

Exiting Lockdown: The Impact on Women



A report from The Fawcett Society
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Summary

The UK Government has made steps towards lifting the coronavirus lockdown, signalling a move to the next phase of the national response to the pandemic.

But with women making up a small minority of those involved in decision-making, gendered perspectives are being missed. This does not just risk inequalities - it means that the likelihood of us ending the lockdown successfully will be undermined.

Publish equality impact assessments: Existing structural inequalities and multiple disadvantage have been highly visible during this crisis. Yet the Government has not published an equality impact assessment for the Coronavirus Act 2020 or other key policies such as the Job Retention Schemes. Conducting and publishing these assessments would reassure the public that the Government is making decisions which take into account the lives of all of our citizens.¹ Acting on them would also make their decision making and policies more effective.

Test, track and trace: Making this key policy work will require a gendered lens. Without comprehensive sick pay coverage and local testing hubs, not all women will be able to access tests or self-isolate in line with Government aims.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for all workers paid at living wage levels: Government should abolish the lower earnings limit immediately to extend entitlement to all workers. For a test, track and trace approach to be fully effective, households without recourse to public funds due to migration status will also need to be able to access state support, through the lifting of this condition in England and the creation of temporary Limited Leave to Remain.

Vaccine and treatment development: Women have historically been excluded from medical trials. This must not be the case for coronavirus.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Women are the vast majority of frontline key workers. They must be supplied with PPE which is designed to fit women's bodies. Sufficient supplies of PPE should be available for a possible second wave of the virus.

Balancing health and the economy: Women are reporting higher levels of anxiety during the outbreak, and greater support for prioritising health concerns over the economy, even more so than men. More reassurance is needed that Government has adequately addressed these concerns.

Care infrastructure: Women rely more on childcare and social care. Both sectors are likely to see a number of providers go out of business during the economic crisis. It is estimated we could see a loss of 10,000 childcare providers and 150,000 childcare places. The vast majority of paid care workers are also women, so their jobs are at risk.

¹ Women and Equalities Committee (2020) 'Oral evidence: Unequal impact: Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics' <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/297/pdf/>

Government must work with local authorities and urgently intervene to ensure care provision for the future by supporting the childcare and social care sectors with additional emergency funding to enable local authorities to fill gaps in provision.

Support parents: The package of support to date from the Chancellor, although generous in terms of protecting workers and jobs, has not addressed the additional hardship and costs parents face. Child Benefit must be increased, urgently, to mitigate the risk of a massive spike in child poverty. Government should bring forward the introduction of part-time furloughing, which would be useful for parents and employers.

In addition, the limited return of school hours for only some children will not fully enable parents to return to work. Because of the unequal impact of caring roles this will result in fewer mothers being able to get back to work - which is likely to result in a two-tier workforce and mean more of them lose their jobs. We are also likely to see a reduction in support for remote learning for children still at home, as teachers focus their time on managing the children who are back in school.

Do not leave the vulnerable behind: The *Plan to Rebuild* must offer hope to people who are vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable. It must also offer workplace protections to their families and carers, and alternative education options if children in shielding households are unable to return to school for a prolonged period of time.

Improve women's representation in decision-making: Women must be better represented in decision-making and amongst government advisers.

Do not roll back positive changes in politics: Emergency changes like remote meetings and fixed timetabling in Parliament and on councils offers a way forward which must not be rolled back unthinkingly. Remote voting and online parliamentary sessions should be properly assessed and reviewed.

The premature return of Parliament will mean some MPs are able to attend the chamber and participate while others are not. This will disproportionately impact those with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities or who are shielding.

Effective working between tiers of government: Evidence shows considerable regional variation in virus infection rates. Local authorities are key partners for the Government in how it responds to this crisis and we know that women rely on local services. Any strategic regional response by combined authorities must ensure women are represented and included in decision making.

Key Facts

Test, track, trace

- Women are 6 out of every 10 key workers, and 77% of the workforce at high risk of exposure to coronavirus are women.
- 1.2m working women have no sick pay eligibility.
- The average worker loses out on £863 per fortnight spent on sick pay.
- 20% of women have no car access to visit out-of-town testing hubs; even more in some urban areas.
- 80% of migrants who are supported by councils because they have eventually get leave to remain.

Restarting the economy

- 56% of key worker women who are working outside the home report high rates of anxiety.
- Women are more likely to work in shut-down sectors, with 23% of women and 16% men in these industries.
- Women are 5% points more likely to have lost jobs than men during the outbreak.
- Women are doing 1.5 hours more childcare work per day than men during the lockdown, a gap half an hour greater than pre-coronavirus.
- Mothers in couples are one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to have lost their job or quit since lockdown
- Surveys suggest 10,000 childcare providers offering 150,000 places may go bust during the pandemic.

Protecting parents

- 57% of parents of children aged 11 or under say they will come out of the pandemic in more debt than before
- 43% say they have nearly run out of money, compared with 18% of other people.

Social care work

- Social care workers are 83% women, and have been twice as likely to die of coronavirus than the population on average.
- Carers are paid £8.52 per hour on average in the independent sector.
- 43% of home carers are on zero-hours contracts.
- State spending on social care has fallen by 2% in real terms over the last decade despite increasing demand.

Gender and politics

- Women make up just 14 out of 50 members of SAGE.
- The key decision-makers in Government on coronavirus are all male.
- Men are 2.7 times more likely to feature as expert commentators in the media during coronavirus.
- Women make up just 20% of city region devolution cabinets.

Equality impact assessments

Existing structural inequalities and multiple disadvantage have been highly visible during this crisis, from the higher death rates among men and unequal economic and social impact on women, to the higher risks faced by people of colour, to the loss of services and support for disabled people.

Yet the Government has not published an equality impact assessment for the Coronavirus Act 2020 or other key policies such as the Job Retention Scheme. The Minister for Women and Equalities stated that publishing equalities impact assessments would have a 'chilling effect' on the advice given by civil servants.²

We disagree, and believe that conducting and publishing these assessments would help to reassure the public that the Government is making decisions which take into account the lives of all of our citizens.³ Acting on them would also make their decision making and policies more effective, as this brief outlines. This is all the more necessary given our findings on the under-representation of women in decision-making structures.

<p>Publish equality impact assessments for all key Government policy decisions relating to the coronavirus pandemic.</p>

² Rt. Hon. Elizabeth Truss MP, evidence given to the Women and Equalities Select Committee 22 April 2020 <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/328/women-and-equalities-committee/publications/oral-evidence/>

³ Women and Equalities Committee (2020) 'Oral evidence: Unequal impact: Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics' <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/297/pdf/>

Test, track, trace

A vaccine or treatment for coronavirus may be some months away. Relaxing the lockdown without causing a further spike will require us to test, track and trace: testing potentially infected people, tracking their interactions, and tracing those they may have infected. The effectiveness of this approach will be determined not just by the number of tests available, but by the public's responses to their availability.

Sick pay

Under the proposed system, people will be required to self-isolate for up to 14 days⁴ if the mobile app or human contact tracing work identifies that they are at risk of having contracted coronavirus. Those asked to self-isolate to protect the public will need financial support to do this.

However, not everyone has access to even the limited support provided by Statutory Sick Pay, which requires workers to earn over the lower earnings limit of £120 per week. Women comprise 70% of individuals working in jobs which are not eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) – 1.3m women (9.5% of employees) compared with 0.5m men (4.5%) are in this category.⁵

Alongside this, we know that women make up the majority of 'key workers'. Resolution Foundation data suggests 65% of key workers are women, and in turn 36% of working women are key workers compared with 18% of men. Mothers are even more concentrated within this group, with 39% of working mothers in key worker roles.⁶ This is confirmed in ONS data which finds, using different definitions, that six in ten key workers are women.⁷ Research by Fawcett alongside Women's Budget Group, Queen Mary University of London and London School of Economics shows that among people working outside the home, more women than men say they have to continue doing so because they cannot afford not to (57% compared with 34%).⁸

We also know from work conducted by economists at Cambridge that women report being able to do 41% of their tasks from home compared to 46% for men.⁹ Finally, Autonomy

⁴ If they, or those they live with, develop any continuous symptoms.

⁵ ONS (2020) 'Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) – Estimates of employee jobs earning below £118 per week, UK, 2019'

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/adhocs/11396annualsurveyofhoursandearningsasheestimatesofemployeejobearningbelow118perweekuk2019>

⁶ Maja Gustafson and Charlie McCurdy (2020), *Risky Business: Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers* Resolution Foundation

<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf>

⁷ ONS (2020) *Coronavirus and Key Workers in the UK*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/coronavirusandkeyworkersintheuk/2020-05-15>

⁸ Fawcett Society (2020) <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/parents-struggling-and-women-keyworkers-are-anxious>

⁹ Adams-Prassl et. al. (2020) 'Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: evidence from real time surveys', *Cambridge-INET Working Paper Series* N: 2020/18 <https://www.inet.econ.cam.ac.uk/working-paper-pdfs/wp2018.pdf>

research suggests that women make up 77% of workers at high risk of exposure to coronavirus.¹⁰

This combination is toxic. Women are more likely to be working in key worker roles, but less likely to have the financial security needed to self-isolate if they become ill. Expanding access to sick pay is vital, but Government should also increase the rate of sick pay. The TUC has shown that the average worker would lose out on £863 per fortnight if they were on SSP, compared with median earnings.¹¹ Workers should not have to face such a stark choice between their finances and their health, and this dilemma again puts the Government's public health aims at risk.

Government should abolish the lower earnings limit for SSP immediately so that all workers who need to can self-isolate during the transition period.

The level of SSP should be increased to the rate of the Real Living Wage.

Community testing

To make test, track, and trace work, Government will need to significantly increase testing capacity, which is an ongoing and high-profile priority. However, the current plans for testing have flaws from a gender and intersectional perspective.

Government proposes to focus on 48 regional testing sites, with drive-through testing.¹² But women are less likely to drive, or to have access to a car. In some regions, a smaller proportion of households own cars at all – in London, 46% of men and 34% of women had access to a car in 2011/12, on a declining trend over time.¹³ Black people were even less likely to have access. Across England more widely, 81% of men and 70% of women have a driving licence,¹⁴ and 83% of men and 80% of women live in a household with access to a car.¹⁵

In combination with what we know (see elsewhere in this briefing) about women being more likely to be in high-stress frontline roles, and to have more domestic and childcare demands on their time, the risk is that women will have less time and fewer resources to access testing. Particularly in relation to the proportion of individuals who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms, this undermines the test, track and trace approach.

For testing to work effectively, these considerations need to be taken into account. Community testing in appropriate venues, within walking distance of as many homes as possible (particularly in high-density urban areas), will ensure that testing is genuinely accessible to people who need it most. Local authorities will be best placed to understand the real physical geographies – such as main roads and psychological barriers – that will

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/29/low-paid-women-in-uk-at-high-risk-of-coronavirus-exposure>

¹¹ TUC (2020) *Sick pay for all* <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/sick-pay-all>

¹² Gov.uk, 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested' accessed 13 May 2020 at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

¹³ TfL (2012), 'Roads Task Force – Technical Note 12' <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/technical-note-12-how-many-cars-are-there-in-london.pdf>

¹⁴ ONS, (2018) *National Travel Survey: England 2018*

¹⁵ Ibid.

determine whether hubs are actually accessible, and they should have a key role in rolling out community testing. This is one example of how devolved, local decision-making during this crisis could better support women.

Government must introduce community testing hubs within walkable distance from people's homes, working with local authorities.

No (wo)man is an island

In a public health crisis, we as a society are only as strong as our most vulnerable members. In Singapore, initial success in limiting cases and deaths was dramatically overturned because no attention was paid to the spread of the virus among an underserved population of migrant workers.¹⁶ Some of the worst-hit locations in the UK have been those with large migrant populations,¹⁷ and some of the most distressing stories of the fatal impact of coronavirus have been among migrants without documentation.¹⁸

Thousands of households in the UK do not have access to public funds, and many others also have no legal right to work. This can be due to explicit conditions on visas restricting them to 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), or it can be due to a lack of legal immigration status, for example due to refused asylum requests.

However, 80% of migrant families supported under social services legislation by councils because they do not have access to mainstream state support eventually receive leave to remain.¹⁹ Government currently offers Home Office decision-makers flexibility to lift NRPF visa conditions if families face destitution²⁰, and the High Court has ruled that the criteria governing this discretion must be made clearer.²¹ For at least the duration of the crisis, Government should simply lift NRPF, in line with Scotland and Wales. Otherwise people with NRPF will be, of necessity, required to expose themselves to greater coronavirus risks than they need to.

When it comes to migrant women who are not able to work or receive state support because they do not have legal migration status, for the duration of the coronavirus crisis the policy aim of maintaining a formalised migration system should take a back seat to public health. These women should be allowed to legally work and claim state support through being provided with a form of Limited Leave to Remain during the crisis.

¹⁶ Rebecca Ratcliffe (2020), "'We're in a prison'" Singapore's migrant workers suffer as Covid-19 surges back', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/23/singapore-million-migrant-workers-suffer-as-covid-19-surges-back>

¹⁷ Aamna Mohdin, (2020), "'Every day I hear about a Covid-19 death'" Life in the UK's worst affected area' *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/01/covid-19-coronavirus-newham-london-uk-worst-affected-area>

¹⁸ May Bulman (2020) 'Undocumented migrants dying of coronavirus because they're too afraid to seek help, MPs and charities warn' *The Independent* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-undocumented-migrants-deaths-cases-nhs-matt-hancock-a9470581.html>

¹⁹ NRPF Network (2019) *Annual report 2018-19: Local authority support for people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)* <http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/Documents/NRPF-connect-annual-report-2018-19.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk>

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/07/home-offices-denial-of-benefits-to-migrant-families-unlawful-court-rules>

Government should lift NRPF for all households, not just exceptional cases, in England. It should introduce a form of Limited Leave to Remain for all undocumented migrants during the crisis period. Immigration policy must take a back seat to public health during the pandemic.

Vaccines, treatments and PPE

In normal times, the creation of vaccines, medical treatments and personal protective equipment (PPE) treats male bodies as the 'norm', and women's bodies as an exception. This is particularly true when it comes to the design of drug studies.²² This is harmful to women's health – women must be included in the testing of any vaccine to make sure that it works for them.

The problem of medical equipment not being designed for women also interacts with the well-documented shortages of PPE, and with women also being more likely to work in frontline, key worker roles. Joint Fawcett research identifies that 61% of women working out of the home versus 43% of men say their work is currently essential.

Efforts to secure PPE must be broadened to include the many low-paid women in public facing roles, in particular care workers who have been twice as likely to die of coronavirus as the general population,²³ and shop workers given the reopening of retail. Those efforts must recognise, when specifying its design, that women make up a significant majority of those who need it. With the possibility of a second wave of the virus after summer, obtaining sufficient PPE that works for women keyworkers should be a focus while infections are low.

The Government should require all research it funds in the search for vaccines and cures to use both men and women within clinical trials, and report results on a sex-disaggregated basis.

The Government should ensure that PPE which fits women's bodies is available to all women working in high-risk occupations – in particular care workers.

²² Caroline Criado Perez (2019) *Invisible Women*

²³ ONS (2020) 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered up to and including 20 April 2020'
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/covid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwalesdeathsregistereduptoandincluding20thapril2020>

Restarting the economy

Balancing the economy and wellbeing

In easing lockdown and encouraging people to return to work, the Government has to make decisions that balance restarting the economy with protecting public health. Polling shows that the public is currently significantly more in favour of protecting individuals' health than the health of the economy – with 53% prioritising the former while 11% prioritise the latter. Women are even less likely to prioritise the economy, with 9% compared with 14% of men stating this as their preference.²⁴ Given higher risks faced by people of colour, this concern is likely to be even more prevalent among women of colour.

This chimes with joint Fawcett polling which has found that women report higher levels of anxiety than men – women key workers working outside the home have among the highest levels, with 56% reporting anxiety of 7 or above on a 0-10 scale.²⁵

Wider availability of antibody testing will be key to responding to these concerns. So will clear instructions to employers and employees about the considerations that need to be taken into account when deciding whether a return to the workplace is appropriate, or what measures should be taken to make workplaces safe. The concerns that have been raised – namely that Government guidance leaves too much to employers' discretion - suggest that Government should do more in this area.

Women's jobs are more likely to have been affected by the lockdown

Research at the beginning of the crisis suggested, on the basis of existing trends, that women were more likely to be in shutdown and key worker sectors. Resolution Foundation analysis at the beginning of the crisis found that employed women were twice as likely to be key workers as men.²⁶ This analysis also suggested that women are more likely to work in shut-down sectors, with 23% of women and 16% of men in the workforce in this group. IFS analysis reports similar findings,²⁷ and identifies that younger women, and lower paid workers, are especially likely to be in shutdown sectors. Similar analysis at LSE has also suggested that women are more likely to be in both shutdown and keyworker roles,²⁸ as has Fawcett's own data.²⁹

This has been reinforced by surveys conducted during the crisis showing that women are more likely to have lost work. Work by economists at Cambridge University suggests a

²⁴ Ipsos Mori, data tables, fieldwork conducted 8-11 May 2020
https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-05/covid-19_week_9_economy_130520.pdf

²⁵ Fawcett Society (2020), <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/parents-struggling-and-women-keyworkers-are-anxious>

²⁶ Gustafson and McCurdy, Ibid.

²⁷ Robert Joyce and Xiaowei Xu (2020) 'Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?' IFS Briefing note <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

²⁸ Claudia Hupkau and Barbara Petrongolo, (2020) 'Work, care and gender during the Covid-19 crisis', A CEP Covid-19 analysis, Paper No. 002 <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-002.pdf>

²⁹ Fawcett Society (2020), <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/women-are-bearing-the-emotional-brunt-of-the-coronavirus-crisis>

significant gender differential in the impact of the pandemic lockdown measures.³⁰ They find that 15% of UK workers lost their jobs due to coronavirus in the four weeks to early April, while 31% were furloughed. They find that women were 5% points more likely to lose their jobs than men.

Taking into account ability to work from home, as well as key factors such as occupation, industry, and permanent/temporary employment status, women are still 2.4% points more likely to lose their jobs. This may sound small, but is likely to represent hundreds of thousands of additional women unemployed following the pandemic.

However, the picture from survey data is not clear. Subsequent survey analysis by Resolution Foundation, separate to that cited above, has found an equal impact of job losses on women and men.³¹ Official Government data will not be published until June 2020.

Government has taken welcome steps in continuing furlough, and enabling it to occur on a part-time basis - but this should be brought forward. Some sectors will recover fully in due course but for those which it appears may struggle to do so – such as aviation, and high street retail – workers who lose their jobs must be offered support. As women are likely to make up the majority of those in need of support, it must be designed with a gender lens in mind; for example, by including effective childcare support, and by including a focus on the sectors which have shed jobs.

Government should publish data on the gendered impact of business support that it offers to different sectors, and ensure that it supports female-dominated sectors.

Employment schemes for those whose jobs have disappeared because of the pandemic should be designed with a gender lens.

³⁰ Adams-Prassl et. al. (2020) 'Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: evidence from real time surveys', *Cambridge-INET Working Paper Series* N: 2020/18 <https://www.inet.econ.cam.ac.uk/working-paper-pdfs/wp2018.pdf>

³¹ Laura Gardiner and Hannah Slaughter, (2020) 'The effects of the coronavirus crisis on worker: Flash findings from the Resolution Foundation's coronavirus survey' https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-effects-of-the-coronavirus-crisis-on-workers/#_edn2

Care work

Impact of school and nursery closures

We know that women, in normal times, spend far more time doing childcare work than men. The UK Time Use Survey shows that mothers with children aged 16 or under spend on average 118 minutes per day doing childcare work, compared with 67 for fathers.³² Consequently a third of mothers compared to a quarter of fathers report always feeling rushed, and mothers' time is more fragmented.

During the pandemic, using a different methodology, economists at Cambridge INET find that mothers working from home are spending over 3.5 hours per day on childcare, compared with around 2.5 hours for men; while both mothers and fathers are spending around 2 hours on home-schooling, with women doing a little more. Overall this results in a gap during the pandemic of 1.5 hours per day between the work done by women and men, an increase of half an hour.³³

The IFS also finds that for mothers in couple households, doing childcare has replaced paid work, with mothers doing two hours less paid work and two hours more childcare than fathers. Mothers are twice as likely to be interrupted in their work than before the crisis. As a result, mothers are one-and-a-half times as likely to have lost work during the crisis than fathers.³⁴ Single parents, who were not covered by the study, are likely to face even greater pressures.

During lockdown the gap in hours of childcare work appears therefore to have persisted despite all parents doing more care. Compounded with the fact that women, in usual times, do almost twice as much housework and cooking and four times as much laundry, women are likely to face significantly more pressure on their time than men during lockdown.³⁵ For single parents, most of whom are mothers, the strains will be even greater.

The greater childcare load on women means that the availability of paid care matters. There is a significant risk that many private, voluntary and independent childcare providers will go out of business during the lockdown, with some surveys suggesting up to 10,000 providers may close, losing 150,000 places.³⁶ The support on offer from Government was initially unclear and now appears inadequate. Initially both the free places funding, and furlough, were promised, but Government has since reduced this offer. As well as the loss of work experienced by women working in childcare, which is 98% female, insufficient childcare availability is likely to threaten mothers' employment. The economic literature on 'wage

³² Dunatchik, Mayer, and Speight (2019) *Parents and time pressure: evidence from time use diaries*, NatCen <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1827637/Time-pressure-report.pdf>

³³ Hupkau and Petrongolo, *ibid*

³⁴ Andrew et. al. (2020) 'How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?' *IFS Briefing Note BN290*

³⁵ ONS (2015) UK Harmonised European Time Use Survey <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

³⁶ Women's Budget Group (2020) 'Easing Lockdown: Potential problems for women' <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf>

scarring' is clear that this could have compound effects, if periods of unemployment now reduce women's incomes in the longer term.³⁷

Women's employment is more exposed to the coronavirus economic crisis, and women are more reliant on paid childcare to work. These factors combine to mean that restarting the economy without a specific plan in place to shore up childcare providers, through cash grants to enable them to continue operating, risks lasting damage to women's employment. Where capacity has been ineradicably lost, local authorities should be empowered, financially enabled, and legally mandated to set up provision to fill the gaps.

Government should provide easily accessible grant funding for independent, private, and voluntary childcare providers to shore up capacity.

Councils should be funded and empowered to set up provision to fill any gaps created by provider failure.

Reopening schools

Moves to begin reopening schools following lockdown seek to make it easier for parents, in particular mothers, to return to work. There are two key caveats to this aim. Firstly, many parents may remain anxious about how health and economic factors have been weighed up by decision-makers, and may therefore be reluctant to send their children to school. This is likely to be particularly true in relation to households where one or more family members is in a high-risk group. Households who do not feel comfortable returning their children to school must be reassured and/or exceptions made from the return to school (if it becomes mandated), and provision must be made for longer-term home-schooling for shielding households.

Secondly, options for reopening schools have included half-sized classes being held on alternate days. While this would enable some children to resume their education to some degree, it is likely to be insufficient for parents and carers who rely on school for childcare purposes to resume ordinary working patterns. This problem would be accentuated if, as reported, whole classes are required to close if their pupils or teachers become infected with Sars-Cov-2.

Additionally, the wrap-around care, such as after-school clubs, that many parents and carers rely on to make up a full day of childcare are likely to be limited at present. This problem will continue into the summer in a different form, as the holiday clubs that parents usually rely on are also unlikely to operate normally.

Parents will therefore be stuck between a rock and a hard place – between a Government and employers who want them to return to work, and schools, nurseries and wrap-around care which are not yet operating on normal timetables.

As mothers are more likely to be expected to take on this responsibility, this could place women at risk of reduced hours or redundancy, and risk the creation of a two-tier workforce. It will also leave parents whose children are not in the priority year groups even

³⁷ Paul Gregg and Emma Tominey, (2004) 'The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment' *CMPO Working Paper Series No. 04/097* <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmpo/migrated/documents/wp97.pdf>

facing even more pressure, and their children receiving less support, as resources for home schooling are diverted towards classes who have returned.

Government must therefore be clear that furlough will still be available to parents in these circumstances, and should consider reducing the minimum period of furlough alongside other amendments from August, from three weeks down to one. It should also consider how workers' rights to flexibility and protections from discrimination interact with this 'new normal', and whether they need to be strengthened to stop women falling out of work.

Action should be taken to support parents who remain wary of returning their children to school, such as those with family members who are shielding. This should include exemptions from penalties and additional home schooling support.

Parents who have to work alongside irregular school hours and limited wrap-around provision should be supported by a more flexible furlough scheme, and consideration should be given to expanding their working rights.

Funding and protecting social care

Care homes and care workers have been hit hard by coronavirus. The latest official figures as of 15 May 2020 state that there have been 12,526 deaths of care home residents from coronavirus,³⁸ while independent LSE estimates put the number of excess deaths in care homes at 22,000, or 54% of the excess deaths in England and Wales.³⁹ These represent a tragic loss of life for those dying of the virus and their families, and also a deeply traumatic experience for the frontline workers who have witnessed it. Government data also reveals that up to 20 April 2020, 86 women and 45 men working in social care died of coronavirus, giving death rates of 9.6 per 100,000 for women and 23.4 per 100,000 for men, twice the average across the population.⁴⁰

The Government has come under sustained criticism throughout the crisis for not prioritising care homes and care workers, including in relation to the provision of testing and PPE, and discharging infected patients into care homes from hospitals.⁴¹

But the crisis in social care predates the virus. Pay in the sector, in which 83% of workers are women and 21% BAME, is low, often barely above the statutory minimum. In March 2019 pay for direct care workers in the independent sector was £8.52 on average. On an annual full-time basis, these workers earned just £16,400. This was even lower in some settings, with workers in independent adult residential care homes getting just £8.33 per

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/deathsinvolvingcovid19inthecaresectorenglandandwales/deathsoccurringupto1may2020andregisteredupto9may2020provisional> accessed 21 May 2020

³⁹ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/e-May-20/Care-home-residents-account-for-over-half-of-excess-deaths-during-COVID-19-pandemic>.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales/deathsregistereduptoandincluding20april2020>

⁴¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52727221>

hour, and those in independent care home services with and without nursing paid £8.37 and £8.27 respectively.⁴²

A quarter of social care workers are employed on a zero-hours contract, making up 370,000 workers. This rises to two in five (43%) for those who work in domiciliary care, that is, visiting people to support them in their home. 15-minute visits and no pay for travel between appointments are still a common practice, and as a result turnover and vacancies are high.

While the vast majority of care workers are not employed directly by councils, the UK Homecare Association estimated in 2017 that 70% of people who need home care received it from the state.⁴³ State spending, through councils, of £21bn per year has fallen by 2% in real terms since 2009/10, despite more people being ruled ineligible for support.⁴⁴ In recovering from this crisis, Government and councils must invest in social care and in the terms and conditions of carers.

Increase social care workers' wages across the board, with the Real Living Wage as a minimum.

Reform and invest in the social care sector, and protect social care budgets from any future funding cuts.

Improve care workers' terms and conditions: provide adequate PPE, end 15-minute visits and zero-hours contracts, pay for travel time, and give all workers entitlement to statutory sick pay.

⁴² Skills for Care (2019), *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England* <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/national-information/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England.aspx>

⁴³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38907054>

⁴⁴ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2019/adult-social-care>

Protecting those at risk

Parents and poverty

Joint research by Fawcett with the Women's Budget Group, LSE and QMUL shows significant differences between parents and the rest of the population in terms of fears about debt and their household running out of money. 57% of parents of under-11s indicated they would come out of the pandemic in more debt than before, and 43% say they have nearly run out of money, compared with 18% of other respondents.⁴⁵

This is not surprising – families with children are at the highest risk of poverty among all household types, and the proportion of children in poverty has been increasing while the proportion of all people in poverty has remained relatively flat. Households at greater poverty risk have also been shown to be at greater risk from coronavirus – such as self-employed people, those in low-wage sectors, and people from ethnic minority groups.⁴⁶

Single parents will also be at even greater risk of poverty and debt as the crisis continues. Government support so far has focussed on reinforcing connections to the labour market (through the job retention schemes) and topping up individual benefit income. Despite these clearly documented financial strains on families, there has been no support offered. Child Benefit offers a quick way to correct this, with high coverage and high take-up.

Government should increase Child Benefit urgently as we exit the lockdown: we propose a rise to £50 per child.

Pregnant women

Medical evidence is currently unclear on whether pregnant women face additional risks from coronavirus. Pregnant women are likely to experience more serious illness if they get the flu, and the Government has categorised pregnant women as a vulnerable population on a precautionary basis. However, pregnant women's rights and needs have not been consistently addressed in Government announcements and guidance.

For example, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance did not state that furlough was available to pregnant women who could not safely work.⁴⁷

Government must explicitly include advice for pregnant women and new mothers at each stage during the release from lockdown.

Vulnerable and shielding households

The Government's document *Our Plan to Rebuild* focuses primarily on easing lockdown from an economic perspective. It gives little indication of future plans for the 'clinically extremely

⁴⁵ Fawcett Society (2020) <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/parents-struggling-and-women-keyworkers-are-anxious>

⁴⁶ House of Commons Library (2020) *Poverty in the UK: Statistics*

⁴⁷ <https://maternityaction.org.uk/2020/05/follow-up-letter-to-the-chancellor-on-furlough-for-pregnant-women-under-cjrs/>

vulnerable', beyond steps to support and provide food.⁴⁸ For those who are in the 'clinically vulnerable' group, such as over-70s and people with diabetes, it instructs them to continue to minimise contact outside the household.

This leaves large gaps when it comes to disabled people, older people, and others whose health makes them more vulnerable. There is no indication as to when people who receive social care are likely to have their rights to support reinstated. These households will be at particular risk, and face months of further shielding, if a second spike in infections occurs, reinforcing the need for care and consistent messaging when relaxing lockdown.

Importantly, there is also no indication as to what this means for carers (who are disproportionately women)⁴⁹ or for people who live with someone who is in the vulnerable category. As with parents whose childcare needs are not met by new limited school timetables, there is no indication of what protection from redundancy or loss of work they will be offered if they feel they cannot go into work given the health risk it would pose to their household members.

Rebuilding cannot leave the vulnerable behind. A route back to normality must be outlined for disabled people, older people, and those with health conditions which make them vulnerable.

⁴⁸ HM Government (2020) *Our Plan to Rebuild*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf

⁴⁹ PSA Commission on Care, 2016

Gender and politics

Decision-making and coronavirus

At present women make up just 14 of the 50 members of the main SAGE scientific committee.⁵⁰ According to recent research, men are 2.7 times more likely than women to feature as expert commentators in coronavirus coverage, which represents a three-year high.⁵¹ Only one woman Cabinet Minister has spoken, only once, during the daily ministerial briefings.

This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates that decision-making is being made primarily by men, which risks the gendered implications this briefing explores not being accounted for. Secondly, it sends the wrong message about whose needs are being considered. Fawcett research finds that 47% of all people say that more women MPs make politics 'more relevant to people like me'.⁵² A public cast list of middle-aged white men will not enhance public confidence in the Government's message or that it is taking their diverse needs into account.

Government should increase women's representation on SAGE, and enable more women cabinet ministers to participate in key decisions, and front the Government response.

Hybrid Parliament and remote councils

Parliament has begun to use electronic voting, remote attendance at questions and meetings, and more strictly timetabled business, during the lockdown. Similarly, local government has begun to conduct remote meetings, enabled by emergency legislation.⁵³ Fawcett,⁵⁴ and other stakeholders⁵⁵ have been calling for Parliament and local government to be modernised for some time. By enhancing flexibility when it comes to where legislators work, and reducing uncertainty of timings, they enable greater representation among people with caring responsibilities for adults or children. This also applies to those for whom travel is also a barrier, including disabled people. These changes have been introduced of necessity due to lockdown, but for many they are an improvement.

However, there is also a risk that unless gendered impacts are analysed – for example, in terms of who contributes to debates, tables questions, and participates in meetings – these

⁵⁰ Gov.uk, 'Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE): Coronavirus (COVID-19) response' <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies-sage-coronavirus-covid-19-response>

⁵¹ Guardian (2020), 'Male experts dominate UK news shows during coronavirus crisis' https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/may/04/male-experts-dominate-uk-news-shows-during-coronavirus-crisis?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Tweet

⁵² Fawcett Society (2018) '100 years since women first won the vote, UK pessimistic about achieving gender equality in Parliament' <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/100-years-since-women-first-won-the-vote-uk-pessimistic-about-achieving-gender-equality-in-parliament>

⁵³ The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

⁵⁴ Fawcett Society (2017) *Does Local Government Work for Women? Final Report of the Local Government Commission*

⁵⁵ Sarah Childs (2016) *The Good Parliament Report*

changes may also have unintended negative consequences. This may be particularly true if men are more likely than women to return to the physical rather than virtual parliamentary chamber, or to the estate in terms of parliamentary staff.

The premature return of MPs to the Commons also risks a two-tier Parliament. If disabled or pregnant Members, over 70s, or those with shielding family members, or BAME MPs who are at higher risk, cannot safely return to the workplace, their constituents will be disadvantaged if the hybrid Parliament is abandoned too quickly. Conservative MP Robert Halfon has described a premature return as threatening the lives of some MPs, and a group of 35 MPs has written to the Speaker to oppose it.⁵⁶

The presumption should be that remote meetings and predictable timetabling changes are not rescinded, in local government or Parliament. Their impact should be analysed before a decision is made.

Working with local and regional governments

ONS data shows considerable regional variation in deaths from coronavirus, with London worst affected in mid-April.⁵⁷ However, new infections are being identified at substantially different rates in different areas across the country.⁵⁸

Local authorities and city region devolved authorities should be key partners for the Government in responding to this crisis. We know that women are more likely to rely on local services, but also that they are substantially under-represented in decision-making structures, making up just 35% of local councillors and an even smaller proportion of council leaders or cabinet members.⁵⁹

Representation on devolved authorities is also a concern. There are 95 members of Combined Authority boards across the eight metro mayor areas, and just 20 are women. All eight metro mayors are men.⁶⁰ Liverpool City Region has now launched a Coronavirus Economic Recovery Panel – if this replicates the inequality on Combined Authorities, there is a risk that women will be locked out of discussions about the recovery.

Working with local and regional authorities on the priorities outlined above will be vital – but policymakers at local and national level need to bring women in.

National, devolved and local governments must work effectively together and ensure women are represented in decision-making.

⁵⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/20/mps-fear-two-tier-commons-if-lockdown-lifted-in-uk-parliament>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deaths-involvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april>

⁵⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51768274>

⁵⁹ Fawcett Society (2017) *Does Local Government Work for Women? Final Report of the Local Government Commission*

⁶⁰ Leah Culhane and Andrew Bazeley (2019) *Including Women's Voices*, Fawcett Society

<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1015f2fe-23fe-46ab-9096-38632d02b2a6>

About us

The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all.

The Fawcett Society has co-ordinated over 80 organisations for a joint list of asks to the Government from the women's sector, across nine different areas from women in prison to the impact on parents: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/coronavirus-urgent-call-for-uk-government-to-support-women-and-girls>. Our wider work on coronavirus is available at <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/coronavirus-making-women-visible>.