



Joint briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on women with childcare responsibilities in Scotland

March 2021

1. About this briefing

This briefing uses survey data from a joint survey on the impacts of COVID-19 developed by Close the Gap, Engender, the UK Women's Budget Group, Fawcett Society, Women's Equality Network Wales, and Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group. The survey was carried out by Survation with 1,003 parents with children aged 14 and under between 18th November and 2nd December 2020 across the four nations in the UK. A joint briefing was published in February 2020 that analyses the data at the UK-level.¹

This briefing looks at the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on women with childcare responsibilities in Scotland specifically by analysing survey data gathered from 721 parents in Scotland.² The survey data reinforces pre-existing evidence that **women's employment has been disproportionately impacted by additional caring responsibilities** over the course of the crisis, and **women have been particularly affected by rising financial precarity and anxiety** as a result of the social and economic consequences of the crisis. The data also highlights that **Black and minority ethnic (BME)³ women and disabled women have been particularly impacted by the social, economic, and labour market implications of the pandemic.**

The results highlight that, without mitigating action, the pandemic has the potential to reverse gender equality gains and reinforce women's pre-existing inequality. There is therefore an urgent need to integrate gendered perspectives in labour market and economic recovery policymaking. The findings also underscore the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to economic recovery and labour market policymaking, in recognition of the particular impacts of COVID-19 on BME women, disabled women and young women as a result of their multiple and intersecting identities.

¹ Fawcett, WBG, WEN, NI Women's Budget Group, Close the Gap and Engender (2021) *Pushed to More Precarity: The Uneven impact of lockdowns on mothers and lower-income parents*. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/General-parents-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>.

² Of the 721 parents, 536 were a nationally representative sample and 185 were a Black and minority ethnic booster sample.

³ The survey data uses the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), but this briefing opts for BME in keeping with how Scottish data is typically classified.

2. Key findings

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a rapid and unprecedented shift in the economic landscape in Scotland, with men and women being impacted by the pandemic in different ways. The main conclusion from the survey data is that COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities in unpaid work including caring responsibilities, and experiences of poverty. The key findings include:

a. Women, particularly BME and disabled women, are experiencing further and deeper poverty as a result of COVID-19

- Women are more likely to report that they are struggling to make ends meet (39%) than their male counterparts (31%).
- More women disagreed with the statement that they were better off now than at the start of 2020 than men (47% compared to 41%).
- Disabled women are also more likely to report struggling making ends meet (57%) than non-disabled women (35%), disabled men (46%) and non-disabled men (28%).
- BME women were more likely to lose working hours over the course of the crisis, with 39% of BME women reporting losing working hours compared to 14% of white women.
- Over half of BME women reported struggling to make ends meet (51%) compared to 38% of white women and 32% of white men.

b. The closure of schools and nurseries, and the increase in childcare has disproportionately impacted women's employment

- 21% of men said they would be given time off with full pay by their employer in the event of additional caring responsibilities as a result of school closures or having to self-isolate,⁴ compared to 14% of women.

c. Women's propensity to work part-time places them at greater risk of job disruption

- Women working full-time were more likely to report not being placed on furlough (59%) than women working part-time (52%).
- Women working part-time were 11 percentage points more likely to report losing working hours (26%) than their full-time counterparts (15%).

⁴ Question refers to additional caring responsibilities resulting from ELC/school closures or your child having to self-isolate.

d. BME women and disabled women were significantly more likely to say they were unfairly selected for furlough than their white and non-disabled counterparts

- Over a fifth of BME women (21%) felt they were unfairly selected for furlough because of their race, sex, age, disability or health condition compared to 1% of white women.
- 19% of disabled women felt they were unfairly selected for furlough because their race, sex, age, disability or health condition compared to 1% of non-disabled women.

e. Mothers are experiencing higher levels of anxiety during the crisis, with BME mothers and disabled mothers particularly affected

- Mothers are more likely to report high anxiety levels than fathers, with 36% of women reporting a high level of anxiety compared to 29% of men.⁵
- Around a third of BME mothers (34%) and BME fathers (32%) reported a high level of anxiety compared to 28% of white mothers and fathers.
- 58% of disabled mothers reported a high level of anxiety compared to 32% of non-disabled mothers and 24% of non-disabled fathers.

f. Women continue to do the majority of unpaid work in the home

- 72% of mothers say it is mostly them who do housework, such as cleaning and laundry. By contrast, only 4% of mothers stated that housework was mostly done by their partner and 24% said it was done by 'both equally'.
- 61% of women stated that they mostly do shopping for groceries and essentials. Only 10% of women said shopping was mostly done by their partner and 28% said it was done equally.

3. The impact of COVID-19 on women's social, economic and labour market inequality

The social, economic, and labour market consequences of COVID-19 are likely to be long-term, with particular risks for women and women's equality in terms of women's labour market participation, the distribution of unpaid childcare and care, and women's experiences of poverty. In illustrating that women continue to undertake the majority

⁵ The question asked, 'overall, on a scale of 0-10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' A high level of anxiety refers to an anxiety level of between 6 and 10.

of unpaid domestic labour during the pandemic, the data reinforces other research, as well as women's own accounts.⁶ Before the pandemic, time-use data for Scotland showed that women in opposite sex couples were undertaking approximately 68% of childcare.⁷ Researchers examining real time survey evidence from the UK, US and Germany found that since lockdown, regardless of whether they are also doing paid work, women at home are spending six hours providing childcare and home schooling every working day while fathers are providing around four.⁸ This incompatibility of paid work, home-schooling and childcare has seen mothers withdraw from paid work, and poses significant risks for women's mental health and economic equality.

Specific focus needs to be given to women's mental health, with research suggesting that disabled mothers in particular are experiencing acute levels of anxiety. Evidence from the Mental Health Foundation strongly suggests that women experiencing poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, lone parents, carers, young women and girls, and minoritised women are particularly likely to experience mental health problems.⁹ There is an urgent need for increased attention to gender and women's mental health within mental health policy, taking into account intersectional dynamics and the impact of COVID-19.

Women's labour market participation has been adversely affected by COVID-19 job disruption. Women are more likely to work in a shutdown sector, such as hospitality and retail which puts women at greater risk of losing their jobs over the course of the crisis. Indeed, data from ONS shows that since July, women are the majority of furloughed workers in Scotland. Two female-dominated sectors, wholesale and retail, and accommodation and food services, have the highest rates of furlough, increasing the likelihood of furlough for women and heightening women's risk of redundancy over the course of the crisis.¹⁰ Women who were already struggling, including BME, disabled and young women, are now under enormous financial pressure. COVID-19 has therefore placed these women, and their children, at even greater risk of poverty, adding to a growing child poverty crisis.

⁶ Engender (2021) *Covid-19 and women's equality*. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/covid-19/>.

⁷ Scottish Government (2019) *Centre for Time Use Research Time Use Survey 2014-15: Results for Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/centre-time-useresearch-time-use-survey-2014-15-results-scotland/pages/5/>.

⁸ A. Adams-Prassl, T. Boneva, M. Golin and C. Rauh, (2020) *Inequality in the Impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence from Real Time Surveys*. Available at: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp13183.pdf>.

⁹ Mental Health Foundation (2017) *While your back was turned: how mental health policymakers stopped paying attention to the specific needs of women and girls*. Available at:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/while-your-back-was-turned-how-mental-health-policymakers-stopped-paying-attention-to-mental-health-needs-young-women-girls.pdf>;

Mental Health Foundation (2016) *Fundamental facts about mental health*. Available at:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/fundamental-facts-about-mental-health-2016.pdf>.

¹⁰ HMRC (2021) *Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics – January 2021*.

4. Conclusion: The importance of a gendered economic recovery

The lack of focus on gender in responding to the 2008 financial crisis resulted in the recession having a disproportionate impact on women's employment. It is therefore vital that the lessons from 2008 inform the response to the current economic crisis, which is expected to be deeper and more prolonged. It is pivotal that the Scottish Government integrate women's needs into the work of economic recovery. Promoting a gender equal recovery must mean building a labour market and economy that values and counts women's work, and recognises the complexities of their lives.

The findings of the survey demonstrate the importance of taking an intersectional approach to labour market and economic recovery policymaking. The impacts of the pandemic have the potential to further entrench labour market inequality for BME and disabled women who already face multiple barriers to good quality employment.¹¹ BME women are more likely to work in a sector that has been shut down; more likely to be in insecure work which puts them at increased risk of losing hours and earnings; and are concentrated in low-paid service sectors which are more susceptible to redundancies over the course of the crisis. Disabled women experience gendered labour market inequalities such as childcare and a lack of flexible working, in addition to the range of barriers faced by all disabled people in the labour market including discrimination, inaccessible workplaces and a lack of employer support.¹² This means disabled women experience poorer labour market outcomes and lower pay than disabled men,¹³ and these outcomes have been worsened by COVID-19. Disabled women have also experienced increasing financial precarity as a result of the crisis, reported higher levels of anxiety and may face additional barriers to paid work as a result of changes to social care over the course of the pandemic.¹⁴

In 2020, Close the Gap and Engender published *Gender and Economic Recovery* which details principles for a gender-sensitive economic recovery.¹⁵ The principles describe features of an economy that works for women as well as men, and develops Scotland's existing commitment to inclusive growth so that women are not left behind. The nine principles are a set of ideas, challenges, and calls that are rooted in evidence. The principles range from specifying that gender-sensitive inclusive growth is about the pattern of growth and not its rate, to stipulating that unpaid domestic and care work

¹¹ Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research into Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment in Scotland*.

¹² Inclusion Scotland 'Employment'. Available at: <https://inclusionScotland.org/resources/employment/>.

¹³ TUC (2015) *Disability and Employment: A social Model Study of Employment Experiences of Disabled People in Great Britain, with a Focus on Mental Illness*. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/DisabilityandEmploymentReport.pdf>.

¹⁴ Engender (2020) *Gender & Unpaid Work: the impact of Covid-19 on women's caring roles*. Available at: https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/1594974358_Gender--unpaid-work---the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-womens-caring-roles.pdf.

¹⁵ Close the Gap and Engender (2020) *Gender & Economic Recovery*. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery---Engender-and-Close-the-Gap.pdf>.

needs to be recognised, reduced, and redistributed from the household to the state by an increase of accessible, good quality childcare and social care. Pivotal, one of the principles highlights that while equality is good for growth, the converse is not necessarily true. The principles will create better jobs, better decision-making, and a more adequate standard of living for us all. These principles should be adopted by the Scottish Government as a starting point for the design and delivery of economic recovery policymaking, in order to ensure that the economic recovery is gender-sensitive and addresses pre-existing gender inequality.

The survey findings highlight the importance of gender analysis and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19, and the need to mainstream gender in labour market and economic recovery policymaking. Tackling occupational segregation, norms about how unpaid work is allocated within the household, and the undervaluation of “women’s work” should be core to labour market and economic recovery responses. Economic recovery needs to focus on rebuilding and transforming the economy to further gender equality and tackle pre-existing inequalities.

About us

Close the Gap is Scotland’s policy advocacy organisation working on women’s labour market participation. We have been working with policymakers, employers and employees since 2001 to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women’s labour market inequality.

Engender is a membership organisation working on feminist agendas in Scotland and Europe, to increase women’s power and influence and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve gender equality and justice.