

BUILDING BACK FAIRER FOR WOMEN & GIRLS



A JOINT REPORT BY

imkaan

Fawcett ▶
Equality. It's about time.

maternity action
Ten years of fighting for better maternity rights

women's aid
until women & children are safe

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Summary

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how deep-rooted gender inequality is within our society. As restrictions lift, we now look to the future and together set out this vision for how the UK could build back fairer for women and girls in all our diversity and come out of the pandemic with a stronger and fairer society for all.

Key asks

A care-led recovery

- The UK Government should invest in a sustainable universal care system to ensure high quality care for everyone who needs it.
- The UK Government should give all care workers a pay rise to the real living wage and ensure all care workers are protected by effective terms and conditions of employment.

Childcare is available and affordable for all parents and carers

- The UK Government should allocate investment in childcare that reflects its central importance as essential economic infrastructure, including emergency funding to prevent closures.
- The UK Government should set out a plan to review childcare funding and create a new vision for early years provision in the UK which prioritises high quality early years education while striking a fairer deal for working families.

A modern future of work for all and an end to the gender pay gap

Equal Pay

- The UK Government should urgently make equal pay law fit for purpose in the 21st century, legislating to give women who suspect they are being paid unequally the legal right to know information about their male comparator's salary.
- The UK Government should extend gender pay gap reporting requirements to include ethnicity pay reporting and require employers to publish action plans setting out the steps they will take to advance equality in their workplaces.

End pregnancy and maternity discrimination

- The UK Government should ensure swift passage of Maria Miller MP's Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill.

Flexible working for all

- The UK Government should legislate to make all jobs flexible, and advertised as such, unless there is a clear business requirement not to.
- The UK Government should make flexible working a day one right.
- The UK Government should ensure that survivors of domestic abuse are offered flexible working arrangements and a period of paid employment leave to cope and recover.

Secure work and well-paid work

- The UK Government should give workers the right to opt out of zero hours contracts by requesting a more predictable contract that reflect their hours.
- The UK Government should encourage employers to have a robust, internal workplace policies to tackle workplace harassment and violence against women and girls.

End male violence against women and girls, for good

- The UK Government should invest in early intervention – particularly with boys and men – and actions to change the societal culture that enables violence against women and girls.
- The UK Government should radically overhaul public services to better support victims of abuse and prevent abuse.
- The UK Government should provide long-term, sustainable funding for specialist services, based on need, including ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' services.

Ensuring every woman can access the most basic support

- The UK Government should immediately end the No Recourse To Public Funds condition.
- The UK Government should end indefinite detention for all and should limit detention for migrant women to an absolute minimum, with caps on the lengths of their stay.

A safety net that works for women and their children

- The UK Government should:
 - Suspend the two-child limit and the benefit cap to all benefits
 - Lift local housing allowance rates to cover the average cost of renting in each local area (the 50th percentile).
 - Retain the £20 uplift to Universal credit, and extend this to legacy benefits
 - Abolish lower earning limits and increase statutory sick pay to real living wage
 - Increase child benefit by £10 per week, and
 - Assess all welfare reforms for their impact on women's ability to escape abuse.

Women in all our diversity are equally represented in the UK's national and local governments

- All political parties should set out an action plan to achieve equal representation in the next ten years and commit to all-women shortlists if this is not met.
- All parliaments and councils across the UK should continue to use virtual voting and meeting practices on a permanent basis, with legislation passed to enable this where necessary.
- The UK Government should enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring all parties to publish diversity data on candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament.
- The UK Government should introduce full maternity cover and job-share options for MPs.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives and revealed how deep-rooted gender inequality is within our society. As restrictions lift, we look to the future and together set out this vision for how the UK could build back fairer for women and girls in all our diversity and come out of the pandemic with a stronger and fairer society for all.

The vision of the future we are calling for focuses on policy asks for the UK Government. The powers of the devolved governments mean that some of the action we are asking the UK Government to take will affect women in England, some will affect women in England and Wales, some will affect women in Northern Ireland, some will affect women in Great Britain and some will affect women across the UK.

A care led recovery

The UK Government plans to 'build, build, build' with jobs and infrastructure at the heart of the Government economic recovery strategy.¹ Research by the Women's Budget Group has found that investing the £5bn promised to infrastructure projects in the UK into care instead would produce 2.7 times as many jobs - 6.3 times as many jobs for women and 10% more for men.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the UK's care crisis.² At a time when our care system has been under immense pressure - with half of England and Wales Covid-19 deaths in care homes - a longer-term crisis exists as 1.4 million older people have care needs which are unmet.³

Women's Budget Group's research shows that increasing the numbers working in adult social care and childcare to 10% of the employed population (the level in Sweden and Denmark) and giving all care workers a pay rise to the real living wage would create 2 million jobs, increasing overall employment rates by 5 percentage points and decreasing the gender employment gap by 4 percentage points.⁴ A better care system also requires that care workers are better trained and have better terms and conditions. Investment in care and the professionalisation of the sector are not only needed to transform our broken social care system but are also a highly effective way to stimulate employment, reduce the gender employment gap and counter the risk of economic recession as the UK comes out of the pandemic.

Key asks:

- The UK Government should invest in a sustainable universal care system to ensure high quality care for everyone who needs it.
- The UK Government should give all care workers a pay rise to the real living wage and ensure all care workers are protected by effective terms and conditions of employment.

1 UK Gov, (2020), *Build, Build, Build: Prime Minister announces new deal for Britain*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/build-build-build-prime-minister-announces-new-deal-for-britain>

2 OECD, *Benefits and Wages, Net Childcare Costs* <https://data.oecd.org/benwage/net-childcare-costs.htm>

3 Women's Budget Group (2020) *WBG Briefing: Social Care and Gender*, <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/2019-wbg-briefing-social-care-and-gender/>

4 Women's Budget Group (2020), *A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus*, <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/a-care-led-recovery-from-coronavirus/>

Childcare is available and affordable for all parents and carers

Childcare is an essential piece of economic infrastructure, which needs proper design and investment. Affordable, high-quality childcare and early education which enables parents to work and lays strong foundations for child development needs to be seen as just as much a part of our nation's infrastructure as transport, energy, and information technology. The Social Mobility Commission argues that high quality early years provision delivered by a skilled and qualified workforce is key to closing the educational attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their better off peers.⁵

In 2020, the Fawcett Society united with a coalition of organisations representing businesses, parents, children and childcare providers to call for urgent investment in the sector which was already underfunded and undervalued before Covid-19.⁶ This has not been forthcoming. Research has demonstrated fears that 1 in 6 childcare settings could close permanently as a result of the pandemic, with a loss of 250,000 childcare spaces, especially in areas of high deprivation.⁷

Parents in the UK face the highest childcare and early years costs across the members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). At the same time, early years workers are struggling to make ends meet themselves with low rates of pay, long hours and a lack of career development and progression opportunities. More than 3 in 4 young mums (78%) said a lack of flexible and affordable childcare was a barrier to finding employment and 57% were unable to take up employment because of a lack of suitable childcare options.⁸

Key asks:

- The UK Government should allocate investment in childcare that reflects its central importance as essential economic infrastructure, including emergency funding to prevent closures.
- The UK Government should set out a plan to review childcare funding and create a new vision for early years provision in the UK which prioritises high quality early years education while striking a fairer deal for working families.

A modern future of work for all and an end to the gender pay gap

Equal Pay for all women

Fifty years on from the Equal Pay Act 1970, from supermarkets and councils to broadcasters and catering companies, men are still being paid more for the same work, work rated as equivalent, or work of equal value. Pay discrimination is thriving because we have a culture of pay secrecy in the UK. Polling from The Fawcett Society found that six in ten (60%) working women who work with men doing the same or very similar work to them either don't know what those men earn, or say they know that they are paid less than their male counterparts.⁹

5 UK Gov, (2020) Press release: *Stability of Early Years Workforce in the UK* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/stability-of-the-early-years-workforce-in-england-report>

6 Fawcett Society (2020), *Businesses, parent and nurseries call for investment to stem the childcare crisis* <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/businesses-parents-nurseries-call-for-investment-to-stem-covid-childcare-crisis>

7 Childcare.co.uk, (2021), *Nearly a sixth of childcare providers set to close permanently due to Covid-19*, <https://www.childcare.co.uk/news/childcare-closures>

8 Young Women's Trust, (2019) *Childcare: What Young Women Want*, <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/our-research/childcare-what-young-women-want/>

9 Andrew Bazeley and Gemma Rosenblatt, The Fawcett Society, (2020), *Why women need a right to know: Shining a light on pay discrimination*, <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=cd8d56a1-52cb-43f2-bd2d-ba272ff802a6>

During the pandemic, Spain tightened its laws on equal pay, citing the need to prevent the pandemic from worsening the gender pay gap. In the UK, gender pay gap reporting was suspended and then reinstated with a delayed enforcement date. In the UK, unlike many comparable countries,¹⁰ employers are not required to take any action to redress their gender pay gap.

The UK Government must do better to reduce the gender pay gap and should pass The Equal Pay Implementation and Claims Bill, which was introduced in the last Parliament by Stella Creasy MP, with support from a group of cross-party MPs, and was drafted by the Fawcett Society. The Bill would give a woman the legal 'Right to Know' a male comparator's salary in order to know if she is being discriminated against, with appropriate safeguards in place. It would also lower the threshold for gender pay gap reporting to 100 employees and introduce ethnicity pay gap reporting, recognising that women from ethnic minority backgrounds experience multiple discrimination and different pay gaps to white women.

Compulsory action plans for gender pay gap reporting are also essential for ensuring that gender pay gap reporting has impact.

Key asks:

- The UK Government should urgently make equal pay law fit for purpose in the 21st century, legislating to give women who suspect they are being paid unequally the legal right to know information about their male comparator's salary.
- The UK Government should extend gender pay gap reporting requirements to include ethnicity pay reporting and require employers to publish action plans setting out the steps they will take to advance equality in their workplaces.

End to pregnancy and maternity discrimination

In 2016, the EHRC estimated that 50,000 new or expectant mothers were being forced out of their jobs every year.¹¹ Maternity Action fears that the current crisis puts new and expectant mothers in an even more vulnerable position. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that mothers were one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to have either lost their job or quit during the Spring 2020 lockdown.¹² The Office of National Statistics found that parents were almost twice as likely to report that they had been furloughed (13.6%) when compared with workers without children (7.2%).¹³ There is an urgent need to replace the existing, ineffective legal protections against unfair redundancy for pregnant women and new mothers.

Maria Miller MP's Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill offers pregnant women and new mothers similar protections to those available in Germany and would mean that they could only be made redundant in limited circumstances.

Key ask:

- The UK Government should ensure swift passage of Maria Miller MP's Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill.

10 Fawcett Society, GIWL, Latham Watkins (2020), *Gender Pay Gap Reporting: A Comparative Analysis*

11 EHRC, (2016), *Forcing working mothers from jobs costs business £280 million each year* <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/forcing-working-mothers-jobs-costs-business-%C2%A3280-million-each-year>

12 IFS, (2020) *How are mothers and father balancing work and family under lockdown* <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>

13 ONS, (2020) *People and Economic Wellbeing in the UK* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/june2020>

Flexible working for all

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that the arguments often used against working from home or other flexible working requests simply no longer stand. During lockdown, around half of people in work did so from home. Men and women did so in similar proportions, however white-collar roles were more likely to be working from home.¹⁴ Similarly, many employees were able to be flexible in the number and timing of their working hours, demonstrating that the usual 9-5 was not necessary in many roles.

Everyone deserves the right to meaningful flexible working that benefits the employee, not just the employer. Prior to the pandemic, flexible hours based on the workers' choice were unavailable to six in ten workers.¹⁵ While workers have had the right to request flexibility since 2003, three in ten requests are turned down.¹⁶

All jobs should be advertised with clear options around flexibility, following careful consideration by the employer of what could be made to work for the role – unless there is a clear and demonstrable business requirement not to offer any form of flexibility. This change would hugely benefit working mothers and would also offer hope to the seven in ten millennials who wanted to work differently pre-lockdown, the over-50s who want to achieve greater balance alongside financial stability, the 38% of dads who lie to their boss to take time off to spend with children, the Disabled people that need flexibility to manage their conditions, and those living outside city centres who want to access a wider range of job roles.¹⁷

Key asks:

- The UK Government should legislate to make all jobs flexible, and advertised as such, unless there is a clear and demonstrable business requirement not to.
- The UK Government should make flexible working a day one right.
- The UK Government should ensure that survivors of domestic abuse are offered flexible working arrangements and a period of paid employment leave to cope and recover.

Secure work and well-paid work

Secure, good quality jobs are essential for sustainable economic recovery and building back fairer for women and girls. 3.6 million workers – or one in nine – were in insecure work ahead of the pandemic, leaving them exposed to income losses when it hit.¹⁸ Those in occupations including caring and leisure were particularly likely to be in insecure work including zero hours contracts and, in both sectors, women make up the majority of the workforce.¹⁹ Analysis by the TUC found that Black, Asian and ethnic minority workers are more likely to be in insecure work.²⁰

Those on zero-hours contracts are at risk of missing out on key rights and protections such as statutory sick pay, while also lacking in the home security and facing lower rates of pay. The fragility of these jobs came to the surface during the pandemic when many restaurant, hotel and retail workers saw their income disappear overnight with lockdown, then faced a five-week wait for universal credit.

The insecurity of zero hours contracts is a significant concern for women survivors of domestic abuse who are likely to need to rely on employment entitlements and may require flexibility and understanding

14 ONS (2020), *Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK: April 2020*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020>

15 TUC (2019), *One in three flexible working requests turned down, TUC poll reveals*, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/one-three-flexible-working-requests-turned-down-tuc-poll-reveals>.

16 Ibid.

17 Fawcett (2016) *Parents, Work and Care* <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ee914eef-9b45-4f6e-84c5-57c0547727b4>

18 Tim Sharp, TUC, (2020), *With 3.6 million in insecure work, we have an opportunity for change* <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/36-million-insecure-work-we-have-opportunity-change>

19 Ibid.

20 TUC (2019) *Insecure Work and Ethnicity* https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Insecure%20work%20and%20ethnicity_0.pdf

from their workplace to cope and recover. Alongside wider support such as paid leave, it's crucial that employers have a robust workplace policy which demonstrates that domestic abuse is not tolerated within or outside the workplace and that women who have experienced domestic abuse have the right to raise the issue with their employer in the knowledge that they will treat the matter effectively, sympathetically and confidentially. It is important that such a policy also covers the approach employers will take where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse and is in line with the established international framework for responding to domestic abuse as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Zero hours contracts are also highly problematic for women experiencing intersectional discrimination, particularly women from black minoritised communities. These women may not have the same options as other groups of women have to opt out of zero hours contracts, and so the following recommendation for the right to opt out may not go far enough. We recognise that we need to do further work to understand their situation and come up with a more informed position on zero hours contracts for these women, which may extend to the recommendation to abolish them entirely.

Key asks:

- The UK Government should give workers the right to opt out of zero hours contracts by requesting a more predictable contract that reflect their hours.
- The UK Government should encourage employers to have a robust, internal workplace policies to tackle workplace harassment and violence against women and girls.

End male violence against women and girls, for good

As a coalition, we know that violence against women and girls is not inevitable. As members of End Violence Against Women, we believe that a different world is possible; a world where women and girls live equally alongside men, free from harassment, abuse and violence.²¹ The UK Government needs to recognise the enormous costs of domestic and sexual violence to the state and our communities and implement a well-funded cross-governmental strategy to end all forms of violence against women and girls, with radical reform to public services in key areas, such as the justice system and family courts, and well-funded specialist support services.

The scale of the problem is vast. Home Office research published in 2019 estimated the economic and social cost of domestic abuse alone at £66bn every year, with direct costs to the Exchequer totalling over £5 billion annually – including £2.3 billion in health services, £1.3 billion in police costs, £550 million in housing costs, £476 million in criminal and civil legal costs, and £724 million for services for victims; and a staggering £14bn in lost working days.²² Women's Aid has estimated that life-saving specialist domestic abuse support for every survivor who needs it would cost £393 million per year: a fraction of the estimated £66bn annual cost to society.²³

The sector has called on the Treasury and relevant departments to help develop a similarly robust figure for VAWG as a whole, so that we could all operate from the basis of a stronger common understanding.

21 See the work led by End Violence Against Women: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/>

22 Rhys Oliver, Barnaby Alexander, Stephen Roe and Miriam Wlasny, Home Office (2019), *The economic and social costs of domestic abuse: Research Report 107* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf

23 Women's Aid (2020), *Women's Aid report says £393 million a year is needed to fund domestic abuse services in England*, <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-report-says-393-million-a-year-is-needed-to-fund-domestic-abuse-services-in-england/>

The statistics we have are concerning: one in five offences recorded by police during and immediately after the first national lockdown in England and Wales involved domestic abuse²⁴ and three women every fortnight are killed by partner or ex-partner in England and Wales.²⁵ Younger women, Deaf and Disabled women, women of colour and LGBT+ survivors are often less likely to be believed and to access support services and the justice system if they choose to do so.

Radical public services change is needed in several key areas to better support victims of abuse and prevent abuse in the first place. In particular we need:

- the ending of 'no recourse to public funds' for abuse survivors which locks migrant women in abusive relationships and puts enormous pressure on support services²⁶
- significant reform to social security policy to tackle the financial barriers survivors face in escaping abusers
- reforms to Family Court procedures and powers²⁷
- housing reforms to protect refugees and move on accommodation, and pathways to enable the removal of perpetrators where this is safe, effective and what the victim wants²⁸
- parity of esteem for mental health in the NHS, and
- non-means tested legal aid for survivors.

All of these, alongside sustainable funding for specialist services, would reduce the complexity of need and costs across systems in the long term. Specialist women's VAWG services are facing a funding crisis which disproportionately impacts "by and for" services.

Crucially, early intervention to prevent and respond to men's violence against women and girls can prevent future costs to the individual, wider society and the Exchequer. Work with boys and men as disproportionate perpetrators of abusive behaviour needs to be part of this early work. Strategic investment now is imperative for building a society better able to respond to violence against women and girls in all its forms. Men's violence against women is rooted in sexism and inequality between men and women but is not inevitable.²⁹ Changing the structures, institutions and attitudes which perpetuate women's inequality in society requires extensive work and government investment to challenge myths and stereotypes, equip communities to speak out and provide children and young people with the tools to end men's violence against women and girls.³⁰

Key asks:

- The UK Government should invest in early intervention – particularly with boys and men – and actions to change the societal culture that enables violence against women and girls.
- The UK Government should radically overhaul public services to better support victims of abuse and prevent abuse.
- The UK Government should provide long-term, sustainable funding for specialist services, based on need, including ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' services.

24 ONS (2020), Domestic abuse in England and Wales Overview, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020#domestic-abuse-in-england-and-wales-data>

25 ONS, (2020). Appendix tables: Homicide in England and Wales. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/appendix-tables-homicide-in-england-and-wales>

26 See further at the Step Up for Migrant Women Campaign, <https://stepupmigrantwomen.org/>

27 Ministry of Justice (2020), *Assessing risk of harm to children and parents in private law children cases* <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/assessing-harm-private-family-law-proceedings/>

28 Women's Aid, (2020), *Improving the move-on pathway for survivors in refuge services A recommendations report* <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10928/improving-the-move-on-pathway-for-survivors-in-refuge-services-wa-daha.pdf>

29 Women's Aid, (2021) *Letter to Prime Minister VAWG Response* <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Letter-to-Prime-Minister-VAWG-Response-2021.pdf>

30 Ibid.

Ensuring every woman can access the most basic support

In a time of national crisis and global pandemic, no one should be denied the most basic help and forced into destitution and abject poverty because of their migration status. It is estimated that currently 1.4 million people in the UK have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and are unable to access the most basic level of support including universal credit, child benefit, disability allowance, housing benefit, free NHS health care and domestic abuse support.³¹

In a toxic combination, many are also denied access to the labour market and work. The hostile environment hurts and targets racialised communities - 82% of people helped with an NRPF issue by Citizen Advice in 2019/2020 were Black, Asian or from another minority ethnic background.³² Research from The Children's Society found that most NRPF families weren't able to meet their children's needs such as paying for food and that most families had experienced street homelessness, were forced to sleep on the sofa or floors with friends or other families, or lived in precarious, unstable and unsafe private rented accommodation. Most of the families they interviewed (8 out of 11) were headed by single mothers and many had children with additional needs, such as autism.

Many women held in immigration detention centres are survivors of torture, trafficking and gender-based violence, and being locked up while a global pandemic is ongoing is causing immense distress. The UK is the only country in Europe to indefinitely imprison people in detention centres. Every year, around 30,000 people are detained by the Home Office without charge and without time limit. Described by a cross-party group of MPs as "expensive, ineffective and unjust", indefinite detention is rendered unnecessary by the fact that many of those detained are eventually released back into the community.

Key asks:

- The UK Government should immediately end the No Recourse To Public Funds condition.
- The UK Government should end indefinite detention for all and should limit detention for migrant women to an absolute minimum, with caps on the lengths of their stay.

A safety net that works for women and their children

The UK Government should reform Universal Credit so that it gives real support to women and their families in times of hardship, economic instability and national crisis. Our social security system seeks to incentivise people who claim benefits to find and move into work, move into smaller and cheaper rented accommodation, or have no more than two children. However, the pandemic and mass scale job losses have shown that anyone can fall on hard times. In the past year, millions of families who've already made decisions about family size and who are struggling to find work are discovering that their support is capped and their position untenable.

Universal credit and economic hardship are not gender-neutral issues. Women represent the majority of people living in poverty and female-headed households are more likely to be poor. For example, 49% of children in poverty in the UK live in lone parent families, and 90% of lone parents are women.³³ Women are more likely to be low paid and in insecure employment and constitute most of the workforce in sectors that have been shut down by the pandemic including hospitality, retail and tourism.

31 Citizens Advice, (2020), Citizens Advice reveals nearly 14m have no access to welfare safety-net <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/citizens-advice-reveals-nearly-14m-have-no-access-to-welfare-safety-net>

32 The Children's Society, (2020), A Lifeline for All <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/a-lifeline-for-all-summary.pdf>

33 Child Poverty Action Group (2021) *Child Poverty Facts and Figures* <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures> and Gingerbread (2021) *Single Parent Facts and Figures* <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures>

It is also well established that economic abuse is a common part of the coercive control that survivors experience and can happen to any woman, but disproportionately impacts women in poverty. It is a fundamental barrier to escaping; over half of survivors surveyed by Women's Aid and the TUC could not afford to leave an abuser.³⁴ These concerns have been acute during COVID 19; Women's Aid's member services reported serious concerns about women's access to the money they need to leave an abuser, including concerns about access to food and basic essentials.

The Government must take practical steps to tackle the risk, and impact, of economic abuse in practice. Access to financial assistance, through welfare benefits, is vital for women survivors of domestic abuse – particularly for those who are forced to flee their homes.

Key asks:

- The UK Government should
 - Suspend the two-child limit and the benefit cap to all benefits
 - Lift local housing allowance rates to cover the average cost of renting in each local area (the 50th percentile)
 - Retain the £20 uplift to Universal credit, and extend this to legacy benefits
 - Abolish lower earning limits and increase statutory sick pay to real living wage
 - Increase child benefit by £10 per week, and
 - Assess all welfare reforms for their impact on women's ability to escape abuse.

Women in all our diversity are equally represented in the UK's national and local governments

Women's representation in national and local governments continues to be low, with just 34% of MPs women, and a similar level of local councillors. Fawcett research has demonstrated that the pandemic has left women even less likely to want to stand for elected office.³⁵ Evidence shows that having more women in power improves the quality of decisions made, particularly in relation to the impact of those decisions on women.³⁶

Action needs to be taken to increase the number of women in political positions. This needs to ensure that more women are supported towards election, and that the barriers that discourage women from entering into and staying in politics are broken down.

Key asks:

- All political parties should set out an action plan to achieve equal representation in the next ten years and commit to all-women shortlists if this is not met.
- All parliaments and councils across the UK should continue to use virtual voting and meeting practices on a permanent basis, with legislation passed to enable this where necessary.
- The UK Government should enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring all parties to publish diversity data on candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament.
- The UK Government should introduce full maternity cover and job-share options for MPs.

34 Howard, M and Skipp, A, Unequal, trapped and controlled, Women's Aid and TUC, 2015 - from 126 respondents to this survey.

35 The Fawcett Society, (2021), *We need more women: Urgent action needed on women's representation*, <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/blog/we-need-more-women-urgent-action-needed-on-womens-representation>

36 UN Women (2013), *In brief: Women's leadership and political participation*, <https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20womenlgthebriefuswebrev2%20pdf.aspx>

This document is a joint statement by the following organisations

imkaan

Fawcett ▶
Equality. It's about time.

maternity action
Ten years of fighting for better maternity rights

women's aid
until women & children are safe

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

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