

Lessons Learned: Where Women Stand at the Start of 2021

The economic and health impacts of Covid-19



The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an independent network of leading academic researchers, policy experts and campaigners. Our vision is of a caring economy that promotes gender equality. For over 30 years we have examined economic policy and asked 'who benefits?'. We produce robust analysis and aim to influence the people making policy. We also work to build the knowledge and confidence of others to talk about feminist economics by offering training and creating accessible resources.

admin@wbg.org.uk

www.wbg.org.uk

[@WomensBudgetGrp](https://www.instagram.com/WomensBudgetGrp)

© 2021 The Women's Budget Group

Lessons Learned: Where Women Stand at the Start of 2021

The economic and health impacts
of Covid-19

January 2021
Anna Johnston

Contents

Introduction	5
Health Impacts	6
Mental health	7
Routine care	8
Health workers	9
Health Recommendations	10
Impacts on the Social Care Sector	11
Social Care Sector Workers	12
Social Care Recommendations	12
Employment	13
Employment Recommendations	15
Unpaid Work	17
Unpaid work Recommendations	18
Childcare	19
Childcare Recommendations	20
Social Security and Public Services	21
Social Security Recommendations	22
Local Government Recommendations	23
Poverty and Debt	24
Poverty and Debt Recommendations	27
Housing	28
Housing Recommendations	29
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	31
Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Recommendations	32
Conclusion	33

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation for many women in terms of health, employment and unpaid work, resulting in increased levels of poverty, debt and mental health deterioration. Violence and financial abuse against women and girls continue to intensify during the local and national lockdowns.

Early in the pandemic the Women's Budget Group published a series of briefings setting out the [likely social and economic impact](#) of Covid-19 on different groups of women and highlighting [early findings](#) of the evolving impact. In November 2020, our [policy briefings](#) highlighted the increased issues facing women as a result of the pandemic. We also recently set out [immediate actions](#) the government should take to protect women at the start of the third national lockdown in January 2021. This briefing lays out some of the main impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic to various and interdependent areas of women's lives as we begin 2021.

Each section of the briefing will provide a short summary of the situation prior to Covid-19, and in the early stages of the crisis, before presenting the most recent statistics highlighting the impact on women. Policy recommendations and links to more in-depth analysis can also be found at the end of each section.

For a full list of our recommendations to the government on how to build an economic recovery towards a caring economy that promotes well-being for all, decent living standards and opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential in life, read our recent work on a [care-led recovery](#) and creating a [caring economy](#).



Health Impacts

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the healthcare system in the UK was already struggling, following the longest funding squeeze in its history. From 2010 to 2019 the NHS has seen its annual growth rate slow to 1.4%, a substantial decrease from the 3.7% average annual spending growth (in real terms) seen since it began in 1948.¹ NHS services were also already under severe strain, missing many key targets on wait times, and bed occupancy rates,² which had a significant impact on service delivery as the crisis hit.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global public health crisis. Men and those over the age of 80 have experienced higher mortality levels.³ However, the crisis has replicated, and in some cases exacerbated existing health inequalities.⁴ Those in deprived areas are more at risk of dying if they contract Covid-19 than those in the least deprived areas.⁵ This is also true for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups compared to White ethnic groups.⁶ These comparative differences in risk of dying if Covid-19 is contracted can be most strongly associated with socioeconomic disadvantage, place of residence, and occupational exposures as well as pre-existing structural health inequalities.⁷

Key workers,⁸ including those within the NHS, have also experienced high levels of exposure to the disease. The majority of these are women; 54% compared with 42% of men,⁹ and 40% of female key workers in health and social care work in frontline roles which require face-to-face interaction (compared with 17% of men).¹⁰ BAME women are also overrepresented in both health and social care¹¹, with one in five NHS workers being from a BAME group¹². BAME nurses are also significantly more likely to be on the lowest nursing band than all other nursing grades put together. As the lower nursing bands tend to provide the majority of hands-on care, this group is at particularly high risk of infection.¹³

1 The King's Fund (2019) NHS Funding: our position (<https://bit.ly/2EHgf3B>)

2 The Kings Fund, (2019) The NHS misses its new target for planned elective care (<https://bit.ly/2pwsIER>)

3 Gov.uk (August 2020) Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/2KcKlyr>)

4 BMJ (October 2020) Covid-19 pandemic is magnifying healthcare inequalities says England's regulator (<https://bit.ly/2LnOssh>)

5 Gov.uk (August 2020) Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/2KcKlyr>)

6 Ibid.

7 ONS (October 2020) Updating ethnic contrasts in deaths involving the coronavirus (Covid-19), England and Wales: deaths occurring 2 March to 28 July 2020 (<https://bit.ly/38lnCUD>)

8 In mid-March, the Department for Education published a list of occupations that were deemed 'critical workers'; those in health and social care, education and childcare, key public services, local and national government, food and essential goods production and distribution, public safety and security, transport, utilities, postal and bank services. See: Gov.uk (2020) Critical workers who can access schools or educational settings (<https://bit.ly/2BnTK1m>)

9 Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2020) 'Carrying the work burden of the Covid-19 pandemic: working class women in the UK, Briefing Note 1: Employment and mental health' (October). Working Paper No 2020/1, Nottingham University Business School.

10 Ibid.

11 IFS (2020) Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to Covid-19 than others? (<https://bit.ly/2U6HxEW>)

12 Gov.uk (2020) NHS workforce (<https://bit.ly/3052uE8>)

13 Race Equality Foundation (2020) NHS Covid-19 and health care worker deaths: questions that need asking (<https://bit.ly/2ADloY4>)

Covid-19 vaccination is currently being rolled out to people over the age of 80, the clinically extremely vulnerable, those that live or work in care homes and health and social care workers at high risk. However, the current surge in cases is stretching NHS and care services to the limit and is causing significant mental and physical strain on NHS staff.

The ongoing health, social and financial implications of the crisis have impacted mental health, most severely affecting women (mothers, BAME, and young women in particular) and key workers.¹⁴ Routine care and treatment for illnesses not related to Covid-19 have also slowed significantly.

- In January 2021, **the UK surpassed 100,000 deaths as a result of Covid-19**.¹⁵
- For women in England and Wales, those of Black Caribbean ethnic background have the highest mortality from Covid-19, **2.1 times higher** than women from White ethnic groups. For men, those from a Black African ethnic background have the highest mortality at **2.5 times** that of White ethnic men (this takes into account geography, socio-economic characteristics and health measures, including pre-existing conditions).¹⁶ In fact, **all ethnic minority groups except Chinese had a higher rate of mortality than White ethnic groups**.¹⁷
- **Disabled people make up almost 6 in 10 (59%) of all Covid-19 related deaths**.¹⁸ Mortality rate due to Covid-19 is **2.4 times higher for disabled women** than non-disabled women and 2.0 for disabled men compared with non-disabled men (adjusting for region, population density, socio-demographic and household characteristics).¹⁹
- The current **NHS Test and Trace system has struggled** to slow the spread of Covid-19, with The Health Foundation finding it **failed to reach 4 in 10 contacts** identified that should undertake isolation.²⁰

Mental health

- Just under **1 in 5 adults (19.2%)** were likely to be experiencing **some form of depression** during the Covid-19 pandemic in June 2020, **almost double from just under 1 in 10 (9.7%) prior to the crisis**.²¹
- The ONS finds that **gender is one of the characteristics associated with higher levels of depression during the pandemic**; women, those between 16-39 years, those unable to afford an unexpected expense, and disabled people are the most likely to be affected.²²

14 ONS (August 2020) Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3oWxGix>)

15 The Guardian (January 2021) UK coronavirus deaths pass 100,000 after 1,564 reported in one day (<https://bit.ly/38JhkE3>)

16 ONS (October 2020) Updating ethnic contrasts in deaths involving the coronavirus (Covid-19), England and Wales: deaths occurring 2 March to 28 July 2020 (<https://bit.ly/38InCUD>)

17 Ibid.

18 ONS (September 2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales: 2 March to 14 July 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2HaQR7x>)

19 Ibid.

20 The Health Foundation (November 2020) NHS Test and Trace turnaround times improving but over 131,000 contacts still not reached (<https://bit.ly/36JQQYD>)

21 ONS (August 2020) Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3oWxGix>)

22 ONS (August 2020) Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3oWxGix>)

- A largescale study published in September 2020 found that **being younger and female was associated with significantly greater levels of stress, anxiety and depression** during the Covid-19 pandemic than for other groups.²³
- **44% of young women with a disability** or long-term health condition said they are **struggling during the Covid-19 pandemic** (compared to 27% without a disability or long-term health condition).²⁴
- **43% of young women** feel their **mental health had become worse** over the last 12 months (compared to 32 per cent of young men) and **over 50%** said they were **'worried about their mental health'**.²⁵
- Lone parents (the vast majority of whom are women) were **twice as likely to have poor mental health, compared with other family types**, immediately before and in the early stages of the crisis. Overall, **51% of single parents reported having depression, bad nerves or anxiety; compared with 27% of couple parents.**²⁶

Routine care

- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the **GP consultation rate for women was 32% higher than for men**, in part due to reproductive related consultations.²⁷ Although they have a longer life expectancy, women were also **more likely than men to experience ill-health and require health services.**²⁸ In 2018/19, women made up 54.6% of admissions to hospitals (defined by finished consultant episodes).
- In England there were **4.7 million fewer people referred for routine hospital care** (for example hip, knee and cataract surgery) from January-August 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, **a reduction of a third (34%).**²⁹
- The limiting of normal cancer services due to Covid-19 **could lead to up to 35,000 extra cancer deaths**; over double the amount originally predicted in April.³⁰
- It is estimated that **almost 1 million women (986,000) women have missed mammograms**³¹ due to breast screening programmes being paused from March-September 2020 to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and divert NHS resources to the pandemic. **8,600 women in this group could be living with undetected breast cancer.**³²
- **30% of women overdue for a cervical screening** are delaying booking an appointment due to anxieties surrounding Covid-19.³³

23 KCL (2020) Covid-19 pandemic significantly increased anxiety and depression in the UK (<https://bit.ly/2N85vz7>)

24 Young Women's Trust (November 2020) Picking up the Pieces: Young Women's Experiences of 2020 (<https://bit.ly/35Msmqs>)

25 Ibid.

26 Gingerbread (November 2020) Caring without sharing: Single parents' journey through the Covid-19 crisis (<https://bit.ly/35EpMTh>)

27 Y. Wang, K. Hunt, I. Nazareth, N. Freemantle, I. Petersen (2013) Do men consult less than women? An analysis of routinely collected UK general practice data, BMJ <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/8/e003320>

28 Touchstone (2017) Ill health is a class and gender issue (<http://bit.ly/2zJU33E>)

29 The Health Foundation (November 2020) 'Hidden backlog' looms as NHS referrals for routine hospital care drop by a third (<https://bit.ly/2KiZqhN>)

30 The Telegraph (July 2020) Coronavirus could lead to 35,000 extra cancer deaths- double previous estimates (<https://bit.ly/35PU0s2>)

31 Breast Cancer Now (2020) Press Play: Getting and keeping breast cancer services back on track (<https://bit.ly/38I6EFK>)

32 Ibid.

33 Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust (2020) Research to understand attitudes to participation in cervical screening during the pandemic (<https://bit.ly/2LA8EXV>)

- A Care Quality Commission (CQC) report published in late 2020 found that **41% of maternity services were rated as “requires improvement” for safety**.³⁴
- **NHS Trusts across the UK have lifted restrictions on partner attendance during maternity care**.³⁵ However, data during the crisis has shown that whilst all trusts previously allowed a partner to be present at the birth, **86% still applied restrictions during labour**³⁶, **causing considerable distress, eroding advocacy and shared decision making and depriving partners being fully present at the birth of their child**.³⁷ This has created a postcode lottery for maternal services³⁸, raising concern about the speed with which Trusts will lift partner restrictions.
- Disparities in maternal and neonatal mortality rates for women by ethnic group are persistent and well-documented. The CQC reports that these disparities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. **Black women are eight times more likely than White women to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19 during pregnancy, while Asian women are four times more likely**.³⁹
- **36% of disabled LGBT people** have been **unable to** access medication or **are worried that they might not be able to access medication** during the crisis.⁴⁰

Health workers

- The NHS is the world’s **fifth largest employer with 1.7m employees**, including around 140,000 doctors and 300,000 nurses and midwives.⁴¹ Women make up **77% of non-medical healthcare staff**,⁴² **85% of NHS General Practice** workers,⁴³ and **77% of NHS Hospital and Community Service** workers.
- In the working-age population (18-65 years) **healthcare workers and their families account for a sixth (17%) of hospital admissions for Covid-19**.⁴⁴
- **40% of female key workers** in health and social care **work in frontline roles** which require face-to-face interaction (compared with 17% of men).⁴⁵
- The NHS currently has a shortage of **100,000 staff (9% of all posts)**. The NHS depends on an additional 5,000 internationally recruited nurses every year to prevent worsening staff shortages.⁴⁶

34 CQC (2020) The state of health care and adult social care in England 2019/20 (<https://bit.ly/2MVKWFI>)

35 NHS England (December 2020) Supporting pregnant women using maternity services during the coronavirus pandemic: Actions for NHS providers (<https://bit.ly/2XEL8LH>)

36 BMJ (October 2020) Partners’ access to scans at birth is a postcode lottery, data shows (<https://bit.ly/35HZrni>)

37 BMJ (October 2020) Care during Covid-19: partner attendance at maternity services (<https://bit.ly/39AWs0U>)

38 BMJ (October 2020) Partners’ access to scans at birth is a postcode lottery, data shows (<https://bit.ly/35HZrni>)

39 CQC (2020) The state of health care and adult social care in England 2019/20 (<https://bit.ly/2MVKWFI>)

40 LGBT Foundation (May 2020) Hidden Figures: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on LGBT communities in the UK (<https://bit.ly/3blP6il>)

41 The Nuffield Trust (2018) The NHS workforce in numbers (<https://bit.ly/2yhKVns>)

42 The King’s Fund (2017) Overview of the health and social care workforce (<http://bit.ly/2zMw9V8>)

43 Calculated (not including staff where gender was unspecified) from NHS Digital, General Practice Workforce data interactive dashboard data (<https://bit.ly/34VT4Ny>)

44 BMJ (October 2020) Health workers and their families count for 1 in 6 hospital Covid-19 cases (<https://bit.ly/39w6oZx>)

45 Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2020) ‘Carrying the work burden of the Covid-19 pandemic: working class women in the UK, Briefing Note 1: Employment and mental health’ (October). Working Paper No 2020/1, Nottingham University Business School.

46 The King’s Fund (2019) Brexit: the implications for health and social care (<https://bit.ly/3hVhESH>)

- Care roles are disproportionately carried out by migrants: for example **37% of registered nurses** and **16% of the social care workforce are migrants**.⁴⁷
- **71% of EU migrants** who are **key workers** would **not be eligible for a UK work visa under the Immigration Act**. This includes essential non-medical NHS staff and social care workers.⁴⁸

Health Recommendations:

- The government pledged to allocate an additional £48.3 billion (£31.9 billion in July and £16.4 billion in September) to health and social care since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, **WBG is concerned that this additional funding is not enough. Government funding pledges must be enough to ensure staff and patients are adequately treated.** The Health Foundation estimates that the direct costs of Covid-19 (NHS Test and Trace and vaccines) for the health system could reach £27 billion.⁴⁹
- The emergency spending on the NHS in the 1-year Spending Review neglected the long-term health and care funding commitments. Prioritising the immediate recovery **must not come at the expense of the goals set in the NHS long term plan.**
- **Exclusion of partners from maternity care has now been reversed. NHS trusts must ensure this is implemented** to prevent the distress, eroded advocacy and shared decision making it has caused so far during the pandemic as well as depriving partners from being fully present at the birth of their child.

You can find out more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations in our *Health Inequalities and Covid-19* briefing [here](#).

47 WBG (2020) Migrant Women and the Economy (<https://bit.ly/3bizb4u>)

48 (IPPR (19 Feb 2020) Immigration plans analysis: two thirds of current EU migrants in health and social care sector would have been found ineligible (<https://bit.ly/3jyBpiW>)

49 The Health Foundation (November 2020) Spending Review 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3bCczOn>)

Impacts on the Social Care Sector

A largescale devaluing of care work has led to significant underfunding of the adult social care system over the years, with falling real terms funding since 2010 despite significantly higher demand.⁵⁰ Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 1.4 million older people had unmet care needs.⁵¹

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the crisis in the social care sector as well as its interaction with, and consequences for, the NHS. The consequences of decades of neglect and lack of regulation in a sector focused on profits and cost minimisation - rather than on meeting need and ethical standards for the treatment of both service users and workers - are cruelly exposed by the levels of unmet need⁵² and the high rates of infection and mortality within the sector.⁵³

The government failed to take measures to protect against Covid-19 in care homes. It's now apparent that there were mass discharges of hospital patients into care homes who were infected or possibly infected with Covid-19 without consideration for how this would impact other residents and staff.⁵⁴ Initially, care homes were also advised that PPE was not required where active symptoms weren't present, and testing in care homes was not prioritised.⁵⁵ With no access to testing, severe shortages of PPE, insufficient staff, and limited guidance, care homes were overwhelmed.

- Between 2 March and 12 June 2020 (most recent figures as of December 2020), **18,562 residents of care homes in England died with Covid-19** (8,328 male deaths and **10,234 female deaths**),⁵⁶ representing **almost 40% of all deaths involving Covid-19 in England** during this period.⁵⁷
- Death rates in homes for adults with learning difficulties or autism were **over 30% higher** than those of the previous five years.⁵⁸
- Adult social care has received **inadequate government funding** during the crisis. The government's Infection Control Fund has pledged £1.1 billion towards social care between May 2020 to March 2021.⁵⁹ However, there was an **estimated £6.6 billion** needed to meet the additional cost pressures facing adult social care by the end of September 2020 including **over £4 billion for PPE**.⁶⁰

50 The King's Fund (2019) Key facts and figures about adult social care (<https://bit.ly/2BrbHMx>)

51 WBG (2020) A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus (<https://bit.ly/3sp1d6i>)

52 Age UK (2019) The number of older people with some unmet need for care now stands at 1.5 million (<https://bit.ly/3pJTY7H>)

53 ONS (June 2020) Coronavirus (Covid-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered between 9 March and 25 May 2020 (<https://bit.ly/39AXCti>)

54 Amnesty International (2020) As If Expendable (<https://bit.ly/3icvfFE>)

55 Ibid.

56 ONS (July 2020) Deaths involving Covid-19 in the care sector, England and Wales: deaths occurring up to 12 June 2020 and registered up to 20 June 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3bySWXE>)

57 Amnesty International (2020) As If Expendable (<https://bit.ly/3icvfFE>)

58 CQC (June 2020) CQC publishes data on deaths of people with a learning disability (<https://bit.ly/2LN5M90>)

59 Gov.uk (2020) More than £500 million for social care to reduce coronavirus transmission over winter (<https://bit.ly/2N4c8IU>)

60 LGA & ADASS (2020) Covid-19: Financial pressures in adult social care. Information provided to the Minister of State for Care (<https://bit.ly/35FUvPI>)

Social Care Sector Workers

- In 2020, **women made up 83% of the 840,000 care workers and home carers.**⁶¹
- Data from the first few months of the crisis show that care workers were more likely to die from Covid-19 than their NHS counterparts (**19.1 deaths per 100,000 women for care workers compared with 15.3 deaths per 100,000 women for NHS staff**)⁶² and twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than non-key workers.⁶³
- Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) care workers have **particularly increased risk.**⁶⁴ This also **disproportionately increases the risk for the families of BAME care workers.**
- Health and Social Care accounted for **35% of the increase in the number of workers on zero-hours contracts** since the outbreak of Covid-19. Overall, the sector increased to 1.05 million, a 17% increase over 12 months.⁶⁵
- Adult social care workers only entitled to Statutory Sick Pay could see their **weekly income reduced by two-thirds** if they have to self-isolate.⁶⁶
- To keep pace with the growing numbers of those over the age of 65, the social care workforce will have to grow by **580,000 by 2035.**⁶⁷
- **66% of EU migrants** working in health and care who are currently defined as **'key workers'** could be **disqualified from working in the UK under the new Immigration Act.**⁶⁸

Social Care Recommendations:

- Adult social care has received **inadequate government funding** both before and during the crisis. Additional emergency funding for social care is desperately needed. Proposals for more fundamental reform should also be brought forward in 2021 to improve the system.
- **Mandatory minimum pay at real living wage rates should be established for social care workers**, and funding increased to match that commitment, to reduce turnover, job insecurity and improve the quality of care and care jobs.
- **Social Care work (not just senior social care roles) should be included in the Shortage Occupation List** to avoid social care staff shortages during and following the Covid-19 pandemic.

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations in our *Social Care, Gender and Covid-19* briefing [here](#).

61 Skills For Care (2019) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England (<https://bit.ly/3oJXVbK>)

62 ONS (June 2020) Coronavirus (Covid-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered between 9 March and 25 May 2020 (<https://bit.ly/39AXCti>)

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 TUC (September 2020) Key workers report (<https://bit.ly/3oJ4Xxf>)

66 Institute for Employment Studies (September 2020) Potential impact of Covid-19 government policy on the adult social care workforce (<https://bit.ly/2XER7QK>)

67 WBG (November 2020) Social Care, Gender and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/2XBTow9>)

68 IPPR (2020) Immigration plans analysis: two thirds of current EU migrants in health and care sector would have been found ineligible (<https://bit.ly/3nlhQXf>)

Employment

Before the onset of Covid-19, employment rates for women were at record levels. However, women were still in a disadvantaged and more precarious position in the labour market: only 59% of women were in full-time work compared with 87% of men. Women continued to be overrepresented in part-time and involuntary part-time employment (74% and 57% are women respectively), as well as temporary and zero-hours contracts (54% of both are women).⁶⁹

Over the months since the crisis developed, the impact on employment has been substantial, although sectors which were forced to shut down faced the biggest hit. Those able to work from home tend to be in higher paid jobs which can be carried out remotely. From July to September 2020, total hours worked in the economy were 12.1% lower than in 2019, equivalent to losing around 3.5 million full-time jobs.⁷⁰ By October 2020, unemployment and redundancy levels had risen to levels last seen in 2009, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.⁷¹ Women have been furloughed in greater numbers than men during the pandemic,⁷² and are the majority of new Universal Credit claimants (see Social Security section). Disabled, BAME and young women have been particularly impacted.

- The ONS Labour Market Overview for December 2020 finds that **unemployment reached 4.6% for women and 4.9% overall. Redundancies reached a record high of 370,000 in the three months to October 2020.** The number of payroll employees has fallen by 819,000 since February 2020.⁷³
- In September 2020, **unemployment rates for BAME workers was 26 times higher than for White workers.**⁷⁴ **The unemployment rate for BAME people has already reached 8.5% (compared with 4.9% overall and 4.5% for White workers).**⁷⁵
- More women than men are key workers at 54% (compared with 42% of men). Key-working roles are also highest among working-class women with **60% of women in 'Semi-routine' and 'Routine' jobs classed as key workers.**⁷⁶

69 WBG (2020) Women, Employment and Earnings (<https://bit.ly/2Xque4e>)

70 New Economics Foundation (November 2020) Winter plan for jobs, incomes and communities (<https://bit.ly/38KWzbf>)

71 WBG (October 2020) Latest ONS data on employment (<https://bit.ly/38KK3bM>)

72 WBG (November 2020) HMRC data prompts concern of 'gender furlough gap' (<https://bit.ly/39v93Tj>)

73 ONS (December 2020) Labour market overview, UK: December 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3oLdWhF>)

74 The Guardian (January 2021) Black, Asian and minority-ethnic UK workers hit worst by Covid job cuts (<https://bit.ly/3iCmV2s>)

75 Ibid.

76 Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2020) 'Carrying the work burden of the Covid-19 pandemic: working class women in the UK, Briefing Note 1: Employment and mental health' (October). Working Paper No 2020/1, Nottingham University Business School.

- Women have been furloughed at a slightly higher rate than men since summer 2020. **In October 2020 women made up 51.1% of furloughed staff, down from 52.4% in August 2020.**⁷⁷ The **gender furlough gap is higher for younger women** than older women. **52.8% of furloughed 18-24 year olds were women in October 2020**, compared with 49.7% in the 45-64 age group.⁷⁸
- **Over half (54%) of working-class women** in ‘Semi-Routine’ (including care workers, retail assistants, hospital porters) and ‘Routine’(including cleaners, waiting/bar staff, bus drivers, sewing machinists) jobs **had been furloughed by June** (compared with 41% of men).⁷⁹
- The labour market divide between graduates and non-graduates has further widened during the pandemic. By the third quarter of 2020, **the proportion of non-university graduates doing any hours of paid work was 17% lower than prior to the pandemic, compared with only 7% for graduates.** This is partly due to the different occupations graduates and non-graduates tend to work in. Prior to the crisis, **71% of non-graduates worked in sectors that were locked down or were not easily transferred to home-working compared to 45% of graduates.**⁸⁰
- Over **one in five BAME workers** who were furloughed during the first lockdown **have since lost their jobs.**⁸¹ The proportion of people from ethnic minority groups that moved from employment to not working in the first four months of the crisis is **nearly three times that of the UK population as a whole.**⁸²
- An estimated **750,000 young women** have had to go to work during the pandemic **despite safety fears.**⁸³
- For parents who were working prior to the pandemic, **17% of mothers are no longer doing paid work**, having lost their work permanently (whether they were laid off, were fired or quit), compared with 11% of fathers.⁸⁴ **72% of mothers** have worked **fewer hours and cut their earnings due to lack of childcare**⁸⁵
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, mothers have been more likely to be furloughed than fathers (35% compared to 30% for fathers),⁸⁶ with their overall employment dropping from 80% to 70%.⁸⁷

77 Gov.uk (December 2020) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: December (<https://bit.ly/39S92ca>)

78 Ibid.

79 Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2020) ‘Carrying the work burden of the Covid-19 pandemic: working class women in the UK, Briefing Note 1: Employment and mental health’ (October). Working Paper No 2020/1, Nottingham University Business School.

80 IFS (January 2021) The IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities: a New Year’s message (<https://bit.ly/38InLas>)

81 Resolution Foundation (October 2020) One-in-five young people and over one-in-five BAME workers who were furloughed during lockdown have since lost their jobs (<https://bit.ly/3solR6LO>)

82 IPPR (September 2020) Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups at greater risk of problem debt since Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/3nHdwYk0>)

83 Young Women’s Trust (Nov 2020) Picking up the Pieces: Young Women’s Experiences of 2020 (<https://bit.ly/35Msmqs>)

84 IFS (September 2020) Family time use and home learning during the Covid-19 lockdown (<https://bit.ly/381Yj4J0>)

85 Pregnant Then Screwed (2020) The true scale of the crisis facing working mums (<https://bit.ly/2XLPa4R>)

86 IFS (May 2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown (<https://bit.ly/3nJoKLJ>)

87 Ibid.

- **Parents in better-off families⁸⁸ are more likely to continue to work through the lockdowns: 55% of formerly working mothers in better-off families** continued work through the first lockdown (60% for fathers in this group), compared with **38% for mothers in the poorest tercile** of families (40% for fathers in this group).⁸⁹
- Lone parents (90% of whom are women) have been particularly impacted, **earning on average just over half as much as mothers in 2-parent households**. **Nearly half (46%) of single parents worked in routine occupations more affected by the pandemic** compared to 26% of coupled parents. Single parents are also **twice as likely to be on a zero-hours contract** than other family groups, putting them at greater risk of job insecurity during the crisis.⁹⁰
- WBG calculations find that **15.5% of women** and 10.6% of men **do not earn enough to qualify for Statutory Sick Pay**.⁹¹
- Employment for disabled people has **fallen more rapidly during the crisis than for non-disabled people** (1.9% compared with 1.1%) and **disabled people are currently 2.5 times more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people**.⁹²
- In the summer of 2020, 1 in 6 (17%) of the working population were facing redundancy. However, this rose to **1 in 4 (27%) for disabled people**, to **37% for those whose disability substantially impacted their activities**, and to **1 in 2 (48%) for those who were extremely clinically vulnerable**.⁹³

Employment Recommendations:

- **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 the additional costs and avoid bankruptcy.
- The majority of public sector workers are women. The **public sector pay freeze announced in the November 2020 one-year Spending Review should be lifted** to support public sector workers through the Covid-19 recovery and to appropriately value their contribution during the pandemic.
- The government should immediately **reinstate gender pay gap reporting** to get a better picture of what is happening to women's economic equality to aid Covid-19 recovery planning.
- The government must ensure that **employment support programmes such as the Kickstart Scheme avoid segregating women into lower-paid professions and are sensitive to diverse caring responsibilities**.

88 In this study, the IFS defines 'better-off families' to be families in the top of three equally distributed 'family income' earnings tertials

89 IFS (September 2020) Family time use and home learning during the Covid-19 lockdown (<https://bit.ly/38lYj4J0>)

90 Gingerbread (November 2020) Caring without sharing: Single parents' journey through the Covid-19 crisis (<https://bit.ly/35EpMTh>)

91 Women's Budget Group (May 2020) WBG responds to the recovery roadmap (<https://bit.ly/3eObaCJ>)

92 Institute for Employment Studies (November 2020) Labour Market Statistics, November 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3fhYlck>)

93 Citizens Advice Bureau (August 2020) An Unequal Crisis (<https://bit.ly/38PoyH7>)

- **Use the upcoming employment bill to reduce insecurity for low-paid workers by extending employment rights and investing in strong and effective enforcement.**⁹⁴
- **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.

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations on women's employment and income during the Covid-19 pandemic in the following briefings:

[Household Debt, Gender 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](#) (with Young Women's Trust)

Unpaid Work

The first lockdown in March 2020 caused the closure of both schools and offices, forcing many parents to undertake home-schooling alongside paid employment. In 2-parent heterosexual households, mothers were already doing over 60% of unpaid household work⁹⁵, and whilst father's unpaid workload increased during the crisis, it has not led to gender parity in the balance of paid and unpaid work.

As we adjust to a third national lockdown in which schools are once again closed, mothers are still doing disproportionately more unpaid work. With a third of childcare providers set to close their doors within the next year, as well as the high cost of early years childcare, many households are having to elect one parent to give up paid work to undertake full time childcare. As the gender pay gap means mothers often earn less than fathers, they have been more likely to leave paid employment (see Childcare section).

Unpaid carers of family and friends have also seen their number of hours of care per week increase.

- Mothers on the lowest incomes are **nine times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures** in the UK. Overall, **4% of parents report being at risk of losing their job if schools close and no additional support is in place** for childcare.⁹⁶
- **Twice as many mothers report they would have to take time off with no pay due to school closures or a sick child** than fathers (15% of mothers compared with 8% of fathers).⁹⁷
- 57% of fathers compared to 49% of mothers report they would be able to work from home during school closures.⁹⁸
- 70% of furlough requests from working mothers were tuned down by their employers.⁹⁹
- Since March 2020 the number of unpaid carers has increased by an estimated **4.5 million, 58% of them women**. Overall, **nearly 3 million unpaid carers** are also juggling paid work with care.¹⁰⁰
- Mothers and fathers in 2-parent heterosexual households are both doing more childcare than before the pandemic. However, **there are clear inequalities in time use**. Fathers spend more time undertaking 'enjoyable' parts of childcare (defined by parents as developmental engagement, such as reading together). The amount of time mothers spent

95 ONS (November 2020) Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work' (<https://bit.ly/3if8TTW>)

96 WBG (January 2021) Mothers on the lowest incomes are nine times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures in the UK (<https://bit.ly/39q4w4s>)

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 TUC (January 2021) Working mums: paying the price (<https://bit.ly/38Hv6He>)

100 Carers UK (October 2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on (<https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>)

on 'enjoyable' childcare also increased. However, **overall mothers spent two-thirds more time on childcare than men, much of this focused on non-developmental childcare and supervising children.**¹⁰¹

- **Increased unpaid work and 'multitasking' during the pandemic has impacted women's productive work time.** Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, mothers and fathers used to be interrupted for childcare responsibilities during the same proportion of paid working hours. **Since the crisis began, mothers are being interrupted 50% more often.**¹⁰² **While 70% of fathers' work hours are spent exclusively doing work, this is the case for only 53% of mothers' work hours.**¹⁰³
- In June 2020, **70% of employed women in couples were mostly doing the washing/ironing and 61% the cleaning.** This was largely still the case in September 2020.¹⁰⁴ Overall, **almost half (45%) of employed women spent 11 or more hours per week on housework** at this point in the pandemic (24% of men).¹⁰⁵
- During the pandemic, **almost two thirds (64%) of unpaid carers have not been able to take breaks from their caring role.**¹⁰⁶ **70% of unpaid carers have reported caring had had a negative impact on their physical and mental health.**¹⁰⁷
- 81% of unpaid carers are providing more care, and 8 in 10 carers have seen the needs of the person they care for increase since the start of the pandemic.¹⁰⁸
- **18% of over 65s from BAME groups are likely to be receiving informal care from their children** compared to 10% from White ethnic groups.¹⁰⁹

Unpaid work Recommendations:

- **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 whilst schools are closed.**

You can read more about WBG and NEF analysis and policy recommendations in our *Childcare, Gender and Covid-19* briefing [here](#).

101 WBG (July 2020) ONS new data on time use and parenting in lockdown (<https://bit.ly/2LwAtjP>)

102 IFS (May 2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown (<https://bit.ly/3nJoKLJ>)

103 Ibid.

104 Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2020) 'Carrying the work burden of the Covid-19 pandemic: working class women in the UK, Briefing Note 2: Housework and childcare' (December). Working Paper No 2020/2 (14-12-20), Nottingham University Business School.

105 Ibid.

106 Carers UK (October 2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on (<https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>)

107 University of Birmingham (August 2020) Covid-19 leaves unpaid carers without physical and mental health treatment (<https://bit.ly/2XC90Qh>)

108 Carers UK (October 2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on (<https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>)

109 ONS (2019) Living longer: caring in later working life (<https://bit.ly/3nLa3rs>)

Childcare

The childcare system in England was not fit for purpose prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Only just over half of local authorities in England (56%) reported that they have enough childcare for the children of parents who work full-time, and less than a fifth (18%) have sufficient childcare for the children of parents who work atypical hours.¹¹⁰ 84% of childcare in England is delivered by for-profit providers,¹¹¹ despite global evidence concluding that non-profit early years settings offer better quality.¹¹²

High-quality childcare has the greatest benefit for disadvantaged children. However, access to high-quality early years education and care is severely constrained by income, with the result that those children who would benefit most often cannot access such care.¹¹³ Despite the 15-30 hours of free childcare provided, UK parents pay the highest childcare costs in Europe and the second highest in the world.¹¹⁴ A nursery place for a child under two costs between 45% and 60% of women's average salaries in England, and between 20-25% for three- and four-year-olds with the free hours entitlement.¹¹⁵

It was reported early in the crisis that 34% of nurseries in the most deprived areas and 24% in the least deprived areas were likely to close within a year.¹¹⁶ The pre-existing gender pay gap between parents paired with a significant decline in available and affordable childcare over the coming months could result in more parents electing for the mother to stay at home and look after the children.

- Polling in late October 2020 found that **1 in 6 early years providers could close by Christmas 2020**, rising to **25% in the most deprived local authorities**.¹¹⁷
- **81% of mothers require formal childcare to go to work**, yet in July 2020 only half had access to childcare and 33% of employed mums had lost a childcare place since March, rising to 48% for self-employed mothers.¹¹⁸
- **46% of mothers being made redundant said that lack of childcare was a factor** in their selection for redundancy.¹¹⁹

110 Family and Childcare Trust (2020) Childcare Survey 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2MASdrg>)

111 Barrett-Evans, Dominic and Birlean, Diana (2018) Childcare UK Market Report; Fifteenth Edition, London: Laing and Buisson

112 care See for example: Cleveland, G., & Krashinsky, M. (2009). The Non-Profit Advantage: Producing Quality in Thick and Thin Child Care Markets. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 28(3), 440 – 462

113 WBG (November 2020) Childcare, Gender and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/3bEfn3T>)

114 WBG (2020) A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus (<https://bit.ly/3sp1d6i>)

115 CPAG (September 2019) The cost of a child in 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3ibhMOq>)

116 The Sutton Trust (July 2020) Covid-19 impacts: early years (<https://bit.ly/3sny9MB>)

117 Early Years Alliance (October 2020) Alliance calls for £240m early years funding in Spending Review (<https://bit.ly/38Hv81H>)

118 Pregnant Then Screwed (2020) The true scale of the crisis facing working mums (<https://bit.ly/2XLPa4R>)

119 Ibid.

- **51% of young mothers** reported they were **unable to apply for a job, turned down a job or left a job because they could not cover childcare costs** (up from 33% in 2019), showing the impact an unaffordable formal childcare service has when informal childcare arrangements, such as relying on family and friends are unavailable (as was the case during much of the Covid-19 pandemic).¹²⁰

Childcare Recommendations:

- **Emergency support is required for Early Years providers immediately to prevent widespread closures.**
- The Early Years workforce should be **provided with raised salaries and high-quality training**, enabling better support for the most disadvantaged children.
- **The Early Years Funding Formula should be updated to reflect the real costs of delivering childcare.** In 2019 there was a total gap of £662 million for Early Years funding (free entitlement hours for under two's was underfunded by 37%, and for three and four-year-olds this was 20%). The formula was updated by 8p/hr in the November 2020 Spending Review, which is not enough, particularly with the increases in the National Living Wage.

Social Security and Public Services

Social security is a vital protection against life risks including illness, poverty and unemployment. Yet the deteriorating landscape of public services and the fraying of the social security safety net over the past decade have heavily impacted local and regional resilience in coping with the health and economic shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the austerity policies were implemented in 2010, central government funding for local authorities has dropped by 77% per person, an overall fall of almost £29 billion (in real terms).¹²¹

Greater responsibility for unpaid family and childcare results in women having less time for paid work and greater reliance on social security and public services on average than men. So, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, women in the UK were already more likely to be living in both in-work and out-of-work poverty.¹²² This was particularly likely for low-paid, disabled and BAME women and mothers.¹²³

As well as pre-existing supports such as Universal Credit, government schemes such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) have been a vital lifeline for the increasing numbers of people whose jobs were affected by the pandemic. However, the current crisis has also exposed significant failings in the social security safety net, which has had a detrimental impact on millions of people, and women in particular.

- By October 2020, there were **5.7 million people** on Universal Credit, an increase of **2.7 million people (a 90% increase)** compared with early March 2020.¹²⁴ The latest figures for overall **households on Universal Credit registers 4.6 million, an increase of 1.9 million households** since the start of the pandemic in early March.¹²⁵
- **Just over half of new Universal Credit recipients are women (51%).**¹²⁶
- Many households claiming benefits during the pandemic have been further disadvantaged by **having to pay back benefit debt**. Benefit debt occurs for a range of reasons, including repayment of Universal Credit Advances, previous benefit overpayment, budgeting loans, rent arrears, utilities bills and mortgage interest. Whilst such deductions were paused at the start of the crisis, they resumed in summer 2020. In August 2020 **41% of all households on Universal Credit were subject to a deduction. This rises to 63% for those that started claiming during the first 4 months of the pandemic.**¹²⁷

121 Harris, T. H Hodge & D Phillips (2019) English local government funding: trends and challenges in 2019 and beyond (<https://bit.ly/32UyX0i>)

122 WBG (2019) DWP data confirms: women and children continue to be worse affected by poverty (<https://bit.ly/2xHdxHj>)

123 Ibid.

124 Gov.uk (December 2020) Universal Credit statistics: 29 April 2013 to 8 October 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2LydZyT>)

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Covid Realities (2020) Paying back benefit debt- what happens when deductions are made to benefit payments? (<https://bit.ly/35FD0z6>)

- **16-24 year olds** make up a **higher proportion of new Universal Credit recipients** than before the pandemic, at **27.1%** (compared with 21.1% in February-early March 2020).¹²⁸
- **69% of young women claiming Universal Credit** since March 2020 reported they had **done so for the first time**.¹²⁹
- As of September 2020, there were **over 600,000 people aged 50 or over** claiming unemployment-related benefits – **double the number there were in March 2020**.¹³⁰ Of people aged 50 or over, **2.7 million were furloughed** (a quarter of everyone on the scheme), with an estimated **400,000 of those jobs at risk of disappearing**.¹³¹
- In December 2020, BPAS found **that 62% of women who have had an abortion during the pandemic** have said that their **decision to end their pregnancy was either due to mainly financial factors or a combination of financial and other factors**. Among women who were aware of the **two-child limit**,¹³² **21% said that mainly financial factors influenced their decision**, compared with 7% of those who were not aware.¹³³

Social Security Recommendations:

- Efforts to control Covid-19 have increased costs for households with children. **Child Benefit should be increased to £50 per child and the benefit cap and the two-child limit should be abolished to prevent child poverty being further exacerbated.**
- The personal allowance in **Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits should be further increased**, or at least, the **uplift made permanent** and proportional to household size. **It must also be applied to other 'legacy benefits'**, including Job Seeker's Allowance and Employment Support Allowance to guarantee disabled people do not struggle to access basic resources.
- **Employment and Support Allowance, Job Seeker's Allowance and other benefit payments should be increased** in line with the rise in Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits.
- The 5-week wait for Universal Credit has been hugely damaging to many, with those who opt for an advance accruing this as debt. **The 5-week wait should be scrapped and replaced by a non-repayable grant.**
- **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 Covid-19 or are awaiting test results are not forced to go to work.

128 Gov.uk (December 2020) Universal Credit statistics: 29 April 2013 to 8 October 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2LydZyT>)

129 Young Women's Trust (Nov 2020) Picking up the Pieces: Young Women's Experiences of 2020 (<https://bit.ly/35Msmqs>)

130 ONS (2020) CLA02: Claimant Count by age group (experimental statistics) (<https://bit.ly/2XGSbUk>)

131 HMRC (2020) Coronavirus job retention scheme statistics. (<https://bit.ly/38Jf9Av>)

132 The government's 'two-child limit' policy, introduced in 2017 restricts the amount of financial support available for families with three or more children.

133 BPAS (December 2020) Forced into a corner: The two-child limit and pregnancy decision making during the pandemic (<https://bit.ly/39uTqvF>)

- Excluding many migrant's 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. **The 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition should be lifted.**
- **The government should consider debt relief** for people accumulating Covid-19 related debt and rent arrears to avoid further widespread poverty and destitution.

Local Government Recommendations:

- **Local government funding needs to be urgently restored** to a level which enables councils to meet their statutory obligations and also provide the preventive, non-statutory services which are vital to the wellbeing of women, children and those in need of care.
- **Equality Impact Assessments of local government funding levels and spending should be carried out across the UK, taking into account the impacts the pandemic has had on different groups.**

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations in our *Social Security, Gender and Covid-19* briefing [here](#).

Poverty and Debt

Before the Covid-19 crisis, household debt across the UK was already at an all-time high. Stagnant wages, rising rents and living costs, as well as cuts to social security (such as cuts to the local housing allowance, the benefit freeze and the benefit cap) have all contributed to household debt. Ongoing research into destitution from Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that more than a million households in the UK were destitute at some point in 2019, an increase of 35% on 2017.¹³⁴

However, poverty and debt are gendered. Before the crisis, women were more likely to live in poverty than men (19% compared with 21%), and female headed households were poorer than comparable male-headed households.¹³⁵ 61% of those getting into debt to purchase everyday necessities were women¹³⁶ and women were more likely to become insolvent.¹³⁷

Women and those from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background are also over-represented in low-income households, due to their lower earnings compared to White men.¹³⁸

Disabled women are more likely to be in low-paid work; the employment pay gap for disabled women is 36% (average median gross earnings compared to a non-disabled man),¹³⁹ totalling an equivalent earnings difference of £7,020 per year.¹⁴⁰ Disabled people were also already facing on average an extra £583 in costs per month due to their impairment or condition, despite benefits designed to meet such costs.¹⁴¹

Lone parents (90% of which are women) were increasingly likely to be destitute,¹⁴² less financially secure, and on lower incomes than other family types; mothers in coupled households earned nearly twice as much per week than lone mothers.¹⁴³ Lone mothers were also set to lose the most from cumulative tax-benefit changes since 2010; £4,640 per year by April 2021 (17% of net income) for a non-disabled lone-mother, rising to £7,224 per year (26% of net income) for a lone disabled mother, and £10,506 per year (32% net income) for a lone disabled mother with a disabled child.¹⁴⁴

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an economic recession which has seen these pre-existing gendered and intersectional inequalities compound. Polling undertaken early in the crisis found 42.9% BAME women believed they would be in more debt, compared to 37.1% of white women,

134 JRF (December 2020) Destitution in the UK 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2LUIfVO>)

135 WBG (2018) The Female Face of Poverty (<https://bit.ly/3bBVdRS>)

136 StepChange (2018) Women and debt (<https://bit.ly/35EYmN5>)

137 WBG (2019) Household debt and gender (<https://bit.ly/2AzRzHE>)

138 WBG (November 2020) Household debt, Gender and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/38IBUo4>)

139 TUC (November 2020) Disability pay and employment gaps (<https://bit.ly/3IQp3UV>)

140 Original calculation with data from TUC (November 2020) Disability pay and employment gaps (<https://bit.ly/3IQp3UV>)

141 Scope (May 2020) The Disability report: Disabled people and the coronavirus crisis (<https://bit.ly/34VGdLo>)

142 JRF (December 2020) Destitution in the UK 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2LUIfVO>)

143 Gingerbread (November 2020) Caring without sharing: Single parents' journey through the Covid-19 crisis (<https://bit.ly/35EpMTh>)

144 WBG (2018) Disabled Women and Austerity (<https://bit.ly/3sqJtI0>)

and 34.2% of white men.¹⁴⁵ 34.2% of disabled women (compared with 24.4% of non-disabled women) reported their household had already run out of money, with 37.7% of disabled mothers having struggled to feed their children since the start of the crisis.¹⁴⁶

Inequality between the most affluent and poorest households has also widened. Loss of employment and an inadequate social security safety net have meant that low income households with less/no savings to buffer against such volatility are being pushed further into debt.¹⁴⁷ We knew at the start of summer 2020 that 3.8 million people had borrowed to make ends meet since the start of the pandemic, most often using a credit card (1.7 million), an overdraft (1.6 million) or a high-cost credit product (980,000).¹⁴⁸ 44% of those with an income of less than £30,000 have fallen behind or borrowed to make ends meet.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, households on higher incomes, whose work is typically more easily transferred to working from home, have seen a substantial rise in household savings.¹⁵⁰

- The poorest fifth of income groups have seen an **average £170 per month (£1,220 total and equivalent to 14% of pre-crisis income) decline in their bank balances** from March to September 2020, relative to what would be expected pre-Covid-19, as income falls are not fully cancelled out by lower spending.¹⁵¹
- By the end of July 2020, **a third (34% or 9.7 million)** of households across the UK reported **a fall in income as a direct consequence of the pandemic**.¹⁵²
- By November 2020, almost **18 million people (34%)** have had to use some form of debt to get by since March 2020, with **6.4 million (12%) people using multiple forms of debt**.¹⁵³
- By November 2020, **42% of high-income households have saved more during the pandemic**. According to the Bank of England, **these households are less likely to spend their savings in support of the recovery, with only 10% planning to do so** (70% planned to continue saving this additional money).¹⁵⁴
- At the end of July 2020, **10% of households were in serious financial difficulty** and a further **16% were struggling to make ends meet**¹⁵⁵
- **More than 11 million people (one in five)** are now **running out of money 'always' or 'most of the time'** before the end of the week or month. This means an additional **4.2 million are now frequently running out of money**, compared to the start of the Covid-19 crisis.¹⁵⁶
- **30% of women report being negatively affected financially** by the Covid-19 pandemic compared with 26% of men.¹⁵⁷

145 WBG (June 2020) BAME women and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/35IFEE7>)

146 Ibid.

147 WBG (November 2020) Household debt, Gender and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/38IBUo4>)

148 StepChange (2020) Coronavirus and personal debt: a financial recovery strategy for households (<https://bit.ly/2lvGfA8>)

149 Ibid.

150 Bank of England (November 2020) How has Covid affected household savings? (<https://bit.ly/3oLdD6t>)

151 IFS (October 2020) Spending and saving during the Covid-19 crisis: evidence from bank account data (<https://bit.ly/3bEJ3Yp>)

152 Standard Life Foundation (September 2020) Emerging From Lockdown (<https://bit.ly/3qo24Tg>)

153 Turn2Us (November 2020) Weathering the Storm: How Covid-19 is Eroding Financial Resilience (<https://bit.ly/2LRaVxs>)

154 Bank of England (November 2020) How has Covid affected household savings? (<https://bit.ly/3oLdD6t>)

155 Standard Life Foundation (September 2020) Emerging From Lockdown (<https://bit.ly/3qo24Tg>)

156 Turn2Us (November 2020) Weathering the Storm: How Covid-19 is Eroding Financial Resilience (<https://bit.ly/2LRaVxs>)

157 StepChange (June 2020) Coronavirus and personal debt: a financial recovery strategy for households (<https://bit.ly/3oOYLUA>)

- In October 2020, an estimated **1.5 million young women had lost income since the coronavirus pandemic began**.¹⁵⁸ The pandemic has particularly impacted young women's employment, as **over a third (36%)** of all young women were employed in **shutdown sectors like hospitality, leisure and tourism**.¹⁵⁹ Young female employees aged 17 were the most likely to be furloughed, with **65% put on furlough** (compared with 62% of 17-year-old male employees)¹⁶⁰
- **6 million people have fallen behind on at least one household bill**. Over **half (52%)** of people in this group **are disabled**.¹⁶¹
- Nearly **half of parents (47.5%)** have been **unable to pay for an unexpected expense during the crisis** (data collected for July 2020).¹⁶²
- In September 2020, **1 in 4 people with caring responsibilities (the majority of whom are women) had fallen behind on their bills**. This is particularly pronounced for people caring for someone older, with **1 in 3 (33%) having had to borrow money from a commercial lender**.¹⁶³
- **1 in 3 (31%) Black people** are **behind on their bills**, compared to 1 in 8 (12%) for White ethnic groups.¹⁶⁴
- **1 in 5 key workers have fallen behind on their bills**, compared to fewer than **1 in 10 of non-key workers**.¹⁶⁵ **Women are twice as likely to be key workers** than men with BAME and migrant women overrepresented.¹⁶⁶
- **32% of young women** surveyed by Young Women's Trust **are finding it hard to afford essentials like food**. Around **1 in 10** said they have **taken on debt to afford essentials**, such as borrowing from family and friends, taking on overdrafts or paying on credits card.¹⁶⁷
- **A quarter of young women** surveyed during the pandemic said they **expected to lose more than £100 a week** during the pandemic, **84% were concerned about their future finances**.¹⁶⁸
- The current rate for Statutory Sick Pay is £95.85 per week. Over **4 in 10 workers** told the TUC that they would be **pushed into debt or not be able to pay bills** if their income dropped down to £96 per week for just two weeks.¹⁶⁹

158 Young Women's Trust (Nov 2020) Picking up the Pieces: Young Women's Experiences of 2020 (<https://bit.ly/35Msmqs>)

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

160 HMRC (Aug 2020) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: August 2020 (<https://bit.ly/34GA6Ku>)

161 Citizens Advice (2020) Excess debt – who has fallen behind on their household bills due to coronavirus? (<https://bit.ly/2lpLZMm>)

162 ONS (September 2020) Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: September 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3snZhLr>)

163 Citizens Advice (2020) Excess debt – who has fallen behind on their household bills due to coronavirus? (<https://bit.ly/2lpLZMm>)

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

166 Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business (<https://bit.ly/3n5UYRA>)

167 Young Women's Trust (2020) Ignored, undervalued and underpaid (<https://bit.ly/3piwOFh>)

168 Young Women's Trust (May 2020) Ignored, Undervalued and Underpaid (<https://bit.ly/33UyCue>)

169 TUC (September 2020) Sick pay and debt (<https://bit.ly/3ssGVJp>)

- Figures from The Trussell Trust in December 2020 show that **nearly half (47%) of the households** using their food banks in the summer of 2020 **were in debt to the DWP** – meaning that **the most common form of debt among people using food banks is debt to the government**, ahead of private lenders, families and friends.¹⁷⁰
- From the start of April to the end of September 2020, The Trussell Trust food banks provided **47% more emergency parcels to people in crisis around the UK than over the same period in 2019** (1,239,399 compared with 843,655). However, the extent of need exceeds this, as it **does not include the nearly 1,000 independent foodbanks across the UK**.¹⁷¹

Poverty and Debt Recommendations:

- The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) should **extend payment holidays for the duration of the pandemic to help people manage household bills**.
- The government should **increase the budgets of local authorities to make Local Hardship Funds more widely available**.
- **Investment in local welfare assistance for local authorities to provide direct support including cash** to prevent households being pushed into destitution.¹⁷²
- We recommend the introduction of a **national hardship fund**¹⁷³ to provide grants to households negatively affected by coronavirus to repay arrears and debt incurred to pay for essentials. **WBG recommends these are delivered on the individual level to maximise economic independence**.

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations on women's poverty and debt during the Covid-19 pandemic in the following briefings:

[Household Debt, Gender 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](#) (with Young Women's Trust)

170 The Trussell Trust (December 2020) Lift the Burden: Tackling the Government Debts Facing People at Food Banks (<https://bit.ly/3ibKm2e>)

171 Ibid.

172 JRF (December 2020) Destitution in the UK 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2LUifVO>)

173 StepChange (June 2020) Coronavirus and personal debt: a financial recovery strategy for households (<https://bit.ly/3oOYLUA>)

Housing

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have caused an economic crisis impacting all areas of life, including housing. It has exposed structural weaknesses in the UK housing system which impact vulnerable and poorer households, contributing to poverty, disadvantage and poor health. This includes insufficient housing benefits, and insufficient social housing stock. In 2011, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was reduced from the 50th to the 30th percentile of local rents and was then frozen for four years in 2016. The cumulative impact of these changes means that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of low-income private renters already faced shortfalls between LHA and private rental costs.¹⁷⁴

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, lack of access to affordable housing, ownership and feeling safe were already areas that affected women disproportionately. On average, private renters spent 33% on rent,¹⁷⁵ however due in part to the gender pay gap, there was a distinctly gendered difference; average rents used up 43% of a woman's median earnings and only 28% of men's.¹⁷⁶ Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, women also made up 60% of households claiming housing benefits.¹⁷⁷ Two-thirds (66%) of all statutory homeless families with children were headed by lone mothers.¹⁷⁸ In terms of buying property, the median cost of a house in England was 12 times a woman's median salary (only 8 times for men). Regional differences in affordability meant that across the UK this ranged from 8 to 18 times a woman's median salary (5 to 14 times for men).¹⁷⁹

Early in the crisis, the government implemented several policies to protect different sections of society, including a ban on evicting tenants, the housing of all rough sleepers by local authorities, uprating LHA to the 30th percentile, a mortgage payment pause and a removal of stamp duty for housing purchases.

However, many of the measures that supported the most vulnerable have ended, or are due to end in the coming months, removing a vital safety net as redundancies continue across the UK. The government's failure to reinstate the 'Everybody In' scheme over the winter months of 2020-21, which had previously seen over 29,000 rough sleepers housed during the pandemic, leaves many thousands of rough sleepers faced with severely cold weather and increasing risk of infection.¹⁸⁰

174 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) How do landlords address poverty? (<http://bit.ly/2j7SAKO>)

175 MHCLG (2020) English Housing Survey: Housing Costs and Affordability 2018-19 (<https://bit.ly/35oXsVp>)

176 WBG (2019) A Home of Her Own: Housing and Women (<https://bit.ly/2y0k3Jc>)

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

180 The Guardian (January 2021) Call to provide shelter for rough sleepers over UK winter lockdown (<https://bit.ly/2XH6wQE>)

It is also concerning in the longer term that given women were already less able to rent or purchase housing prior to the crisis, that these pre-existing inequalities may deepen beyond 2021 as the economy and labour market struggle to recover.

- There are **4.3 million homes in England that do not meet basic standards set by government**. They are excessively cold, or damp, or contain hazards that put the occupant at risk of tripping and falling. **Private renters are disproportionately impacted, with privately rented accommodation most likely to fail basic housing standards (25% compared with 12% of socially rented homes).**¹⁸¹
- **Due to poor quality and overcrowding (amongst other factors) housing is a known public health issue**. The pandemic has highlighted the impact socioeconomic inequalities can have on health, with inadequate housing an important factor in this. **Areas with larger numbers of overcrowded housing have the highest Covid-19 mortality rates.**¹⁸² In England, **Bangladeshi (24%), Pakistani (18%), Black African (16%) and Arab (15%) households are much more likely to experience overcrowding than White British households (2%).**¹⁸³ **1 in 5 children from a low-income household spent the first lockdown in an overcrowded home, while close to 10 per cent are growing up in damp conditions.**¹⁸⁴
- **253,000 people in England are homeless and living in temporary accommodation during the pandemic** – the highest figure for 14 years.¹⁸⁵
- In response to the Covid-19 crisis the government suspended evictions for rental tenants (currently in place until 21st February 2021 in England, 31st March in the devolved nations) and increased LHA to the lowest 30th percentile of local rents until April 2021. However, regional analysis in November 2020 indicates that **474,000 private-renter households in Great Britain still face a rent shortfall.**¹⁸⁶ The true number is likely higher as many renters in the cheapest properties are ineligible for housing support due to their visa status, and Shelter has argued **almost 2 million of those claiming Universal Credit** are still struggling to pay their rent despite the additional benefit.
- **63% of private renters don't have savings to pay for housing or living costs if they were to lose income during the crisis.**¹⁸⁷
- By November 2020, **2.6 million mortgage deferrals had been approved**, with just under 140,000 still in place at the end of October. Once payment holidays end, and higher mortgage payments are reinstated, **homeowners may incur greater household debt to cover the additional costs.**¹⁸⁸

181 MHCLG (July 2020) English Housing Survey (<https://bit.ly/2N6WupV>)

182 Inside Housing (May 2020) The housing pandemic: four graphs showing the link between Covid-19 deaths and the housing crisis (<https://bit.ly/2GHXc9I>)

183 ONS (September 2020) Overcrowded houses (<https://bit.ly/2ZvdIR3>)

184 Resolution Foundation (July 2020) Lockdown living: Housing quality across the generations (<https://bit.ly/3qj3uya>)

185 Shelter (December 2020) Homeless in a pandemic: 253,000 people are trapped in temporary accommodation (<https://bit.ly/39uPpqJ>)

186 Generation Rent (November 2020) End of furlough puts 341,000 more renters at risk of debt (<https://bit.ly/2LzbUTd>)

187 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (August 2020) Build, build, build social housing (<https://bit.ly/2FjlkOB>)

188 House of Commons Library (November 2020) Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions (England) (<https://bit.ly/3IHTZGW>)

Housing Recommendations:

- The **eviction and bailiff visit ban should be extended indefinitely** to limit the risk of eviction and homelessness.
- **The government should immediately reinstate the 'Everybody In' scheme** to protect homeless people from the severe winter weather and increased risk of Covid-19
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates should **be raised to the 50th percentile of local rents**, and the **under-occupancy penalty (or 'bedroom tax') should be abolished**.

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations in our *Housing, Gender and Covid-19* briefing [here](#).



Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a severe increase in domestic abuse, financial abuse and other gender-based violence. The World Health Organisation warned early in the crisis that violence against women tends to increase during emergency situations, including epidemics.¹⁸⁹ For women and girls living with such violence, home is not a place of safety, and being in lockdown with a perpetrator could present additional risk, isolation, and exposure to increased violence, and coercive and controlling behaviour.¹⁹⁰

During the current lockdown, the government have stated explicitly that escaping harm is legally recognised as a legitimate reason to leave home. However 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.

- **Cases of femicide** as a result of domestic abuse **more than doubled at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic**.¹⁹¹
- **Two-thirds of women** in abusive relationships **suffered increased levels of violence** from partners since the beginning of the pandemic, and **three-quarters** of women have found it **more difficult to escape** their perpetrators.¹⁹²
- **16% of adults in the UK (8.7 million people)** say they have **experienced economic abuse**.¹⁹³ For **1.6 million people (3% of UK adult population)** economic abuse **started during the Covid-19 pandemic**.¹⁹⁴
- **45% of women currently experiencing economic abuse** have had a **worsening of their education or employment situation as a result of the perpetrator's actions since the start of the outbreak**.¹⁹⁵
- **One in three survivors (34%) of economic abuse** had made **plans to change their employment or education** situation prior to the outbreak which have been **impacted by abuse during the pandemic** (for example, no longer being able to afford educational courses).¹⁹⁶

189 WHO (2020) Covid-19 and violence against women (<https://bit.ly/2XTJISM>)

190 Women's Aid (2020) VAWG sector statement on Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/3eG8zea>)

191 The Guardian (April 2020) Domestic abuse killings 'more than double' amid Covid-19 lockdown (<https://bit.ly/38Hd2wP>)

192 Guardian (August 2020) Domestic abuse surged in lockdown, Panorama investigation finds (<https://bit.ly/32JAKUY>)

193 Refuge (September 2020) Know economic abuse: 2020 Report (<https://bit.ly/38FK1BL>)

194 Ibid.

195 Surviving Economic Abuse (December 2020) The cost of Covid-19: Economic abuse throughout the pandemic- on employment and education (<https://bit.ly/2LQHpbq>)

196 Ibid.

- **1 in 6 (17.3%) disabled women in the UK experience domestic violence** (compared to 1 in 15 (7.0%) non-disabled women).¹⁹⁷ The current Covid-19 crisis has forced disabled women to **increase dependence on others**, placing them at **greater risk of domestic abuse**.¹⁹⁸ **Women with learning difficulties** who have experienced domestic and sexual violence **have lost one-to-one support from advocates**. Deaf women have also experienced **difficulty communicating as support has moved mostly over the phone** or online. **15% of disabled LGBT people** also reported **not feeling safe** where they were staying during lockdown.¹⁹⁹

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Recommendations:

- The VAWG sector has struggled with the significantly increased demand for their services since the start of the pandemic. The government must provide **adequate, ring-fenced funding** for the sector to enable it to respond to the growing need.

You can read more about WBG analysis and policy recommendations on the impact of Covid-19 on violence against women here:

[Covid-19 and economic challenges for disabled women](#)

[Covid-19 and economic challenges for migrant women](#)

[Household debt, Gender and Covid-19](#)

[Covid-19- The Impact on Women in Coventry](#)

¹⁹⁷ ONS (2019) Disability and crime, UK: 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3fd80de>)

¹⁹⁸ Sisters of Frida (April 2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on disabled women from Sisters of Frida (<https://bit.ly/2YUWvAe>)

¹⁹⁹ 58 LGBT Foundation (May 2020) Hidden Figures: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on LGBT communities in the UK (<https://bit.ly/3hPhnQJ>)

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. Whilst it has affected everyone, the severity of the impact has disproportionately hit those already disadvantaged, exacerbating existing inequalities. It has exposed the erosion of public services such as social care, social security, local government schemes and housing, and the underfunding of others, such as VAWG services. The crisis has also made visible the increasing precarity of work for many, particularly women and other marginalised groups.

The unparalleled health crisis has also highlighted the various ways in which care for others has been devalued in our society. Whether on the frontlines of the NHS, care homes, in schools, supermarkets and in the home, care has been central to keeping people safe during the pandemic.

When the time comes to rebuild after Covid-19, economic recovery should build towards a caring economy that re-values care, promotes well-being for all, decent living standards and opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential in life.

Find out more about our recent work on a [care-led recovery](#) and creating a [caring economy](#).



