the reorganization of domestic and working life was sometimes delivered very abruptly, even overnight.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The weaker position of women in coping with the Covid-19 crisis was admitted and declared openly by the Estonian government at least as early as 2021. According to Minister of Social Protection Signe Riisalo, women in particular have suffered from the effects of the crisis throughout the world, as the stereotypical division of labour according to gender roles is still widespread and »women's sectors«, such as services and tourism, have been hit hard during the crisis. The Estonian government, social security institutions and educational institutions are well aware that women were at the forefront during the Covid-19 crisis in medicine, social work, care and education, and that the workload on women increased in the emergency situation. This was on top of their everyday work as they also needed to take care of their children, feeding them and helping them with their school work, because schools and kindergartens were closed ([Minister Riisalo at the UN, 16.03.2020, sm.ee](#)).

According to EIGE, if the gender equality perspective is neglected in short-term emergency and long-term reconstruction measures, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic risk maintaining or even exacerbating existing gender inequalities and rolling back the progress achieved ([Gender equality and socio-economic impact of covid-19 pandemic. EIGE publications, 26.03.2021](#)).

The Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs acknowledges that Estonia's rigid gender system, low awareness of both the principles of equal treatment and the intentions behind promoting gender equality have contributed to the perpetuation of a situation in which prejudices, along with conservative and gender-stereotypical expectations concerning what is considered gender-appropriate behaviour, influence the decisions and choices of boys and girls, men and women, leading to differences in their socio-economic status and general well-being ([Gender Equality | Sotsiaalministeerium](#)).

The Estonian Commissioner for Equal Opportunities has stated that although men and women technically have the same rights, their real standing and opportunities are different. For example, unequal treatment of women by employers in relation to motherhood and children is widespread, which prevents women from realising their full potential in the labour market ([Võrdsete võimaluste volinik](#)).

Men and women tend to work in different fields of activity, so clearly there is horizontal segregation in Estonia. Women make up the majority in fields that are considered important, but are not highly valued (social affairs, health care and education). Men dominate in fields such as construction, energy and transport. Statistics on working life quality show how it has changed over time in Estonia and where support from the state is needed. In Estonia, the male employment rate in 2021 was 69.5 per cent and that of women was 64 per cent, so quantitatively they are employed fairly equally outside the home ([Work life quality, stat.ee](#)).

Men and women in Estonia tend to enter different occupations and also at different levels, as the labour market is ver-

tically segregated. Gender segregation on the labour market in 2020 was 36.4 per cent, one of the highest among EU member states. However, 29 per cent of women in Estonia work as top specialists (compared with 16 per cent of men), 18.8 per cent work in services and sales, and 17.1 per cent work as technicians and middle level specialists. Some 10.8 per cent of women work as simple workers (compared with 6.9 per cent of men) ([Segregatsioon : Euroopa 2020 ja võrdset võimalused](#)).

Women in the Estonian labour market are prevalent in the hospitality industry, retail sales, education, art and entertainment, health care and social services (Figure 1 in Appendices). Concerning parents' employment, the gender differences in the employment rate are not substantial, with men in the age group 20–64 registering over 70 per cent and while women register below under 70 per cent.

There are, however, noteworthy differences in the labour market participation of men and women with children under the age of 3.

Already 21 per cent of men in Estonia use parental allowances and the number has grown rapidly. During the period that also includes the Covid-19 pandemic, men's proportion rose 9 per cent. Some 60 per cent of men take paternity leave when a child is born ([Hoolduskoormus](#)). The father is entitled to paternity leave of 30 calendar days until the child is three years old. It should be mentioned that at the official end of the current pandemic – 1 April 2022 – several amendments to the Family Benefits Act entered into force, related to changes in maternity and parental leave, sharing the burden of care more evenly between parents ([Child leave system and family benefits will become more flexible, 28.03.2022, koda.ee](#)).

According to EIGE, Estonia's ranking on gender equality indicators is average. With 61.6 out of 100 points, Estonia ranks seventeenth in the EU on the Gender Equality Index. Its score is 6.4 points below the EU average. Since 2010, Estonia's score has increased by three places. These improvements have been driven primarily by higher scores in the domains of power and money. Since 2018 Estonia's ranking has not changed. Estonia's highest ranking is in the domain of time, in the sub-domain of care activities. Most room for improvement can be found in the domain of health as its ranking has dropped by two places since 2010. Estonia's score is the lowest in the sub-domain of health behaviour in which it ranks 20th among all Member States. In the sub-domain of health access, Estonia is the last among all Member States. Estonia's ranking has improved in the domain of knowledge, in the sub-domain of educational attainment. Estonia's progress has stalled in the domain of work, where it ranks sixteenth ([Gender equality Index 2021. EIGE](#)).

2. NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND THE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC

On 3 March 2020, the Estonian government declared a state of emergency, set to last until 1 May, but later extended until 17 May. All public gatherings were banned, including sports

and cultural events; border control was reinforced with health checks at every crossing and entry point.¹

Schools and universities were closed and people were encouraged to work at home.

All activities involving teaching and learning became, overnight, centred around the home. Families were expected to organise teaching and working life at home, and schools started to provide lessons by Zoom, Google Meet and other internet environments.

Inequalities in internet access were discussed in the media, mainly in relation to regional differences and teachers' internet skills. Domestic work burdens and reconciliation of paid work and care work were not discussed publicly, but people engaged in active discussions on social media.

Full border controls were established from 17 March on, with only citizens of Estonia, permanent residents, their relatives and transport workers carrying out freight transport being allowed to enter the country. On 14 March 2020 traveling restrictions were set inside the country borders: Estonia's western islands were closed to all but residents.

Operating bans were extended to recreation and leisure establishments, ordering sports halls and clubs, gyms, pools, aqua centres, saunas, day-care and children's playrooms to be closed immediately.

Surprisingly, in Estonia DIY stores remained open, which was a clear political choice for the right-wing populist parties in government in spring 2020, keeping the electorate, mainly in small towns and countryside, busy, repairing their houses and building at home as many activities were closed down. On 24 March 2020 the Government Emergency Committee decided that at least two metres distance should be maintained between people in public places, and only up to two people should be allowed to gather in public spaces. On 27 March 2020 the Emergency Committee decided to tighten quarantine rules on Estonia's islands, the majority of shops were closed, and new movement restrictions were introduced, for example, by the Estonian shipping company Tallink, and the Latvian airline AirBaltic suspended all flights from 17 March, including those from Tallinn Airport.

Social distancing as measured by cell phone mobility data was set as a measure by the government at the beginning of the pandemic. Changes in mobility were measured at 17 per cent in December 2020, raising to over 40 per cent in March 2021. In autumn 2021 it was around 15 per cent less than normal and remained lower until spring 2022. Since then it has been declining and is projected to stay at around 9 per cent less than before the pandemic in April 2022 ([COVID-19 Healthdata.org. Social Distancing](https://www.healthdata.org/covid/social-distancing)).

This reflects the fact that peoples' everyday lives, including teaching, care work and paid work have been more or less in

one place, at home, under the supervision of family members or paid assistants, such as nannies or tutors.

However, people in Estonia could leave their homes to visit parks and woods for recreation and physical activities during the whole period of the pandemic. Facilities such as golf courses, where distance between people could easily be kept, remained open, too, although football and basketball courts were closed. Inequalities in leisure activities were, however, minimal as Estonia is rich in free hiking possibilities in forests and moors, and has good bicycle tracks, while there are large parks and woods inside cities.

Public transport has been operating all the time; food shops and pharmacies have been open throughout the pandemic in Estonia. Food courier companies such as Wolt and Bolt developed their services quickly to deliver food to homes, while big firms such as RIMI, Selver and Barбора developed their own courier services.

Vaccination is generally considered to be the best way to prevent the virus and protect people. Testing is also important. Tests were bought by the government and distributed to schools, where pupils were supposed to test themselves twice a week in the academic year 2021/2022 and declare possibly positive test results. Compared to the mess in 2020–2021, schools and kindergartens generally remained open in 2021–2022. Until recently wearing a mask indoors was suggested where it is not possible to maintain distance and activities were organised in accordance with the principle of dispersion and so-called bubbles. Until very recently, ceremonies and other major gatherings in buildings were monitored to limit room capacity to 50 per cent. Good ventilation has been stressed, as well as hygiene. Generally, schools, teachers and parents were under the most pressure the whole period of the pandemic.

3. COVID AND CHANGES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

To contain the virus, people were confined to their homes, either unable to work or continuing to work virtually. This excludes workers categorised as essential who continued their jobs on the frontline of the pandemic. This group includes workers in the health and care sector, victim support services, education, supermarkets, pharmacies and banks. EIGE's research shows that women are overrepresented in many of these sectors.

Coronavirus and the ensuing economic crisis have affected the labour market also in Estonia. Statistics Estonia is publishing short-term statistics on changes in the labour market since 6 January 2020; for comparison, the weekly data for 2019 have been included (Short-term labour market statistics | Statistikaamet, see also Figure 3 in Appendices).

The data presented show changes in employment relationships: new, terminated and suspended employment relationships, also by type of contract and by economic activity. It is clear that the Covid-19 crisis has greatly influenced hospitality

¹ See the »COVID-19 pandemic in Estonia« on Wikipedia.

services. The number of employment relationships is based on entries in the employment register. Unfortunately, the gender dimension is not included in the available data.

In relation to unemployment, however, surprisingly, the data from 2021 do not show that women were more affected by the Covid-19 crisis: women made up 51.8 per cent of the registered unemployed and men 48.2 per cent, whereas in 2020 women made up 50.1 per cent and men 49.9 per cent (Haugas/Sepper 2021)

Probably, people left or changed jobs in the hospitality industry as soon as they could during the crisis periods of 2021, as large sectors were still affected and there has been a shortage of labour, both skilled and unskilled, in Estonia over recent years.

4. COVID AND POVERTY

The following data are indicative of the situation in 2020 but are based mainly on earlier years. Over 75 per cent of men and women over 65 live in relative poverty in Estonia. Also, the poverty rate, at 10 per cent, has risen among women with higher education (in 2020 it was 9.4 per cent). Relative poverty in Estonia affects unemployed men more than women and all retired people over 65 years of age. In Estonia education influences men's and women's economic viability differently, and affected highly educated men slightly more in 2018–2020 (Majanduslik toimetulek : Euroopa 2020 ja võrdsed võimalused).

Estonia is doing well despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the economy is growing. The unemployment rate is 5.2 per cent, lower than the previous year (6.2 per cent) (Labour market | Statistikaamet). Still, inequality and the differences between people's income and economic well-being can be significant and Estonia must tackle both poverty and relative poverty. Because of, among other things, their lower incomes women use public transport in Estonia more than men and are thus more exposed to the spread of infections (Kruuse/Ojala/Schulz 2020).

5. COVID AND HEALTH

Estonia has 1.33 million inhabitants and approximately 574,000 reported Covid-19 cases by May 2022, according to Worldometer. Some 515,000 have recovered. There are 2,576 reported Covid-19 deaths based on the current projection scenario up to 1 September 2022. Since April 2021 the vaccination rate has risen rapidly, reaching 66 per cent of population vaccinated with at least one dose and 62 per cent fully vaccinated.

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in excess mortality in Estonia (Covid-19.healthdata.org). Comparing 2016–19 and 2020–21 women's mortality rate grew by 8 per cent and men's by 9 per cent, which is below the European average (women 14 per cent and men 17 per cent) (Estonia COVID – Coronavirus Statistics - Worldometer, COVID-19 Results Briefing Estonia, healthdata.org, May 5, 2022). Findings also seem

to show that older men are more likely to die from Covid-19 (Pau 2021).

It has been suggested among feminist academics that the symbolic significance of Covid-19 partly comes from the fact that 65+ men are more seriously affected by the disease in rich countries because of lifestyle illnesses, such as being overweight, heart disease and hypertension, or diabetes (Pilvre 2021).

Growing mental health problems have also been studied in connection with Covid-19 (Covid-19 teemaline küsitlus, üldraport 03 2021, 2021, Riigikantselei). Help with mental problems is far from satisfactory and depends on people's ability to pay, as psychologists work mainly in the private sector.

6. COVID AND COMBATING THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

A major research project has been financed by the Estonian Research Council on the »Economic effects of the Covid-19 virus and assessment of the implementation of relevant policy tools« (1.11.2020–30.04.2022) led by economist Raul Eamets of the University of Tartu, and the think-tanks Centar and Praxis. The results have been presented in several policy papers (RITA projekt "COVID-19 seotud majandusmõjude ning nende pehmendamiseks mõeldud poliitikameetmete tõhususe hindamine", 2022, majandus.ut.ee).

The research was based on the idea that the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus affected the global economy, both directly (effects of human illness) and indirectly (in the form of the national measures to limit the spread of the virus). The project researchers' point of departure was that measures taken by countries to mitigate the economic effects of the Covid-19 restrictions have been quite varied, but so far, there has been no analysis of what measures have been most effective and which are the best options for economic recovery and preparation for a new wave of viruses.

Already in spring 2021 it was known that the initial and partial social security payments paid out to the unemployed in response to Covid-19 would end and that this would have a major impact on thousands of people. Thus many people left the hospitality industry and found new work (Lähiajal lõppevad tuhandete pandeemia ajal koondatute töötushüvitised, 4.05.2021, rmp.ee).

Research results also reported that Covid-19 affected people in northern Estonia more than those in other regions, both rich Harjumaa (as the region has more tourism and other hospitality enterprises) and already poor Virumaa in the east. Research also showed that distance working has spread significantly (Praxis analüüs: pandeemia tabas kõige rängemalt Harju- ja Ida-Virumaad | Praxis.ee).

Also significant is the fact that disabled people are more likely to lack information on Covid-19 and that more attention needs to be paid to communication with various social groups. (Praxis analüüs: viirusinfo ei jõua piisavalt puuetega inimesteni, uudised.tv.3.ee, 22.04.2021)

Also gender equality and Covid-19 problems were tackled in a short report within the framework of the large research project named above (Haugas/Sepper 2021).

The document mentioned is the only analysis of this kind in Estonia. The results of the qualitative study (interviews with women) show that the burden of unpaid work grew significantly during the lockdown and that care work was done mainly by women. Women's readiness to give up paid work – which happened during the crisis – can have a continuing influence on women's career in the future, as well as on the gender pay gap and the future pension gap. But researchers have suggested that it could also promote women's entrepreneurship.

Researchers underline that the Estonian economy relies on the unpaid work done by women at home. As care facilities were closed, women automatically took up the care burden at home, sometimes at the expense of their own work.

Researchers found that Covid-19 has had a major impact on parents, including their mental health and that of their children. The help provided by the state and local governments is seen as insufficient: there have been food packages for pupils and in some municipalities also kindergarten fees (around 70–80 euros) were cancelled for the period when the facilities were closed. Crisis communication was regarded as very poor, messages concerning school from the Ministry of Education and local municipalities, for example, were contradictory and required reorganization of domestic and working life sometimes overnight.

Researchers showed that although the social services institutions in Estonia are aware of Covid-19's effects on homes and especially women, systematic measures were not taken. There was at least some progress only in the field of helping the victims of domestic violence.

7. COVID AND SCHOOLS

During spring 2020 schools and kindergartens remained closed. In autumn 2020 schools operated part-time, with pupils staying at home for a week and then having contact teaching for a week, in order to disperse pupils and teachers at school. That caused additional stress to parents as life and care work at home had to be organized with this in mind. During the 2021/2022 academic year, schools were advised to organize work in a dispersed way, if necessary. The Ministry of Education took the position that it is essential to keep educational and youth work institutions open at all levels and types of education. They claimed that they acknowledged and supported all students in order to fill the potential educational gaps that have surfaced in recent years. A regional approach was considered when making decisions on educational and youth work. In autumn 2021 Tallinn Municipality ordered schools to close again, even though the government had suggested keeping them open if the situation allowed. Education and Covid-19 became a hot political question before the local elections in autumn 2021.

The Ministry of Education admitted in early autumn 2021 that Covid-19 had affected two academic years and that it was thus important to monitor students' levels more closely and to recognize the need for intervention. In order to organize more individual learning based on student needs, the Ministry of Education provided financial support for additional studies in the amount of 40 euros in June 2021. Schools providing a general education were encouraged to turn to the substitute teachers' programme for help or utilise volunteer students. Kindergartens were also called on to invite volunteer students to help. The recruitment of substitute and auxiliary teachers is financed by the state. The ministry recommended that schools design additional support measures that would encourage students to remain in the education system and that the exclusion of students due to arrears should be considered with particular care. In order to maintain learning motivation, the ministry recommended directing students to participate in learning camps provided by the state in summer 2021.

In autumn 2021, the »Smarter from a distance« series of web seminars continued, which offered webinars to address learning gaps and mental health. It was declared that attention would be paid to supporting the mental health of children/pupils and maintaining the mental health of the »school family« itself.

In practice it depended on the availability of specialists, who are scarce and overloaded with work, as paid assistance is available at the market price.

Guide materials for teachers and youth workers were compiled and spread, and phone hotlines as well as internet resources are available. Support from specialists from educational institutions depends however on their availability; counselling is provided by institutions such as Rajaleidja (Pathfinder) which depends on EU funds. Local government child protection officials were also supposed to take an active part in helping out. In practice, most of the burden of tackling the virus fell on families, especially mothers ([Spread of COVID-19 | Estonian Ministry of Education and Research](#)).

Educational activities now take place in a regular manner (spring 2022). The government's view is that the best way to prevent the virus from spreading is to vaccinate everyone over the age of 12. Kindergartens and childcare institutions are open, and hygiene rules are expected to be taught to children. ([Provision of education | Kriis](#))

8. COVID AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Signe Riisalo, Estonian Minister of Social Protection, declared at the annual high-level meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York cited above, that violence against women increased worldwide during the Covid-19 crisis and that there is a great risk that the pandemic will represent a setback in comparison with what has been achieved so far in terms of gender equality and women's rights. The Minister declared that Estonia had done well because so far it had not stopped services for victims of vio-

lence against women during the crisis, and the extent of such services had not been reduced. The country has consciously dealt with the reduction of violence, improved the victim support system and the services provided, and is also preparing a new Victim Support Act.

As regards the role of gender-sensitive policies in the context of Covid-19 recovery, in cooperation with the think-tank Praxis the focus over the past two years has been on encouraging and supporting women to participate in politics.

Family violence makes up 12 per cent of all calls to the police and 40 per cent of all reported crimes and misdemeanours. Surprisingly, however, Estonian data in 2020 did not show a rise in domestic violence and the number of incidents of reported domestic violence was even lower than in 2019 (Haugas/Sepper 2021). An analysis of human rights in Estonia by the US Embassy bears this out ([2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Estonia, 2021](#)).

Experts on gender violence know very well that it this could be a false picture, however. The real reason for the lower numbers could be that victims found it difficult to call the police or for help from a home in which everybody was cooped up together 24/7.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: GENDER ASPECTS OF COVID-19 AND THE POLICY AGENDA OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND TRADE UNIONS

Estonia's Commissioner of Equal Opportunities has expressed her worry that Covid-19 restrictions narrowed women's options to an extent last witnessed in the previous century and have had a particular impact on mothers (Pakosta 2020a, 2020b). As yet there has been no major research on the gender aspect of the Covid-19 crisis in Estonia, except for the abovementioned 20-page report (Haugas/Sepper 2021).

The education and care sectors in Estonia have been strongly affected by the pandemic and require attention if they are to be able to cope with a possible next wave of Covid-19. The proportion of women in education and care occupations is very high, including undeclared employment, especially in the domestic care sector. Jobs in the caring professions are among the most underpaid and the situation could be improved as they are mainly state jobs.

There are also high proportions of women working in other essential jobs that require contact with others, such as supermarket cashiers, who faced greater exposure during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Women are more frequent users of public transport in Estonia, so sanitary conditions in that environment affect women and also children and the elderly more than men, generally speaking. Municipalities should do their best to keep that in mind.

Gender mainstreaming in crisis situations is crucial to ensuring that the different experiences of by women and men are recognised and addressed.

Political parties and trade unions are attempting to tackle rising poverty in Estonia as inflation is very high as a result, among other things, of the energy crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The war and the acute issues facing Ukrainian refugees have taken over public debate.

The Covid-19 crisis is not the focus of party policymaking at the moment. People are generally aware that the disease could become a problem once again next autumn and winter. Vaccination of the older population tends to be the main issue of discussion. The situation in schools, such as insufficient ventilation due to old systems, has been talked about but no state measures have yet been taken.

There has not been enough public discussion of how families will cope or how women will manage to reconcile work with domestic responsibilities during a possible coming lockdown, given their own distance working and possible lockdowns of schools, while maintaining their mental health. Surely it would be wise to provide domestic help, organized and paid for by public funds for parents who need it urgently.

Feminist academics have raised the issue that major special research on gender and Covid-19 should be carried out and financed by the state. The Tartu University, Praxis and Centar research we have cited only amounts to a short policy paper. Trade unions and political parties should exert pressure on the government to generate more data on gender and Covid-19 measures in Estonia.

Municipalities should prioritize renovation of schools' ventilation systems in order to avoid closing schools next autumn and winter again. The education system is very easy to shut down, as we have seen, because it is governed by municipalities, and it is convenient for politicians to use it to try to show that they care about people and are doing something to prevent the spread of the disease.

Mental health issues – anxiety first and foremost – are very acute in Estonia after Covid-19 and also in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the security situation in Europe. Substantial resources should be put into mental health measures, to facilitate professional help for everybody who needs it, to train more specialists and also to pay them decently for their work in public institutions.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic has highlighted that Covid-19 is not only a disease, but also a social phenomenon which has a clear gender dimension, as Estonian Minister of Social Defence has admitted publicly. Estonia's Equal Opportunities Commissioner, some journalists and feminist activists have declared their discontent with the situation, but the issue has not been a special focus in discussing state-level Covid-19 measures. Following EIGE, increased challenges need to be recognised to women's occupational health and well-being in caring professions and also at home in crisis situations. It is also crucial to consult women in decision-making as they tend to have experienced Covid-19 measures and restrictions personally,

resulting in possible burn-out because of home office and responsibility for organizing domestic life, school and family care work simultaneously. An improved gender balance in decision-making during crisis situations and beyond could help in this issue.

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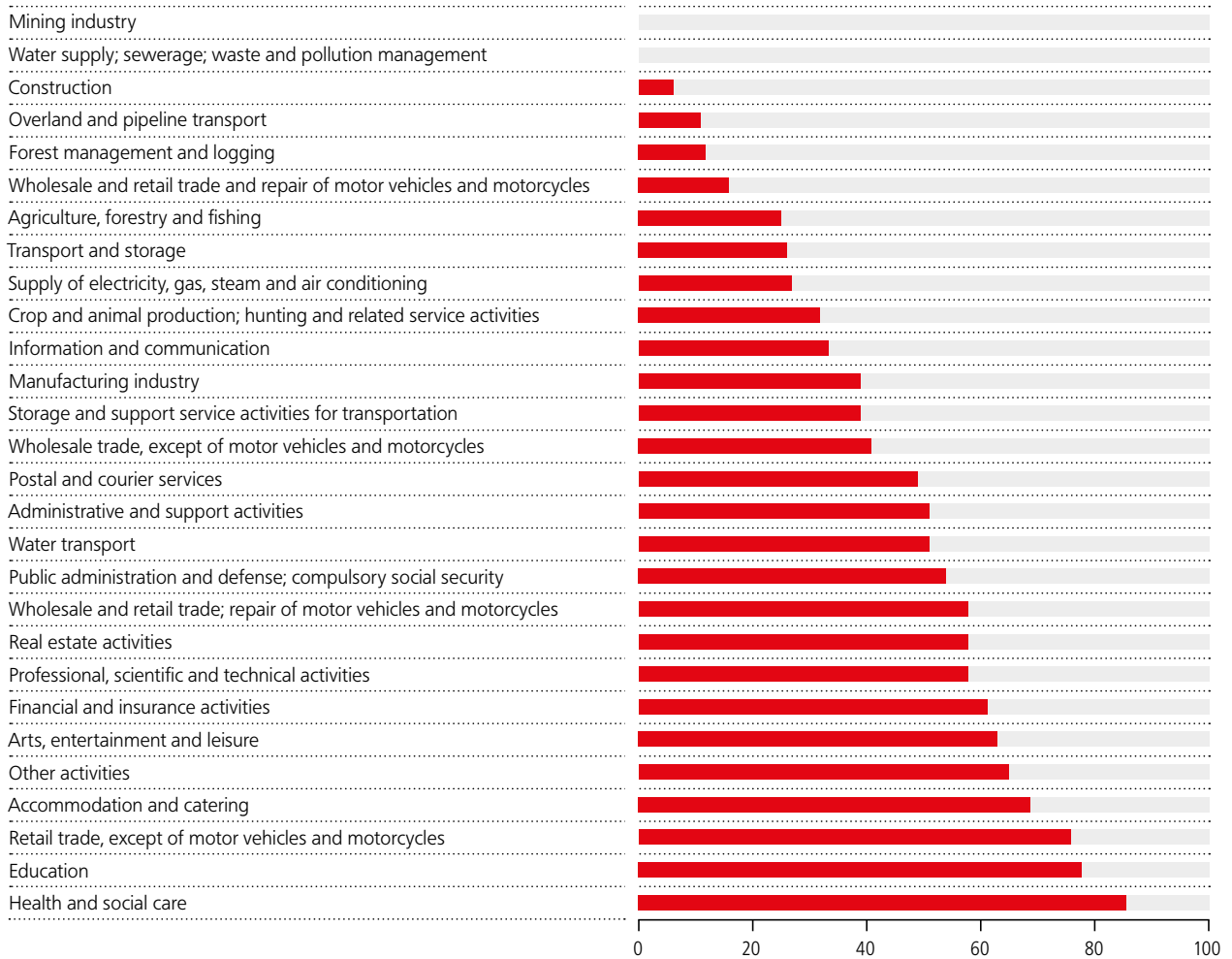
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[Spread of COVID-19 | Estonian Ministry of Education and Research Võrdsete võimaluste volinik |](#)

[Work life quality | Statistikaamet](#)

Appendices

Figure 1
Women's and men's different employment patterns show horizontal segregation of the labour market
 (Euroopa 2020 ja võrdsed võimalused | Kompetentsikeskus)



Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/italy/>

Figure 2
Mobility of Estonians, measured by cellular phone positioning

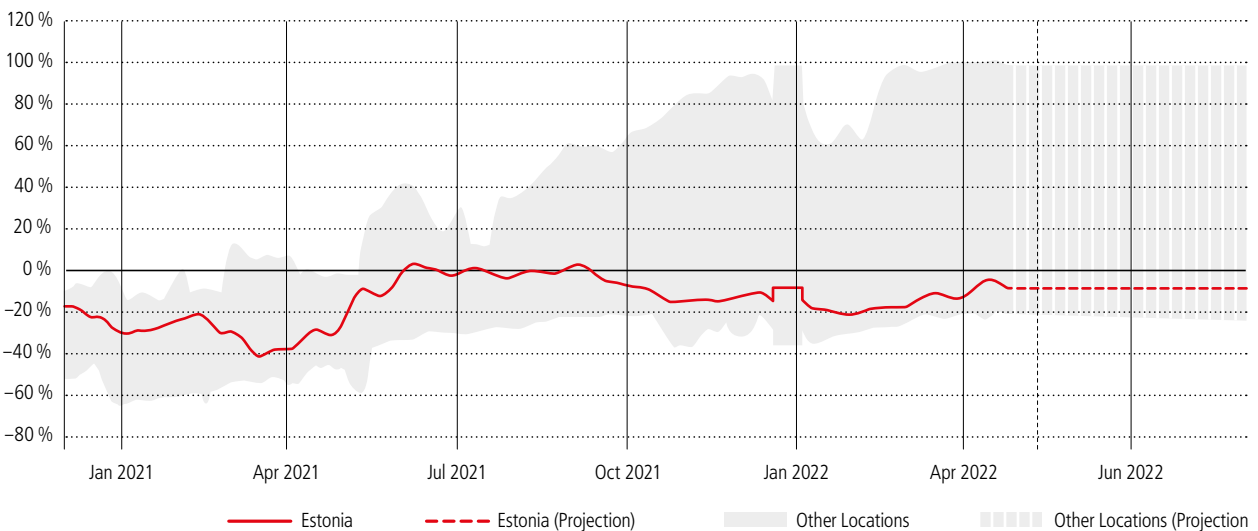
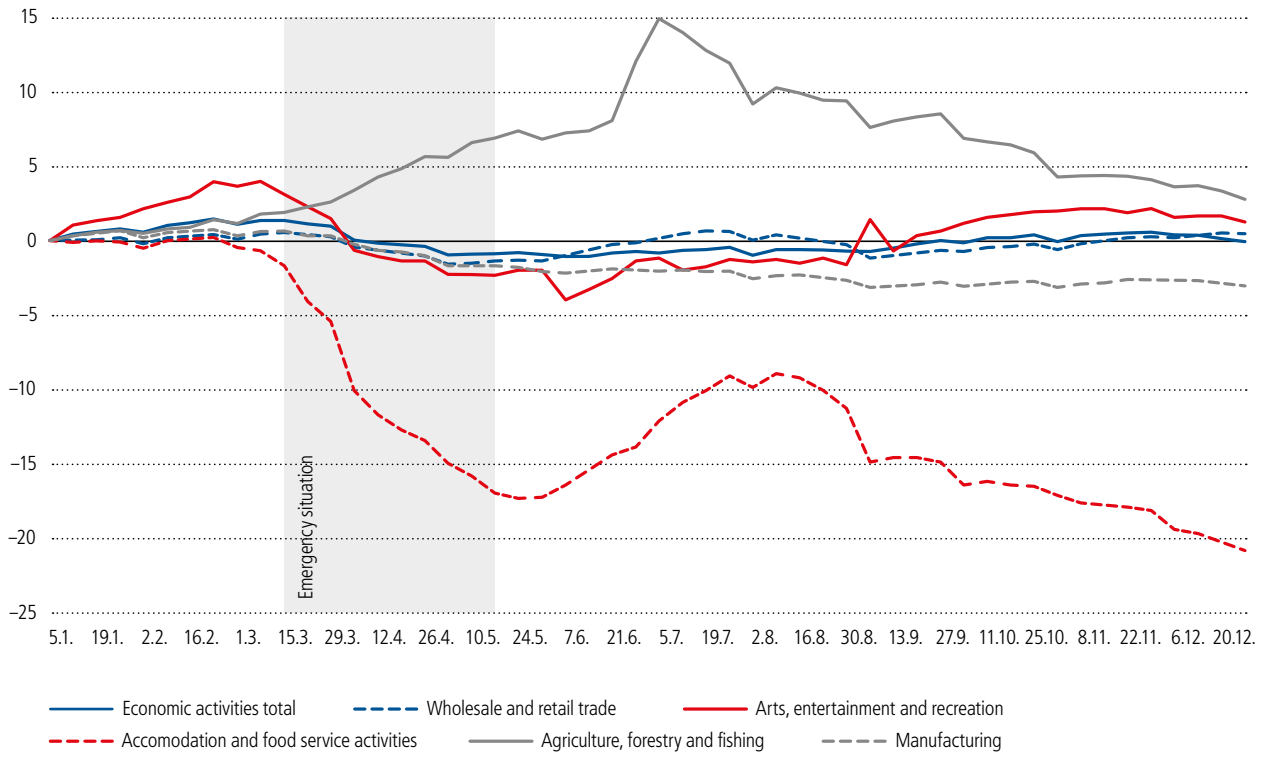


Figure 3
Changes in number of employment relationships based on entries in the employment register



Source: Statistics Estonia, Employment Register.

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The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition dating back to its foundation in 1925. Today, it remains loyal to the legacy of its namesake and campaigns for the core ideas and values of social democracy: freedom, justice and solidarity. It has a close connection to social democracy and free trade unions.

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EUROPA

Covid and Gender in Estonia

Covid-19 is not only a virus, but a social phenomenon and with a clear gender dimension. Women's weaker position in coping with the Covid-19 crisis was admitted openly by the Estonian government as early as 2021. Women have been at the forefront in the pandemic, in medicine, social work, care and education. Women's workload has also been increased by the need to take care of distance learning at home. Inequalities have grown as most families simply do not have the option of hiring nannies and tutors.

More women than men lost their jobs in 2020–21, as the tourism and hospitality industries (both female-dominated) were hit by the restrictions. The data from 2021 do not show that more women were affected by the Covid-19 crisis; both men and women who lost their jobs in 2020 found new jobs the same year.

Concerning Covid-19 deaths, the available data show that older men are more affected (Pau, 2021). Covid-19 has also had a major impact on the mental health of parents and children. Help for this from state and local governments has not been sufficient, however.

Crisis communication is regarded as very poor. For example, information on schools and the reorganization of domestic and working life was sometimes delivered very abruptly, even overnight.