

HMRC data prompts concern of 'gender furlough gap'

Data from HMRC¹ shows women are more likely than men to have been furloughed:

- Women were the majority (52.1%) of workers put on furlough across the UK March – August 2020. Roughly 133,000 more women were furloughed than men across the UK.
- Women were the majority of furloughed workers in every UK region except the West Midlands. More women than men were furloughed in 72% of parliamentary constituencies.
- The Chancellor's own constituency has the highest gender furlough gap, with the highest percentage of women furloughed (60.5% of eligible employees.)
- The gender furlough gap is higher for younger women than older women: women aged 18-24 were 53.1% of those furloughed in this age group, compared with 51.5% in the 45-64 age group.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) or 'furlough scheme' was introduced in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown. In October 2020, HMRC released data on who, of eligible employees, had been 'furloughed' by 31 August 2020, disaggregated by several protected characteristics including sex and age.²

The data shows that women are more likely to have been furloughed than men in the March – August 2020 period. The state only covers 80% of earnings in the 'furlough scheme' so more women than men have taken a pay cut this year. There is concern that those furloughed may be more likely to be made redundant if the scheme ends before the economy recovers. The gender pay gap has slightly decreased in 2020³ but this data is an early warning sign that it may increase because of the pandemic.

Women of every age were more likely to be furloughed than men, except in the West Midlands and in the over-65 age group. The gender furlough gap is bigger for younger women. Overall, there are fewer women in the labour market than men, and women are more likely to work in ineligible employment including the public sector - so the

¹ Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-october-2020>

² We regret that this data is not yet available by other protected characteristics including race, ethnicity and disability.

³ The full-time mean average gender pay gap in 2020 is 11.5%, down from 13.1% in 2019. That means that Equal Pay Day has moved 6 days later in the year, compared to 14th November in 2019. The mean gender pay gap for all employees, not just those working full-time, is 14.6% this year, down from 16.3% last year. This year's data comes with a significant reliability warning given the difficulties the ONS has had in data collection due to the coronavirus pandemic, with a quarter of the usual sample of employer pay data missing (44,000 out of 180,000 employers). The Fawcett Society makes these calculations each year, more information is available on [their website](#).

disproportionate impact of furlough on women is likely to be more pronounced taken as a reflection of the overall population.

Other studies show that working class and Black, Asian or ethnic minority women are even more likely to have been furloughed:

- A [study](#) from the University of Warwick shows that 54% of women working in routine or semi-routine employment had been furloughed, compared with 41% of men and 15% of women working in professional or managerial roles.
- According to a [Resolution Foundation](#) study one-in-five young people and over one-in-five BAME workers who were furloughed during lockdown have since lost their jobs

Recommendations

- The Government should reinstate gender pay gap reporting at the earliest possible opportunity to get a better picture of what is happening to women's economic equality.
- The Government should also mandate employers with more than 250 employees, who would have been reporting their gender pay gap, to report who they are making redundant by protected characteristic.
- Untenable restriction in the benefit system should be suspended and uplifts applied to child benefit, legacy benefits and made permanent for universal credit.

Per cent of women furloughed in each region of the UK:

- South East (54.7%)
- South West (54.5%)
- East of England (54.4%)
- East Midlands (52.8%)
- Wales (52.2%)
- Yorkshire and the Humber (51.3%)
- North East (51.1%)
- North West (51.1%)
- Scotland (51.0%)
- London (51.0%)
- Northern Ireland (50.2%)
- West Midlands (49.3%)

This data is [available here](#). WBG can provide constituency level calculations on request, contact: jenna.norman@wbg.org.uk