

Working time arrangements and work-life balance indicators from the Spanish LFS during COVID19 pandemic.

Reference.

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Abstract

The statistical framework for measuring the quality of employment includes within its dimension 3 a set of indicators on working time and work-life balance, that particularly inform on night work, evening work, weekend work (subdimension 3b) and possibility to work at home (subdimension 3.c). The European Labour Force Survey provides information on these indicators on an annual basis. When the alarm state due to COVID19 pandemic in Spain was declared in March 2020, we changed the periodicity of the questions providing these indicators to quarterly, from Q2-2020 onwards. The paper will show how the pandemic is reflected in the quarterly evolution of these indicators, and how they compare to the previous levels calculated as an annual average.

Key words

Working time arrangements; Labour Force Survey; Quarterly data; Covid19 pandemic.

Background

The set of variables about the information on working time arrangements concerning the frequency of night work, evening work, weekend work and working at home were stated as 'structural' variables in the European Labour Force Survey and the data produced on these variables had annual periodicity in 2006-2020¹.

In March 2020 the 'alarm state' was declared in Spain due to the COVID19 pandemic. Among the measures taken to limit movement of people in order to control the propagation of the virus, home confinement was implemented and almost the whole population was affected. Only 'essential activities' were allowed to continue working in person and most of the economic activity was suspended.

The consequences of these measures in the labour market were impressive and can be observed in the evolution of the main indicators (employment, activity, etc.). Besides, many other changes emerged.

In Spain, we reacted promptly and changed from annual to quarterly periodicity for the set of variables on 'atypical work' from Q2-2020 onwards. As we foresaw this set of variables were extremely useful to explain how workers and employers reacted to the situation created by the pandemic and the measures taken to control it.

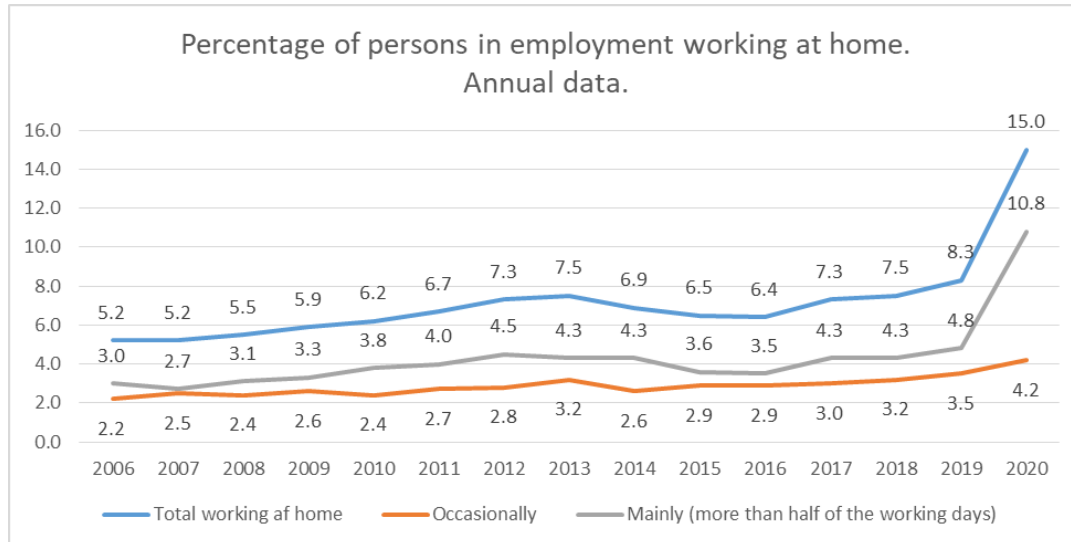
The aim of this paper is to take a first glance of the changes that have been taken place on the set of indicators related to the working time arrangements monitored by the European Labour Force Survey.

¹ In fact, following the new regulations of the EU-LFS, these variables (except work at home) should be biennial.

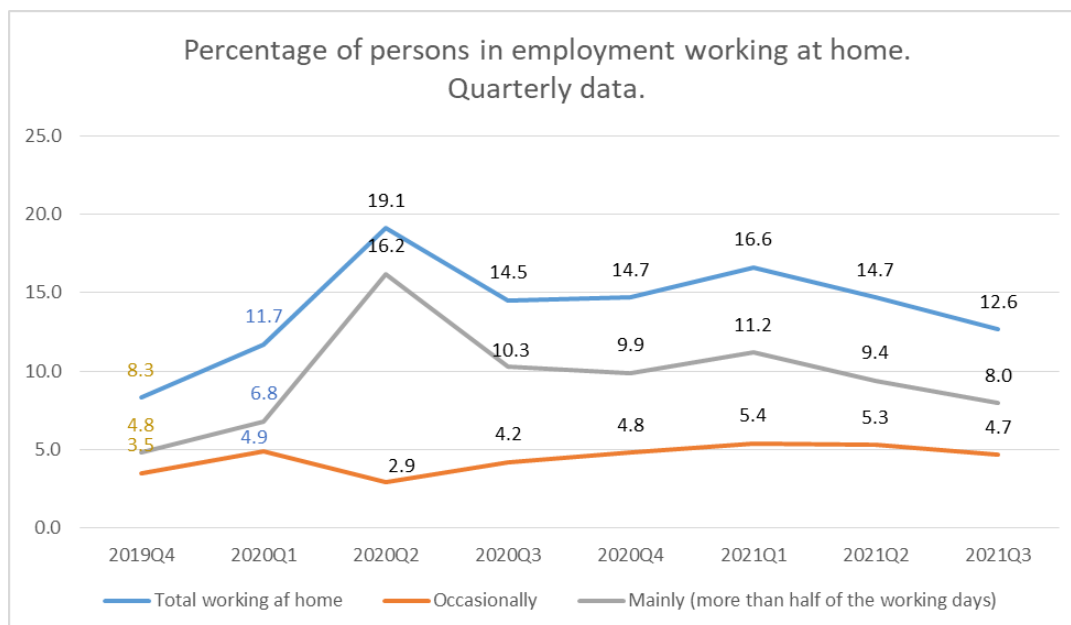
Working from home

One of the main strategies applied in order to maintain the economic activity has been to promote online work, online education and, in general, whenever possible, to carry out activities from home over the internet.

The annual series available from LFS since 2006 shows how the total percentage almost doubled from 8.3% in 2019 to 15% in 2020.



Looking at the quarterly distribution of this annual average, we can see how the percentage of persons in employment working at home evolved depending on the different circumstances of mobility restrictions associated to the COVID19 pandemic. The data in Q1-2020 have been calculated from the annual average 2020 and from the available quarterly data (Q2, Q3 and Q4) of this year (which is marked in blue color). The data represented as in Q4-2019 is in reality the annual average 2019 to show the previous baseline (marked as golden color).



The second quarter of the year was the most restrictive one in Spain concerning mobility of persons. In that period, 19.1% of employed persons worked at home, being 16.2% those who did it more than half of the working days. When restrictions relaxed in the following quarters

the percentages decreased to a 'new baseline' around 15% for the total and 10% for those working mainly at home.

The promotion of working from home and, in general, 'telework' in the near future will surely increase this percentage at least for those jobs where the personal or material contact with products or persons is not inherent to the activity.

Weekend work.

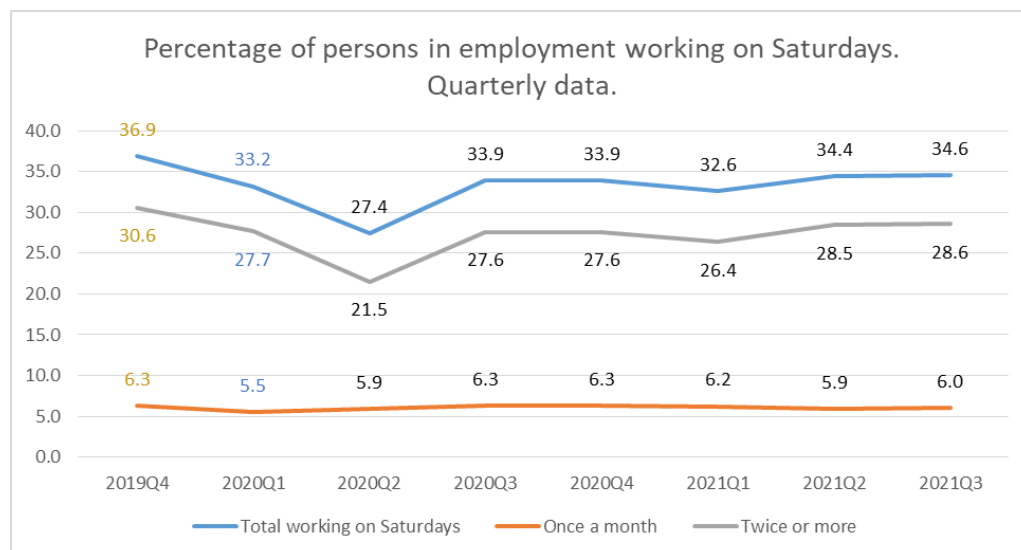
The weekend work was also disturbed by the Covid19 pandemic. Leisure based sectors and commerce were specially affected. As we have information for Saturday and Sunday individually, we will look at them separately.

Saturdays.

In this case the data show more than four points decrease in the share of employment working on Saturdays.

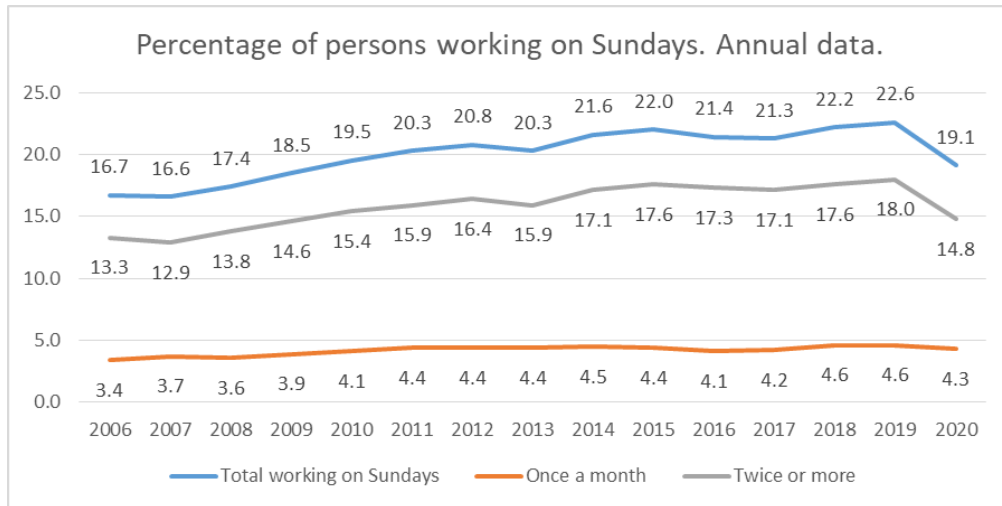


When we look at quarterly figures we can see the relation between the strength of restrictions due to the pandemic and this indicator, especially in the second quarter of 2020.

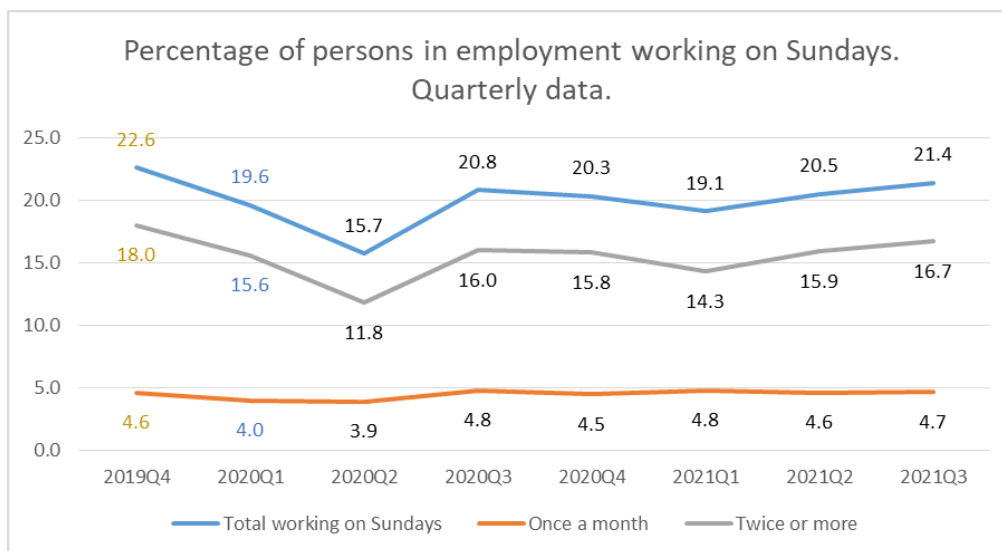


Sundays.

The pattern observed for Sundays is basically the same, but lower in levels. Annually, the share of persons working on Sundays decreased 3.5 points.



The quarterly pattern, again, pointed out the second quarter as the lowest share of Sunday-work in line with the biggest mobility restrictions due to confinement.

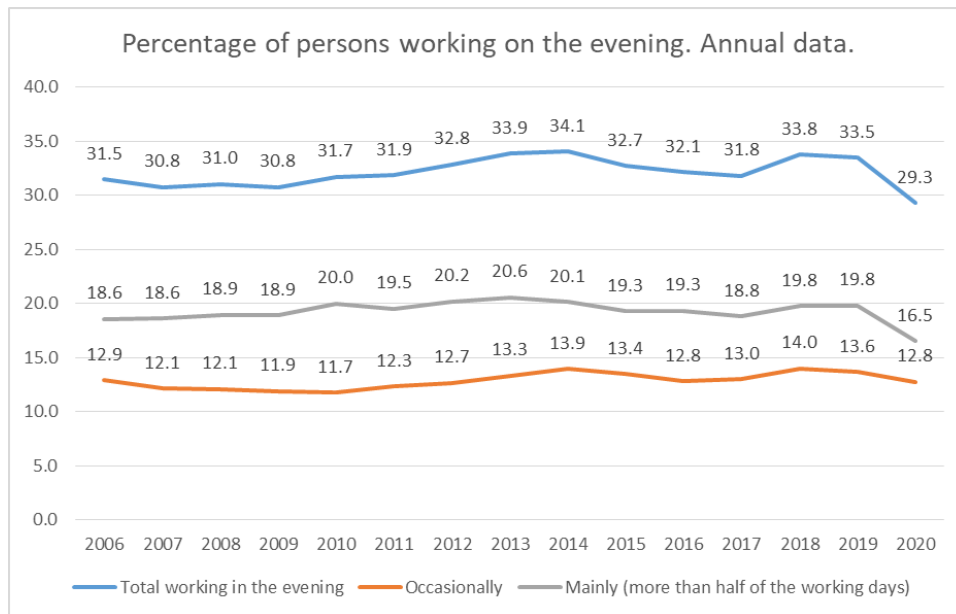


Late evening and night work

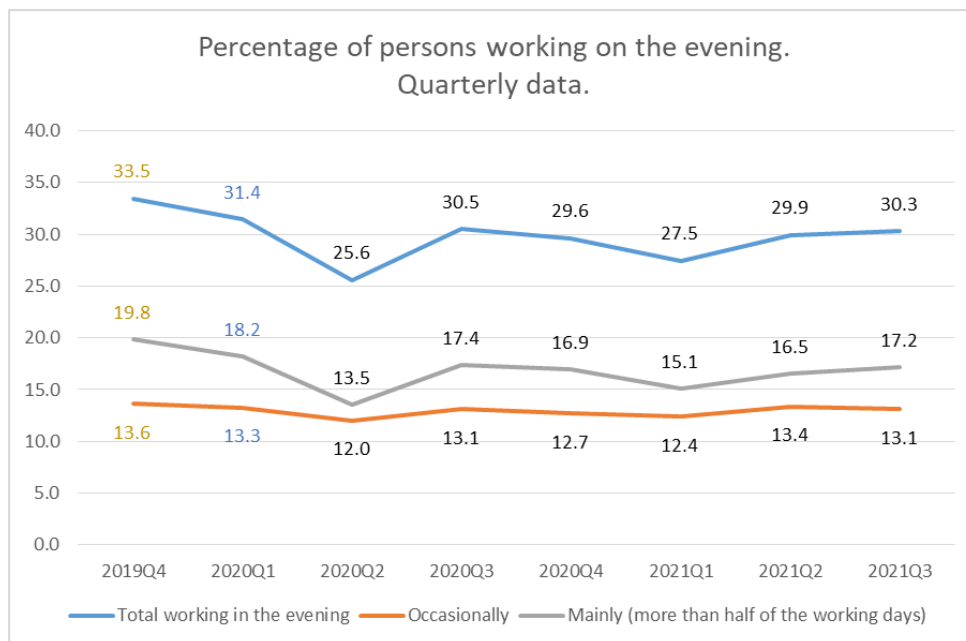
Again, as we have the data from both late evening and at night we will look at them separately.

Late evening

On annual average, we can see that the 2020 figure for the total fell more than four points compared to that of 2019.

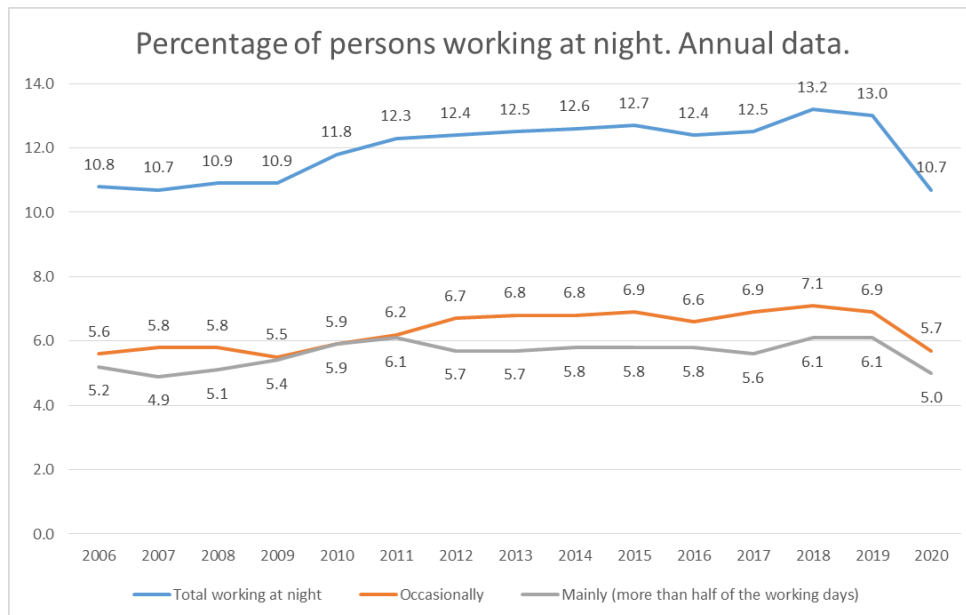


The quarterly pattern, again shows the lowest percentage of persons working at the evening in the second quarter 2020.

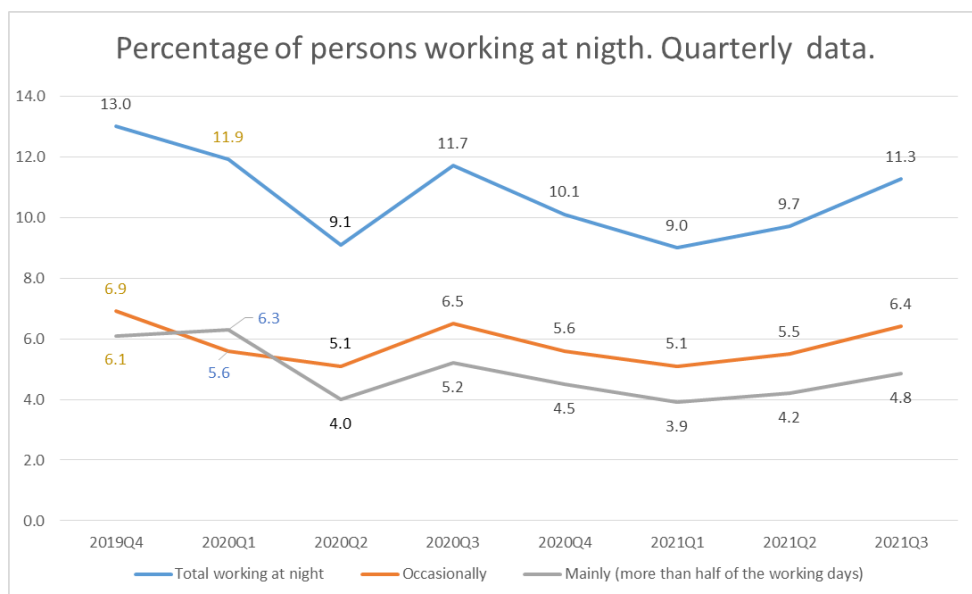


Night work

From a lower baseline compared to evening work, the share of total employment working at night decreased 2.7 points in 2020.



Once again, the second quarter of 2020 registers the lowest percentage of night work.

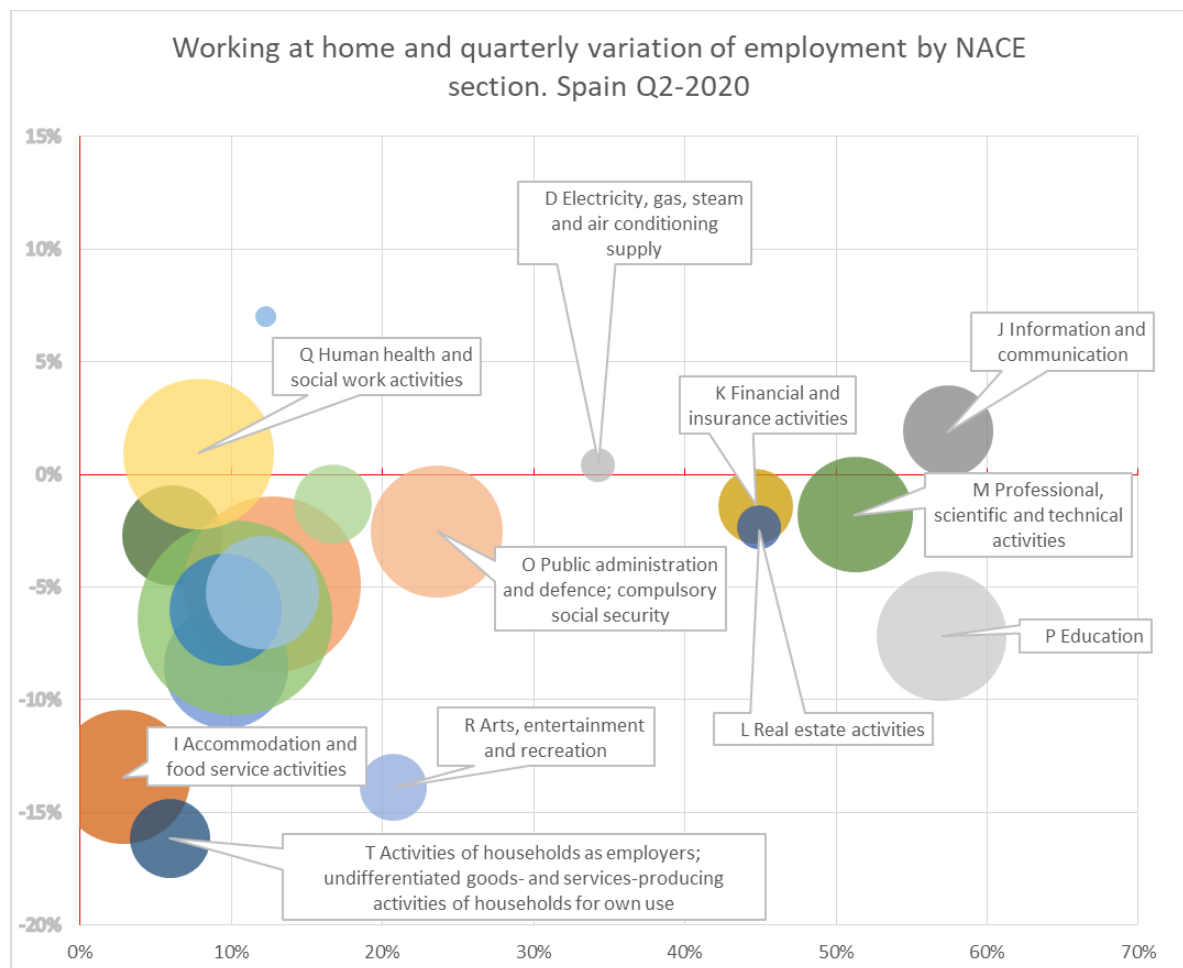


Economic sector and working from home

To end up, we'll comment how the employment quarterly variation in the second quarter of 2020, the period when the measures limiting mobility were more restrictive in Spain, is related to the section of activity to which the job belongs and the ease for people to do the work working from home.

On the vertical axe, the quarterly variation of employment is represented. On the horizontal axis, scores the total percentage of working from home. The 'weight' of the sector in terms of employment is represented by the size of the bubble (Q2-2020 data).

Thus, we can see how the sections '*I Accommodation and food service activities*' and '*T Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use*' showed the highest decrease in the second quarter whereas section '*J Information and communication*' increased their employment in a period when the total employment figure decreased more than one million.



Conclusions

The quarterly monitoring of variables on atypical work during COVID19 pandemic in Spain has been a very useful tool to explain the evolution of the labour market in this sudden breakdown situation.

We have noticed that these variables are very explicative in order to describe the short term situation, and we plan to maintain the quarterly periodicity of this set of variables, at least, while the pandemic is still active in Spain.