

Lockdown 2021: Immediate Actions Needed

Briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group

January 2021

Based on the evidence from 2020 it is clear that the current lockdown, including school closures, will have significant and distinct consequences for different groups of women and men.

This briefing summarises the immediate actions that the Government should take to avoid the negative impacts of the first lockdown in March 2020 when:

- **Mothers did much more childcare and home-schooling than fathers** in heterosexual couples with consequences for their employment and income.¹
- **Domestic abuse increased**, paralleled by increased demand for support services. Cases of femicide as a result of domestic abuse more than doubled at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.²
- **Women were twice as likely to be key workers as men**³ and BAME people were also overrepresented.⁴ 39% of working mothers are key workers compared with just 27% of the working population as a whole.⁵
- **Young women were disproportionately likely to work in the sectors that were hit hardest by previous lockdowns.** 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.⁶
- As a result, **women were more likely to be furloughed**, taking a 20% pay cut, in 72% of parliament constituencies across the UK.⁷

Employment, earnings and home-schooling:

- **Both parents must have the right to be furloughed**, not just the right to request furlough, while children are at home. This should explicitly include public sector workers who cannot work due to home-schooling and childcare responsibilities.
- **A support package for self-employed parents who are unable to work while schools are closed.**
- **All key workers must have access to adequate PPE and liveable Statutory Sick Pay.** This will require immediate funding injections for the social care and childcare sectors to meet these additional costs and avoid bankruptcy.
- **Larger companies should be mandated to report the number of people they make redundant by protected characteristics** including sex and race, to ensure accountability against bias or discrimination while gender pay gap reporting is suspended.

Social security:

- **The rate of Child Benefit should be increased to £50 per child per week** at least until schools are able to fully reopen. With schools closed and more meals to provide, rooms to heat and digital equipment to provide, additional financial support to parents is vital.
- **The two-child limit must be immediately suspended** as part of changes to Child Benefit to ensure all children are fed and warm.
- **Other untenable restrictions to social security including the five-week wait, under-occupancy penalty and benefit cap should be lifted** to ensure people can access support they need.

¹ IFS (2020) How are mothers and fathers coping under lockdown? <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>; Baowen Xue and Anne McMunn (2020) Gender differences in the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on unpaid care work and psychological distress in the UK <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/wzu4t/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/15/domestic-abuse-killings-more-than-double-amid-covid-19-lockdown>

³ The Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

⁴ House of Commons Library (2020) Coronavirus: Which key workers are most at risk? <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/coronavirus-which-key-workers-are-most-at-risk/>

⁵ The Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

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

⁷ WBG (2020) HMRC data prompts concern about the 'gender furlough gap' <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/hmrc-data-prompts-concern-of-gender-furlough-gap/>

- **The £20 uplift to Universal Credit must be made permanent** in recognition of the economic crisis to follow. **It must also be applied to other ‘legacy benefits’** including Job Seeker’s Allowance and Employment Support Allowance immediately to guarantee disabled people do not struggle to access basic resources while shielding.
- **Statutory Sick Pay must be increased to the Real Living Wage and be extended to all workers with no income floor** to ensure that those who have symptoms of coronavirus or are awaiting test results are not forced to go to work. **WBG calculations find that 15.5% of women and 10.6% of men do not earn enough to qualify for SSP** forcing them to go to work while sick.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds should be suspended** to ensure that migrants have access to social security and public services including domestic abuse services.
- **Homeless people must be housed again**, as they were in the first full lockdown. Additional funding must be allocated to local authorities to make this happen.
- **The Government ought to consider debt relief** for people accumulating Covid-related debt and rent arrears to avoid further widespread poverty and destitution.
- **Local Housing Allowance should be increased to the 50th percentile** to help people struggling with rent payments. **The eviction moratorium must be suspended past the current cliff edge.**

Violence against women and girls:

- **Additional funding is needed for specialist support services**, including those by and for Black, Asian and ethnic minority women, to cope with increased demand for support and returning all services online again.

WBG is glad to see the Prime Minister make clear that escaping domestic abuse is a reason to leave the home and parents can request furlough. This is evidence that equality impact is being considered. But the Government must go further to make sure that **all lockdown policy undergoes comprehensive and meaningful equality impact assessments to avoid disproportionate impact.**

In the medium to longer term, significant reform of the care sector and other public services is needed to build resilience and prioritise wellbeing, equality and sustainability – as set out in WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy final report ‘[Creating a Caring Economy](#)’ - but the Government should take the above action immediately to mitigate the impact of lockdown on gender equality.

Further detailed resources and recommendations by theme are available here:

- [Social care, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Childcare, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Local Government, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Social security, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Household debt, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Housing, Gender and Covid-19](#)
- [Health inequalities and Covid-19](#)
- [Covid-19 and economic challenges for disabled women](#)
- [Covid-19 and economic challenges for migrant women](#)
- [Covid-19 and economic challenges for young women](#)

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