

## Written evidence from the UK Women's Budget Group (COV0164)

### The Government's response to Covid-19: Human Rights implications

1. The UK Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an independent network of leading academic researchers, policy experts and campaigners that analyses the gender impact of economic policy on different groups of women and men and promotes alternatives for a gender equal economy.
2. Since March 2020, our work has pivoted significantly to focus on the experience and impact of Coronavirus on different groups of women in the UK<sup>1</sup>. We are responding to the Joint Committee's inquiry using this research to explain the impact of the pandemic on women's human rights in the UK specifically which our research suggest are at risk as a result of Coronavirus.

### What steps need to be taken to ensure that measures taken by the Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic are human rights compliant?

3. Covid-19 and the consequent economic crisis is already having a significant **impact on gender equality and its interaction with other inequalities of income, race, disability and class** as data below demonstrates. This is a human rights issue because equalities are a human right. Gender equality specifically is contained in Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 14 of the Human Rights Acts and, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UK has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW.)
4. The Government must commit to **collecting and publishing gender, ethnicity and disability-disaggregated data at every stage** of the pandemic to assess the impact on women's and minorities' rights as illustrated throughout this submission.
5. This data should then be used to **undertake and publish comprehensive and meaningful Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)**, used to inform human rights-compliant policy making. The Public Sector Equality Duty mandates all Government departments to have 'due regard' for equality as per various human rights instruments. Yet, both before and throughout the pandemic several Government departments have failed to publish Equality Impact Assessments at all, and those that have been published have been of limited quality.
6. For example, the Government's failure to take account of pregnancy and maternity (a protected characteristic under the Equality Act) in the original design of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) has seen many women penalised for motherhood until very recently, when the arrangements were corrected to exclude periods of family related leave in payment calculations. This thereby explicitly discriminated against women who are more likely to take longer periods of time off after giving birth or adopting <sup>2</sup>.
7. Meaningful and accurate EIAs should assess how all nine protected characteristics will interact with pandemic policies as well as **where they intersect**. For example, we now know that disabled women are 11 times more likely to die of Covid-19 than non-disabled women<sup>3</sup>, a staggering statistic

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<sup>1</sup> WBG (2020) Covid-19 tag <https://wbg.org.uk/topics/covid-19/>

<sup>2</sup> This omission is against the principle of equal treatment outlined in CEDAW <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> ONS (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales

that requires urgent action from the Government as a threat to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

8. Intersectional EIAs mean taking account of how policy will impact individuals as well as households as we know that finances and work (paid and unpaid) are not always equally distributed within households, especially heterosexual households. It is also important that the Government takes account of the long term and cumulative impacts of pandemic policy<sup>4</sup>. For example, decisions to close the schools and, some would argue, deprioritise their opening, could have lifetime consequences for both children's attainment<sup>5</sup> and parents – especially mothers<sup>6</sup> – paid work opportunities.
9. Human rights compliant responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis must take account of inequalities of unpaid care work as well as enduring discrimination in the labour market. The asymmetrical distribution of unpaid care has been exposed and exacerbated by lockdown and the closure of schools. Failure to account for this has seen millions of parents sent back to work without formal childcare arrangements in place, a burden we know is falling to women<sup>7</sup>. Initial findings<sup>8</sup> suggest this will increase the gender pay gap and decrease women's paid employment thereby significantly impacting women's economic and social rights. Women with caring responsibilities, pregnancies or disabilities may also be most vulnerable to job losses due to discrimination in the labour market.

### **What will the impact of specific measures taken by Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic be on human rights in the UK?**

10. Measures taken by the Government have protected many from poverty and homelessness yet more must be done to protect people's economic and social rights. **The failure to significantly intervene in the social security system** is already increasing poverty and food insecurity<sup>9</sup> with the Trussell Trust reporting an 89% increase in food bank usage during lockdown<sup>10</sup>.
11. It is recognised that **the two-child limit and accompanying 'rape clause' breach human rights frameworks including** The European Convention of Human Rights, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>11</sup> as well as disproportionately impacting Black, Asian or ethnic minority families<sup>12</sup>. The single payment of six means-tested benefits once a month to a single

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Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales: 2 March to 15 May 2020

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/2marchto15may2020>

<sup>4</sup> WBG (2020) How to do a gender equality impact assessment <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FINAL-EIA-briefing.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> As in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>6</sup> As in CEDAW <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> For example WBG (2020) The impact of Covid-19 on women in Coventry <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/covid-19-report-the-impact-on-women-in-coventry/>

<sup>8</sup> Turn2Us (2020) Press release: Coronavirus pandemic widens gender gap <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/Coronavirus-pandemic-widens-the-gender-gap>

<sup>9</sup> As in Article 11 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> The Trussell Trust (2020) Press release: food banks report busiest month ever <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/06/03/food-banks-busiest-month/>

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2019) Two child limit <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmworpen/1540/1540.pdf> page 10.

<sup>12</sup> WBG (2018) Intersecting inequalities <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/intersecting-inequalities/>

bank account also **increases the risk of financial and other forms of domestic abuse**. The five week wait, benefits cap and low levels of housing allowance and Universal Credit are impoverishing thousands. An urgent review of Universal Credit and immediate suspension of these measures as well as uplift to legacy benefits is needed to avoid these human rights infringements. **No Recourse to Public Funds should be suspended to protect migrants' human rights**.

12. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is also integral to the success of the Test and Trace scheme and people's right to health because if individuals are asked to self-isolate they need assurance they will be able to make ends meet. Without sufficient financial support many may feel they have no choice but to continue working. Women are less likely to be eligible for SSP because they are overrepresented in low paid work and on zero hours contracts. **WBG calculations find that 15.5% of women and 10.6% of men do not earn enough to qualify for SSP**<sup>13</sup>. This means self-isolating for two weeks and claiming SSP may force women and their children into poverty.
13. Women and LGBTQ+ people's right to life, freedom from torture and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment<sup>14</sup> - have been severely compromised by lockdown which has seen a significant **increase in domestic abuse** sexual and online child abuse according to major charities<sup>15</sup>. The Government was not fast enough to respond to this and has not equipped specialist organisations with the funding needed to adapt to the increase in demand and the shift to online services<sup>16</sup>.
14. The closure of schools has had an impact on **children's right to education** enclosed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially those from more marginalised or disadvantaged families due to equipment shortages and challenges juggling home schooling and work, especially for key workers. The attainment gap between disadvantaged children is expected to increase enormously as a result of the inequalities in home schooling provision<sup>17</sup>.
15. Many people's **right to shelter will be disrupted** by the pandemic as in Article 11 of the ICESCR<sup>18</sup>. On the one hand, the Government's failure to support renters and the ensuing unemployment/debt crises is likely to increase homelessness. On the other hand, homeless people who were housed in hotels during the lockdown will now be left without support again and at significantly higher risk of contracting the virus.
16. Human Rights organisations voiced concerns<sup>19</sup> that the **powers given to police, immigration and public health officials to detain or forcibly isolate people** could be particularly dangerous for some communities for whom the police do not necessarily represent safety including: victims/survivors of domestic abuse, Black and ethnic minority people, homeless people, sex-workers/women in prostitution and undocumented migrants. This could go against the International Covenant on Civil

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<sup>13</sup> WBG (2020) WBG responds to Government's recovery roadmap. Update 29 May. <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/28-May-update-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> As well as General Recommendation 19 from CEDAW Committees <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/VAW.aspx#:~:text=In%201992%2C%20the%20CEDAW%20Committee%20in%20its%20General,freedoms%20on%20a%20basis%20of%20equality%20with%20men.>

<sup>15</sup> Women's Aid (2020) Covid-19 resource hub <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-resource-hub/>

<sup>16</sup> The Women's Resource Centre (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on the UK Women's Sector <https://www.wrc.org.uk/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-the-uk-womens-sector>

<sup>17</sup> The Sutton Trust (2020) Covid impacts: schools shutdown <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>

<sup>18</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> Liberty (2020) New law is biggest restriction on our freedom in a generation (<https://bit.ly/2wOMTMJ>); Amnesty International UK (2020) Coronavirus Bill must human rights at the centre of response (<https://bit.ly/2UGUWUE>)

and Political Rights<sup>20</sup>. Data now shows that the provisions contained in The Coronavirus Act 2020 have seen **Black people, disproportionately stopped by the Met police**<sup>21</sup>. The six-month review built into the Coronavirus Act 2020 is welcome but extended police powers must be kept under review and used vigilantly.

17. **Disabled, older and people with serious health conditions may be denied treatment for Covid-19**<sup>22</sup>, even where these conditions have no impact on their chance of benefiting from such treatment. Age UK has described pressure on some older people to sign 'do not resuscitate' forms as 'morally repugnant' following reports that GPs and in one case an entire care home have been asked to get some patients to agree to 'do not attempt CPR' (DNACPR) forms. Decisions about treatment for Covid-19 should respect the human rights of disabled and older people as well as people with serious health conditions. It should not be denied to people who would benefit based on assumptions about their quality of life. Relaxing of social care, mental health and child protection regulations must be vigilantly reviewed for its impact on disabled, elderly and vulnerable and standards restored as soon as possible.

### **Which groups will be disproportionately affected by measures taken by the Government to address the COVID-19 pandemic?**

18. WBG and other research has shown that women, especially poorer women, Black, Asian and ethnic minority women and disabled women are disproportionately affected by measures taken by the Government to address the Covid-19 pandemic. We now look at each of these in turn. This is to some extent a result of pre-existing inequalities:
- Women were more likely to be low paid and in insecure employment.** Women were the majority of low paid earners (69%<sup>23</sup>) the majority of those in part-time employment (74%), involuntary part-time employment (57%), temporary employment (54%), zero-hours contracts (54%) and part-time self-employment (59%).<sup>24</sup>
  - Women were the majority of people living in poverty and female-headed households are more likely to be poor.**<sup>25</sup> For example, 45% of lone parents (90% of whom are women) are living in poverty.<sup>26</sup>
  - Pre Covid-19, women were more likely to struggle with debt and bills.** 39% of women and 34% of men reported it was a struggle to keep up with bills, some or most of the time, 26% of women and 23% of men said they ran out of money by the end of the month and 29% of women and 23% of men said they would not be able to make ends meet for a month or less if they lost their main source of income.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

<sup>21</sup> The Guardian (June 2020) Met police twice as likely to fine black people over lockdown breaches - research <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/03/met-police-twice-as-likely-to-fine-black-people-over-lockdown-breaches-research>

<sup>22</sup> In breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-human-rights-work/monitoring-and-promoting-un-treaties/un-convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

<sup>23</sup> WBG (2020) Women, employment and earnings (<https://bit.ly/2R4d4pj>)

<sup>24</sup> WBG (2020) Women, employment and earnings (<https://bit.ly/2R4d4pj>) based on ONS (Oct 2019) EMP01 SA: Full-time, part-time and temporary workers (seasonally adjusted) (<http://bit.ly/2pZwHnW>)

<sup>25</sup> WBG (2018), The female face of poverty, (<https://bit.ly/34jMVZa>)

<sup>26</sup> WBG (29 March 2019) DWP data reveals: women and children continue to be worst affected by poverty (<https://bit.ly/2xHdxHj>)

<sup>27</sup> ONS (2 April 2020) Early indicator estimates from the Wealth and Assets Survey: April 2018 to September 2019 (<https://bit.ly/34fc1bK>)

- d) **On average, women carried out 60% more unpaid work than men.**<sup>28</sup> This reduces the time for paid working meaning that they earn less, own less and are more likely to be living in poverty.
- e) **Women were more likely to experience domestic and sexual violence and abuse.** 20% of women and 4% of men have suffered sexual assault, including attempts, since age 16.<sup>29</sup> More than 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse during her lifetime<sup>30</sup>: t
- f) **Women were the majority (67%) of people living in homelessness,** with single parents making up two-thirds of homeless families with children.<sup>31</sup>

#### 19. Women in key work:

- a) Women are twice as likely to be key workers as men<sup>32</sup>. 39% of working mothers are key workers compared with just 27% of the working population as a whole<sup>33</sup>.
- b) This is, in part, a result of women's overrepresentation in NHS (where 77% of staff are women), social care (where women make up 83% of care home staff and domiciliary carers) and education (where women are 98% of childcare staff, 85% primary school teachers and 63% of secondary school teachers.) BAME women and migrant women are also overrepresented in this work. For example, 1 in 4 care-workers is born outside the UK. 21% of the social care staff<sup>34</sup> and 21% of NHS<sup>35</sup> staff workforce identify as BAME compared with 14% of the UK population.
- c) Many of the workers in these sectors are low paid. 98% of the 1 million high exposure key workers being paid less than 60% of median average wages are women<sup>36</sup>.
- d) Women may also be less likely to be able to work from home due to the gender pay gap: the Resolution Foundation finds that only 1 in 10 low paid workers can work from home<sup>37</sup> and 69% of low-paid workers are women<sup>38</sup>.
- e) For key workers with young children or single parents, finding childcare during lockdown has been virtually impossible since informal networks have been made impossible by social distancing requirements.

#### 20. Women more likely to work in locked down sectors:

- a) Young women especially are disproportionately likely to work in the sectors that have been hit hardest by the lock-down. 36% of young women and 25% of young men worked in sectors that have been closed down including restaurants, shops, leisure facilities and travel and tourism.<sup>39</sup>
- b) These are also sectors where there is uncertainty as to when and if they can open and/or be financially viable due to distancing requirements. Hospitality, tourism and retail are all dominated by women and are likely to be particularly badly hit risking disproportionate redundancies.

<sup>28</sup> ONS (10 November 2016) 'Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work' (<https://bit.ly/2KBdnG9>)

<sup>29</sup> Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017, ONS, 2018 <https://bit.ly/2C0Y83y>

<sup>30</sup> ONS, 2018, Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 <https://bit.ly/34cTZp8>

<sup>31</sup> WBG (2019) A Home of Her Own: Housing and Women (<http://bit.ly/2L9c9Ts>)

<sup>32</sup> The Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

<sup>33</sup> The Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

<sup>34</sup> Skills for care (2019) State of the adult social care sector <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/State-of-Report-2019.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Gov.uk (2020) NHS workforce <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/nhs-workforce/latest>

<sup>36</sup> The Guardian (2020) Low paid women in UK at high risk of Coronavirus exposure

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

<sup>37</sup> The Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

<sup>38</sup> WBG (2019) Employment and earnings <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/2019-wbg-briefing-gender-employment-and-earnings/>

<sup>39</sup> IFS (6 April 2020) Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? (<https://bit.ly/2XgDc4w>)

## 21. Women doing more care under lockdown:

- a) Women are taking on the majority of childcare, home-schooling and domestic work while and childcare facilities are closed. A 5000-household study by the IFS found that mothers are doing 50% more unpaid work than fathers and that more of their work time is interrupted. While 70% of fathers' work hours are spent exclusively doing work, this is the case for only 53% of mothers' work hours: mothers are being interrupted during 57% more of their paid work hours than fathers<sup>40</sup>. A similar study from the University of Cambridge also found that women are doing one hour more unpaid work each day than men<sup>41</sup>.
- b) This has had an impact on mothers' working hours – the IFS found that mothers working hours had reduced from an average of just under 5 hours a day to under 2 hours a day. Fathers working hours had reduced from over 8 hours a day to just under 4.
- c) Failures in social care too, will have a disproportionate economic impact on women since they are majority of those in need of care and the majority of those working in the sector. Care homes and domiciliary agencies are facing decreased demand due to justified fears about contagion and increased costs of PPE. Many also report that they may not financially survive the pandemic<sup>42</sup>. This will mean a shortage of care for elderly and disabled people who need it, as well as job losses for the women who work in the sector.
- d) Shortages of care also mean women are more likely than men to leave the paid workplace to do unpaid care therefore decreasing their employment, earnings and independence<sup>43</sup>.
- e) This increased responsibility for care may increase women's risk of being made redundant when the furlough schemes (CJRS) tapers off because they might be seen as 'less productive' when, in reality, they are trying to do two or more jobs at once.

## 22. Decrease in women's earnings and economic independence:

- a) Research by Turn2Us, showed that women expected their incomes to fall more than men's as a result of the crisis. Women expected their earnings to fall by 26% (£309) compared to 18% (£247) for men between February and April 2020. The difference widens in two-parent households (£405 vs. £309 for men)<sup>44</sup>.
- b) In the same period there was a 42% increase in the number of single parent families expecting to live on £500 or less a month, suggesting huge increases in child poverty. That equates to an additional 756,000 single living on £500 or less next month, an increase of 216,000 compared to February. That also equates to 378,000 children living in single parent households where they anticipate less than £500 in income)<sup>45</sup>.
- c) Turn2Us has warned that as a result the pay gap would increase by 15%.

## 23. Women at risk of redundancy as 'furlough scheme' ends:

- a) ONS data published on 16 June shows that the furlough scheme has prevented widespread redundancies so far. However, the scheme is due to be tapered from July and end in October. It

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<sup>40</sup>IFS (2020) How are mothers and fathers coping under lockdown? <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>

<sup>41</sup> University of Cambridge (2020) Women bear brunt of coronavirus economic shutdown in UK and US. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/women-bear-brunt-of-coronavirus-economic-shutdown-in-uk-and-us>

<sup>42</sup> The Financial Times (2020) UK's biggest care home group warns of coronavirus hit to business <https://www.ft.com/content/edf259f8-7cb0-4d6f-b58f-7202a5d28e28>

<sup>43</sup> WBG (2020) Briefing: social care and Covid-19 <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/briefing-social-care-and-covid-19/>

<sup>44</sup> Turn2Us (2020) Press release: Coronavirus pandemic widens gender gap <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/Coronavirus-pandemic-widens-the-gender-gap>

<sup>45</sup> Turn2Us (2020) Press release: Coronavirus pandemic widens gender gap <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/Coronavirus-pandemic-widens-the-gender-gap>

seems inevitable that requiring employers to pay a percentage of furlough wages will lead to redundancies as sectors who are making zero profit and cannot reopen anytime soon choose who they can afford to pay. Sectors where there is uncertainty as to when and if they can open and/or be financially viable due to distancing requirements such as hospitality and tourism. These sectors are dominated by women and are likely to be particularly badly hit risking disproportionate redundancies.

- b) This is a particular issue for young women: analysis by IFS shows that 36% of young women and 25% of young men worked in sectors that have been closed down including restaurants, shops, leisure facilities and travel and tourism. Overall, 17% of women and 13% of men work in these sectors. Low-paid workers are seven times as likely to work in a sector that has shut down<sup>46</sup>.
- c) In addition, with limited formal and informal childcare options in the long summer holidays and reports that schools will be disrupted into the autumn, it is likely that women will continue to be carrying out a large amount of additional childcare and other unpaid work<sup>47</sup>. This will put them at greater risk of redundancy if employers are having to make job cuts.

#### 24. Schools and childcare; challenges for mothers:

- a) The decision to close schools was clearly necessary. However, Government handling of both the education and childcare sectors has been poorly managed. The result of this mismanagement will undoubtedly be economic penalties for women predominantly.
- b) A quarter of nurseries in the UK report that they will not financially survive the year. According to the Early Years Alliance this is equivalent to 150,000 childcare places. This will also mean more job losses for women since women are 98% of early years childcare staff<sup>48</sup>.
- c) Many primary schools and all secondary schools will not return until September by which time most parents will be expected to be back at work. Even then there could be disruption into the autumn term with the possibility of many children returning part-time if social distancing is still required.
- d) This risks setting back gender equality because parents and those with other caring responsibilities, who are more likely to be women, will not be able to return to work without full time childcare available for all children. This clearly limits their earning power as well as making them more vulnerable to job losses and associated poverty. It also increases the risks of economic dependency which in turn increases the risk of financial or other forms of domestic abuse.

#### Black, Asian, and ethnic minority (BAME) women:

- 25. BAME women are overrepresented in key work, zero hours work and low paid work so the economic conditions above are increased<sup>49</sup>.
- 26. They also face discrimination in the labour market as a result of race or ethnicity as well as gender. This is likely to put them at greater risk of redundancy when the furlough scheme ends.
- 27. Public Health England have said racism is a factor in why BAME people have suffered disproportionate Covid-19 fatalities and the economic impact will also be felt more severely by BAME people due to pre-existing economic inequalities<sup>50</sup>.
- 28. This is reflected in our polling which suggests that 43% of disabled or retired BAME women and 48% BAME men say that they had lost government support compared with 13% white women and

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<sup>46</sup> IFS (6 April 2020) Sector shutdowns during the Coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? (<https://bit.ly/2XgDc4w>)

<sup>47</sup> Education select committee (2020) Oral evidence: the impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/493/pdf/>

<sup>48</sup> The Guardian (2020) UK childcare industry crushed by Coronavirus crisis <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/apr/24/childcare-industry-crushed-by-coronavirus-crisis>

<sup>49</sup> WBG (2020) Crises collide: women and Covid-19 <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/crises-collide-women-and-covid-19/>

<sup>50</sup> BBC News (2020) Coronavirus: racism could play a part in BAME Covid deaths <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-53035054>

21% white men. Over half (51%) of BAME women say they were not sure where to turn for help compared with 1 in 5 (19%) white women<sup>51</sup>.

### **Disabled women:**

29. ONS data from March – May 2020 shows that disabled women with limiting disabilities aged under 65 are 11.3 times more likely to die than non-disabled women, disabled men aged under 65 with limiting disabilities are 6.5 times more likely to die. A third of all lives lost to Coronavirus in the UK have been those of disabled people<sup>52</sup>. This significantly bucks the trend of more men dying than women and warrants comprehensive investigation.
30. Disabled women and men have suffered doubly from economic and health measures implemented by the Government in response to Covid-19. They have had care standards ‘loosened’ by the Care Act 2004 changes in the Coronavirus Act 2020. Many have effectively had their Employment Support Allowance payments frozen while those on Universal Credit receive a much-needed uplift. And, they have care and support withdrawn due to lack of regulation, PPE and testing.
31. Our research shows the additional pressures that disabled women have faced during the coronavirus lockdown, due to a combination of gender and disability impacts. A third (34%) of disabled women said that their household has nearly run out of money, compared with a fifth (24%) of non-disabled women and men (23%). Over a third (38%) of disabled mothers said they were struggling to feed their children<sup>53</sup>.
32. A fifth of disabled women said they had lost support from the Government, and 43% said they had lost support from other people. 61% said, in the midst of lockdown, that they were worried about accessing the medication they need, compared with 43% of non-disabled women and 37% of non-disabled men. 63% said they had found it hard to get what they needed from the shops<sup>54</sup>.
33. There are specific concerns for disabled women especially disabled women who are mothers or those who are vulnerable to domestic abuse. Disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled women<sup>55</sup>.

### **Migrant women**

34. Migrant women face additional discrimination in the labour market due to their migration status. They are overrepresented in key work – including health and social care<sup>56</sup>.
35. Many non-EU migrant women who are made unemployed or experience domestic abuse during lockdown still have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) which increases their risk of destitution. On study from the University of Cambridge found that 33% of cleaners and construction workers were made unemployed in the period 9-14 April: this is real concern given the overrepresentation of migrant workers in these sectors.
36. Data sharing between the Home Office and other public bodies including the NHS and police mean that migrant women may not feel comfortable using these services during lockdown. This could mean letting Covid symptoms go untested or not reporting abuse/seeking refuge.

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<sup>51</sup> WBG (2020) New data suggests crisis of support for BAME women <https://wbg.org.uk/media/new-data-reveals-crisis-of-support-for-bame-women/>

<sup>52</sup> ONS (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales  
Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales: 2 March to 15 May 2020  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/2marchto15may2020>

<sup>53</sup> WBG (2020) Disabled women under immense pressure under lockdown <https://wbg.org.uk/media/press-releases/disabled-women-under-immense-pressure-during-lockdown/>

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<sup>56</sup> Skills for care (2019) State of the adult social care sector <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/State-of-Report-2019.pdf>

37. Most non-EU migrants continue to pay the heightened Immigration Health Surcharge which puts additional pressure on already stretched finances.
38. Refugee and asylum-seeking women are most at risk of poverty, destitution and homelessness; before, during and after Covid-19<sup>57</sup>.
39. There is only one refuge space per region for women without recourse to public funds.

### Recommendations for action

40. Both the **social care and childcare sectors need immediate funding injections** to ensure they survive the pandemic and can provide care to those who need it as well as ensuring women can return to work.
41. Then, the Government must not postpone consultation on **longer-term reform for the social care sector** any further. Investment in childcare must be central to future budget announcements as the vital social infrastructure necessary to reboot the economy, *for everyone*.
42. As the CJRS begins to taper, **parents and other full time carers need a guarantee that they will not be made redundant if they cannot get full time childcare** and therefore cannot return to work.
43. The Government should require all companies with more than 250 employees (i.e. those who would have been reporting on their gender pay gap) to **report the number of people they make redundant by protected characteristics** including sex and race, to ensure accountability against bias or discrimination.
44. **Part time furlough needs to be made possible before August** to enable those who can return to work and juggle part time childcare. This is the reality of many women's lives with or without Covid-19. Failing to introduce this sooner risks widening the gender pay gap, and diminishing economic output.
45. The Government needs to be honest about the difficulties ahead for schools and nurseries and **consult education unions, local authorities and civil society to come up with a national plan** to re-open schools and maintain social distancing or, find other ways to ensure parents can return to work.
46. **Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) needs to be increased** to the level of the real living wage and **the minimum income requirement abolished** to ensure that the Test and Trace scheme can be effective in stopping a second wave which would result in further deaths and economic damage.
47. **Lift restrictions on benefits that are untenable during the outbreak:** LHA rates should be raised to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile; the benefit cap, under-occupancy penalty, and two child limit should be lifted; the personal allowance in Universal Credit and working tax credit further increased and sanctions and conditionality must be suspended without exception.
48. **Get Universal Credit to families sooner by making budgeting advances non-repayable grants** to reflect the huge increase in demand for social security. Currently families are having to wait five weeks for a payment, or accrue debt in the form of a Budgeting Advance, which is only available as a loan. During the crisis the Government should convert this into a non-repayable grant.
49. **Increase Employment Support Allowance payments in line with the rise in Universal Credit** and Working Tax Credit: at present, up to 2m disabled people have been left behind by the necessary and welcome increase in payments for other benefits.
50. **Increase Child Benefit, to £50 per child:** to mitigate huge increases in child poverty as well as digital poverty and other economic factors that contribute to the attainment gap. A temporary uplift is necessary to ensure children do not lose out.
51. **Lift the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition:** Excluding migrant women from support risks exposing them to the virus, which threatens the public health response; and fails to recognise the vital role many migrant workers are playing in combating the pandemic.

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<sup>57</sup>Women for Refugee Women (2020) Will I ever be safe? Destitution for refugee and asylum seeking women in the UK <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/not-safe/>

52. **Complete and publish meaningful and comprehensive equality impact assessments** of all Covid-19 policy, including steps taken to ease the lockdown, informed by intersectional data.
53. **Reinstate the obligation to provide social care** for all those who need it, as soon as Covid-19 is under control, replacing the discretionary obligation contained in the Coronavirus Act.
54. **Support the Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill** at every stage through parliament to ensure the implementation of adequate legal protection against redundancy for pregnant women and new mothers. This new legislation will ensure that pregnant women and mothers can be made redundant only in very limited circumstances and is crucial to ensuring mothers do not face increased discrimination in challenging economic times.

*16/07/2020*