

COVID-19 WOMEN, WORK, AND WALES

“THE SHORT TERM FUTURE IS
GLOOMY AND THE LONG TERM
FUTURE IS VERY UNCLEAR.”



SUMMARY REPORT

DR LAURA PATERSON
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COVID-19 WOMEN, WORK AND WALES

Since 23 March, lockdown regulations have restricted the movements of everyone in the UK to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The crisis has affected everyone in Wales in different ways.

Lockdown has deeply affected every aspect of women's lives, including their health, employment, and caring responsibilities for children and other adults. Gender-blind policymaking and the sectoral impact of lockdown measures have meant that lockdown has affected women and men in a multitude of different ways.

The economic effects of lockdown are falling heavily on women. Women are more likely to be doing low-paid work on insecure contracts in shutdown sectors¹ and are twice as likely to be key workers.² Across the UK, women are spending double the amount of time as men on homeschooling.³

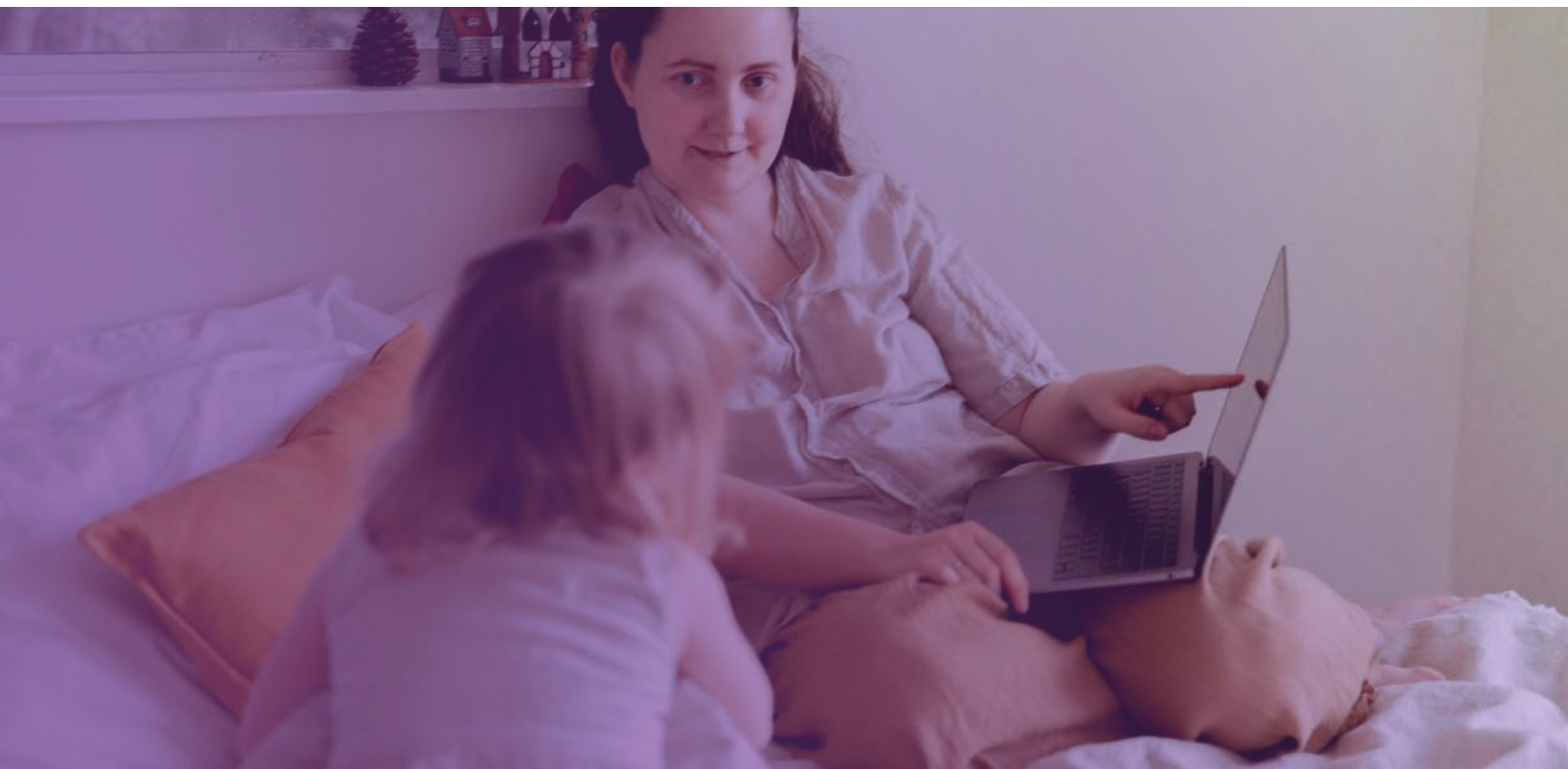
In May and June 2020, Chwarae Teg invited women across Wales to complete a survey and detail their experiences under lockdown, as well as their needs and hopes for recovery. Over 1000 women responded to this survey. This report focusses on women's experiences in the labour market under Covid.

There is no singular female experience during this ongoing pandemic. Employment status, caring responsibilities for children and adults, as well as factors such as ethnicity, disability, and age have been instrumental in shaping women's diverse experiences under lockdown and into recovery. Nonetheless, women across Wales share certain experiences and concerns.

1 J. Rodríguez, Wales Fiscal Analysis, Briefing Paper, Covid-19 and the Welsh economy: shutdown sectors and key workers.

2 T. Bell, N. Cominetti, H. Slaughter, A new settlement for the low paid: Beyond the minimum wage to dignity and respect, Resolution Foundation, June 2020.

3 Dan Ascher, 'Coronavirus: 'Mums do most childcare and chores in lockdown' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52808930> Accessed 1/8/2020



HEALTH AND SAFETY

Women are concerned about the risks of contracting Covid when going about their day-to-day life, and, in particular, as workplaces begin to re-open in the coming months. Women's health and wellbeing has been affected throughout this crisis, through exposure to the virus in their place of work, by working in unsuitable environments at home, and their mental health has deteriorated because of the stress and anxiety of the situation.

JOB SECURITY

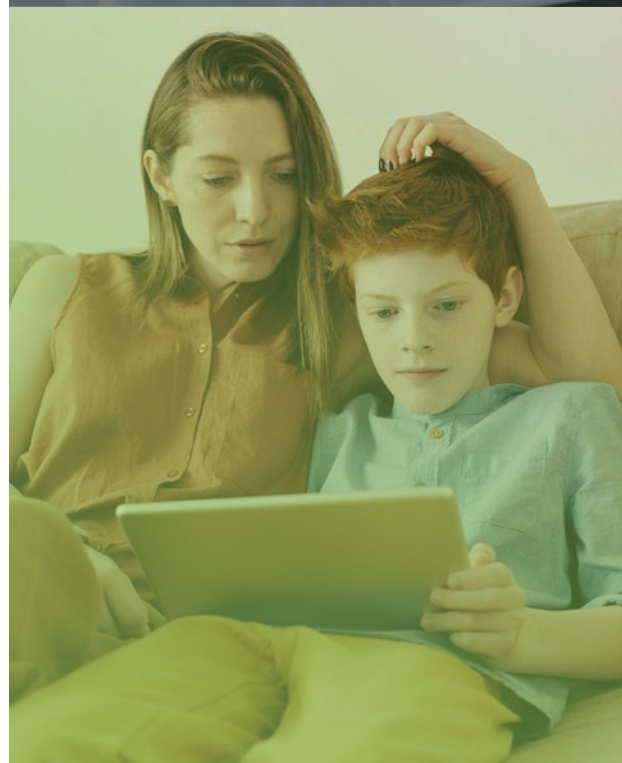
Women are lacking assurances and security in their employment. They are feeling anxious about their future in paid work and their career progression because of furlough, unemployment, and the additional caring and home-schooling they have done during the crisis. Women who have lost their job or fear their job is at immediate risk are deeply concerned about the opportunities that will be available in a recession.

CARE AND HOMESCHOOL

Women's caring responsibilities have increased while schools and childcare settings have been closed to most, and more informal childcare, such as that done by grandparents, has been unavailable. Caring for other adults has become more challenging due to restrictions, and women have taken on additional caring responsibilities through, for example, shopping for people 'shielding' or older parents.

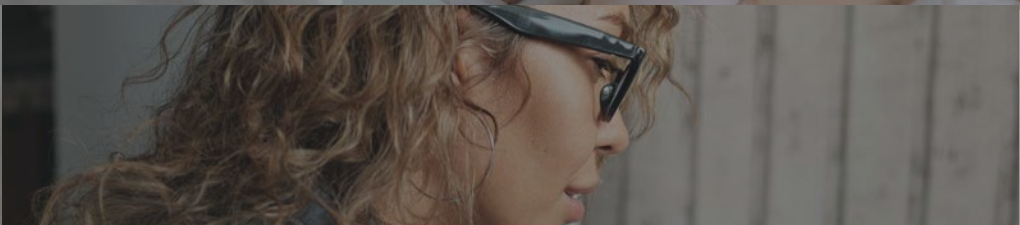
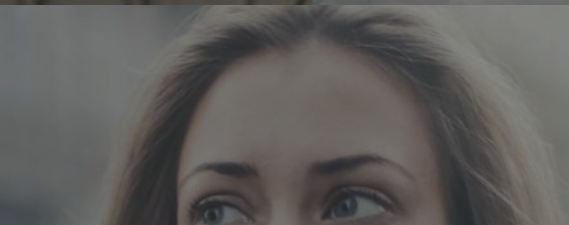
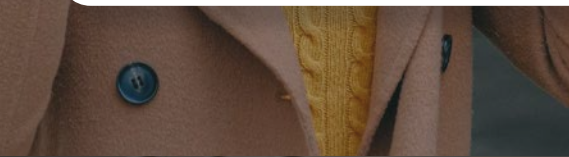
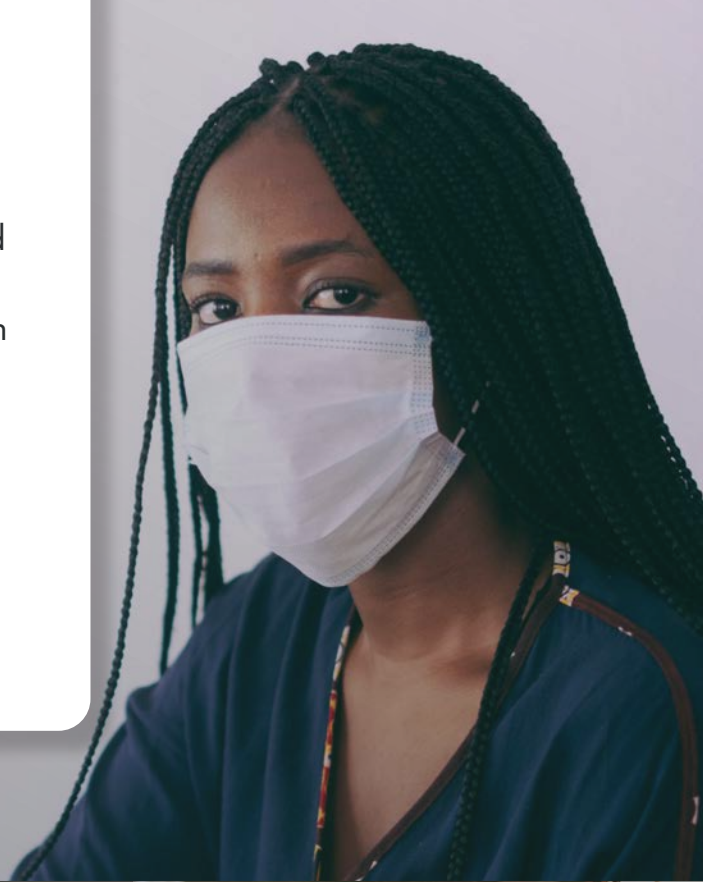
Women have borne the weight of additional childcare and home-schooling, whilst continuing in their paid employment. In addition to the immediate impact on women's feelings of productivity, women are concerned about how the changes they have had to make to adapt will have a lasting impact on their careers beyond the pandemic.

“ I'm doing the same job but in half the number of hours because I have 2 children under 5...It is very stressful because there are not enough hours of working time for me to get everything done, and my husband's boss is not very understanding of him not achieving as much as during normal times. As a consequence his work is currently taking priority and that makes me feel guilty. ”



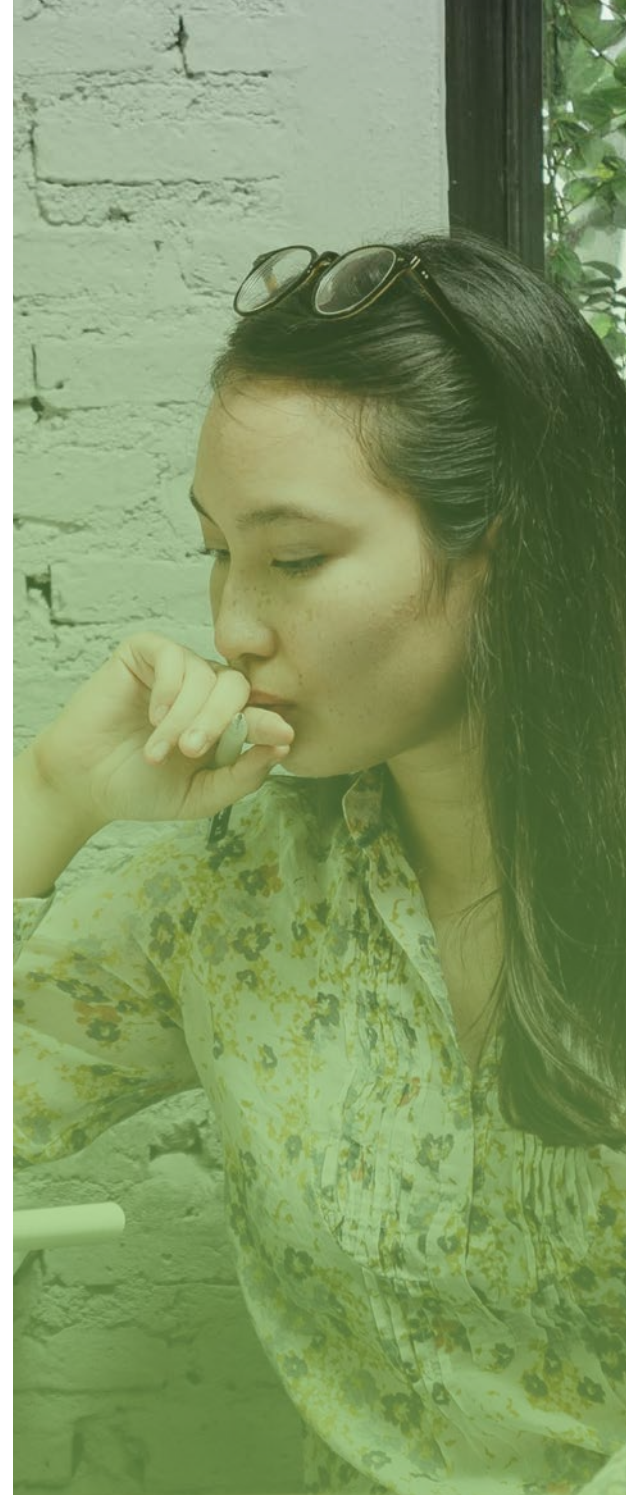
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Women have been deeply affected in every aspect of their life
- Women have borne the brunt of childcare and home-schooling over the lockdown. This has had both an immediate impact on their ability to do, and their experience of, paid work during the crisis and will likely hamper their long-term career progression
- Women are more likely to have been working in sectors which were shut down by social distancing measures
- Women are more likely in Wales to be key workers and doing low-paid jobs in non-shutdown sectors



FURLOUGH

- 7.2% of our survey respondents were furloughed at the time of responding
- Furlough has largely been a negative experience for women
- Women have been missing colleagues and the routine of work, as well as the work itself
- Being furloughed has left a gap in some women's work-based identities
- 33.6% of furloughed women believed they will return to their previous role
- Women are concerned about finding a new role if they are made redundant when furlough ends in October
- Worries about income and job security are at the forefront of women's minds during lockdown and the immediate aftermath, especially for women on fixed or insecure contracts
- Women on furlough are concerned about the longer-term impacts of furlough on their career progression
- Consequently, some women have declined to be furloughed, despite the help it would provide with childcare, putting them under a great deal of pressure
- Other women have not been allowed to be furloughed despite making requests, and this has exacerbated the challenges of childcare and home-schooling
- There are gaps in the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and failings in its implementation, which have affected women. This is clear through the number of women who have been made redundant, have had to take unpaid leave or pay cuts during the crisis.



I have gone from being a full time working mum to now being a stay at home mum. This changed quite rapidly for me and I have had to adapt to a new routine. I am a proud working mum and feel as though having work taken away from me makes me lose my identity as an individual and who I was before becoming a mum.



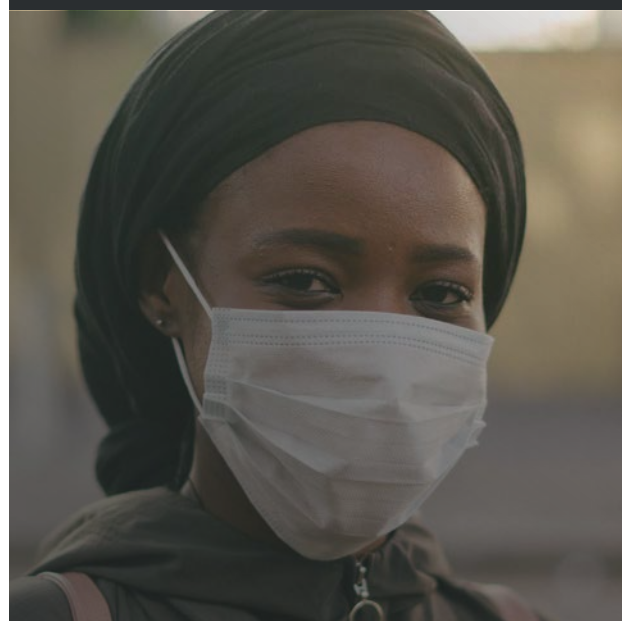
KEY WORKERS

- The crisis has made clear which jobs are most essential to our survival, and highlights that many of the workers doing those jobs have been undervalued as low-paid and/or on insecure contracts
- Women are twice as likely as men to be key workers in Wales, reflecting the concentration of women and men in different sectors
- The crisis has had fatal consequences for many key workers, especially BAME workers, who have been most exposed to Covid largely because of occupational distribution, and failure to provide proper protection
- Many key workers have not been able to access appropriate, well-fitting PPE, due to shortages in the supply chain and hierarchies of allocation.
- Women who continue to go into external workplaces have been exposed to increased risk of the virus and described their ongoing concerns about their safety and the safety of their colleagues, clients, and support users

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My role is pretty much unchanged but I am faced with the new challenge of wearing PPE for 12 hour shifts. I also now have to juggle childcare which is something new to me, which is not proving easy as both myself and my husband are classed as key workers. I feel lucky to be secure within my role but it definitely comes with the stress of the possibility of contracting Covid, potentially becoming critically unwell and passing it on to my daughter and husband.

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WORKING FROM HOME

- Most (70.0%) of our survey respondents have been working from home during lockdown
- Home workers have been relatively protected from the biggest economic and health risks of the pandemic, however, working from home has been a mixed experience for women
- Some women are keen to return to their usual workplace on a full, part or flexible basis, while others are eager to continue to be supported to work from home and to work remotely and flexibly as a regular feature of their working lives

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Saving time on the commute has been fantastic for me and my family, the ability to work flexibly has also been highly beneficial. As a result I have been far more productive, I am far less exhausted than I used to be with all the rushing around.

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- As 'normality' returns, there is an opportunity to embed and extend genuine flexibility in where and how people work. New ways of working will be needed going forward
- Working from home has required individuals and businesses to adapt in terms of technology and ways of working. Unreliable broadband connections, 'not spots', and insufficient digital skills have caused additional challenges for other groups which will be exclusionary going forward
- Working from home has, in some cases, improved the working lives of women with impairments and long-term health conditions, and removed previous barriers they faced in their employment. Lockdown has shown the diversity of roles which can be done remotely, and recovery presents an opportunity to further strengthen accessible ways of working

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I have found working from home to be incredibly isolating as I live alone. Without someone else to talk to or distract me, I find it hard to enforce boundaries and ensure that I only work my contracted hours.

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UNEMPLOYMENT & UNCERTAINTY

- 1.2% of women survey respondents had been made unemployed during the crisis, and 0.5% were unemployed before the crisis. The UK is already in recession, and with the furlough scheme due to finish in October, unemployment will increase
- Unemployed women are deeply worried about their income. The benefits system has again proved inflexible and unsuited to meeting the needs of women out of paid employment
- Women in previously secure employment and women on fixed-term and other insecure contracts, now face additional uncertainty as their jobs are at risk and contracts come to an end with high unemployment and many sectors not yet at full capacity
- Some women have felt compelled to accept contracts with poor conditions because of their vulnerability in this current employment context
- Women have had to turn down job offers because of a lack of childcare options and employer inflexibility

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I am concerned that there will be redundancies in my workplace in the coming months and years because of the strain that the pandemic has had on the economy and I'm concerned that my role will be one of the first to go because it is part-time.

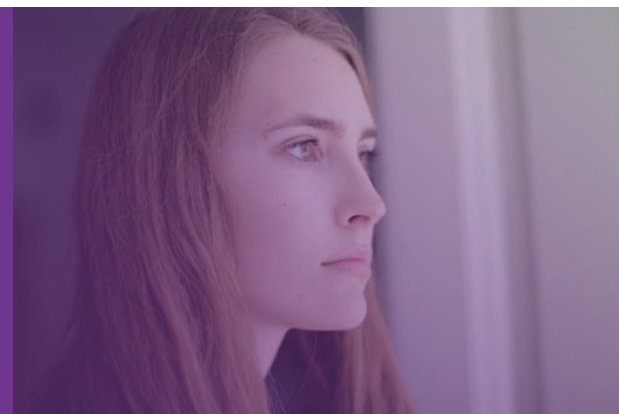
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SELF EMPLOYMENT

- While self-employed women's experiences have been mixed, their responses indicate their frustration with the lack of suitable support for their businesses at this time
- Self-employed women have received less financial support than self-employed men, and lower numbers of self-employed women have received support
- Women with a portfolio career with a mix of employment and self-employment have found themselves between two stools in terms of UK Government support
- Newly self-employed women have been particularly affected, and ineligible for UK Government support. Self-employed women who have been on maternity leave or working part-time in preceding years, for example, for childcare reasons have received lower levels of support
- A positive to emerge from the crisis is that some women feel encouraged to start or expand their own business, and targeted support should be used to support entrepreneurial women as part of long-term recovery





I have been unable to access any grants as I am newly self-employed. It has been very concerning as my husband is the same. We are muddling through on Universal Credit hoping we can get back to work.



This pandemic has brought to the fore the many inequalities that continue to pervade our society. These inequalities existed before Covid-19 and are a result of, and exacerbated by, the decisions made by those in positions of power. The unequal impact of the response to this crisis on women is a consequence of the structural inequalities and entrenched gender roles throughout the Welsh economy and society. Gender-blind policymaking has harmed women in this lockdown.

A one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for recovery going forward. Certain groups of women have been put at increased health and economic risk through previous failures to address systemic

inequality, and interventions must target those who have been worst affected. That is Black, Asian, and Mixed ethnicity women, young women, and women in low-paid and shutdown sectors.

We advise reading the recommendations alongside Chwarae Teg's **A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Wales**  and **Deeds not Words**  which provide core guiding principles for policymaking which is sensitive to the needs and experiences of women. Our previous research reports have identified how women were disadvantaged in pre-Covid times, and what steps can be taken by Welsh and UK Governments, and employers to remedy those inequalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE

Lockdown measures and policymaking during the crisis have impacted women and men differently

Women workers are worried about exposure to the virus at work. Employers are responsible for ensuring physical distancing and Covid health and safety measures are in place to protect public health.

WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD

- 1 Undertake gender analysis of measures taken during lockdown and report on the impact on women
- 2 Take a feminist approach to recovery, as outlined in A Feminist Economic Recovery
- 3 Embed gender mainstreaming in policy and decision-making, in line with recommendations previously accepted in the Gender Equality Review
- 4 Conduct a gender assessment into employability and training schemes to ascertain whether they will work for diverse women in the Covid context
- 5 Commission a longitudinal research project into the shift to agile working, and the impact on women and men, groups with protected characteristics, and across different sectors
- 6 Collect and use data disaggregated by gender and other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity
- 7 Publish clear and enforceable guidelines for employers regarding their obligations to protect the health and safety of all staff working in the workplace or remotely
- 8 Ensure that recipients of Welsh Government funding meet health and safety standards
- 9 Ensure that compliance checks take place in workplaces to make sure that appropriate Covid safety measures are enforced and PPE is available. Local authorities have many of the enforcement responsibilities, such as trading standards and environmental health, which should be carried out consistently across Wales and different sectors

The lowest-paid workers, on insecure contracts, have been especially impacted by this crisis. BAME, young, and women workers have been particularly affected because of their concentration in these roles.

Parents, and particularly women, have reduced or changed their paid hours, or taken unpaid leave, to manage childcare while schools were closed and childcare (formal and informal) was unavailable.

Women have felt overworked and have had poor work/life balance. Not all women have been working in a good physical environment. Standard ways of working have not been well suited to the sudden shift to home working.

Women have had to learn new digital skills at pace. Work has been challenging where service users, clients and colleagues do not have appropriate digital skills. Digital skills will be essential skills for better-paid jobs in the future, and absence of those skills risks exclusion.

Women's employment has been impeded through lack of access to broadband, or a poor internet connection.

- 10 Ensure that public bodies, agencies and employers in receipt of public funding provide secure contracts for their workers, with clear employment rights and access to sick and maternity pay, and extend these requirements through procurement, ensuring fair work practices throughout supply chains
- 11 Deliver a scheme to support financially anybody who has reduced their hours or taken unpaid leave because of caring responsibilities during the lockdown. This should be available if lockdown is extended and if local lockdowns occur
- 12 Invest in infrastructure and training to support quality remote working by:
 - A Making available an investment pot for employers for equipment, training, and social/cultural infrastructure
 - B Publishing a toolkit on remote and flexible working to advise employers on their obligations and best practice
 - C Signposting to existing support available, such as Agile Nation 2
- 13 Invest in provision of affordable digital skills training of basic digital skills and intermediate and advanced skills for work. This should be available offline/ face-to-face, in Covid-safe learning environments in the community, such as libraries, further education settings, and through Adult Community Learning providers
- 14 Promote Access Broadband Cymru, and signpost to UK Government Rural Voucher Scheme, more broadly to households and businesses in poorly connected areas
- 15 Speed up the roll-out of superfast broadband to all parts of Wales and prioritise investment to address any known 'not-spots' in rural and urban areas

Newly self-employed women and women who have taken maternity leave or reduced their paid working hours for childcare have been disadvantaged by support through the UK Government SEISS. Sectors such as hospitality and childcare, which are dominated by women, have been hit hardest by lockdown.

This has been a sectoral crisis and responses will need to be attuned to the needs of the worst affected sectors.

Women's mental health and wellbeing have been affected by the nature of the crisis itself, anxiety and uncertainty regarding work, and money.

16

Deliver financial support targeted at new and existing women-led businesses and job creation. Extend support available in sectors such as childcare

17

Provide grants and financial support to encourage job retention and creation in sectors affected by the crisis

- A Prioritise sectors and jobs which are essential and which support people to survive and thrive, promote equality, provide benefits to the community and the public, and meet local labour market needs

18

Ensure the safety of education and care staff as schools and childcare setting re-open by:

- A Sharing consistent guidance around re-opening and Covid safety to schools and childcare providers
- B Making available appropriate PPE, and distributing to private childcare providers
- C Ensuring staff who are continuing to shield or self-isolate are not financially prevented from doing so
- D Provide financial support to 'wrap around' care settings
- E Improve pay and working conditions for agency workers, especially regarding sick pay

19

Invest in mental health services to improve access and availability to both crisis and preventative mental health support

20

Publish clear and timely information around the impact of the virus in Wales and lockdown regulations to provide certainty

21

Deliver an employer toolkit that:

- A Addresses the importance of mental health at work
- B Provides guidance on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees
- C Signposts employers to resources and further support for staff

ISSUE

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is due to end in October 2020 while several sectors have not yet fully recovered, and there is no guarantee of jobs being available. Local lockdowns are occurring where there is a cluster of Covid-19 cases. Guidance around maternity leave and furlough is unclear and open to incorrect interpretation.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme has excluded the newly self-employed and discriminated against self-employed women who have taken maternity leave in the previous 3 years.

The lowest-paid workers, on insecure contracts, have been especially impacted by this crisis.

UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD

1

Extend and expand the CJRS beyond October 2020, where local lockdowns occur, when schools close or childcare is not available because of coronavirus

2

Publish clear guidance around maternity (and parental) leave and furlough

3

Extend and expand the social security system to be a genuine safety net for those out of work or on low-incomes, as well as the self-employed

4

Extend and expand the support available to include the newly self-employed, those who are part-time self-employed/part-time employed. Fairly account for maternity and paternity leave in SEISS calculations

5

Improve employment pay and conditions for all workers by:

- A Bringing the National Living Wage in line with the real living wage, and guarantee payment of the real living wage to all employees and apprentices
- B Guarantee employment rights for insecure workers, including agency workers and those on 'zero-hours' contracts

ISSUE

Organisations have had to adapt quickly to home working without infrastructure in place. Women have had a mixed response to home working during the crisis. While some are keen to continue working remotely in the future, other women are keen to get back into their usual workplace.

The lowest-paid workers, on insecure contracts, are especially impacted by this crisis. BAME, young, and women workers have been particularly affected because of their concentration in these roles.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD

- 1 Run consultations with staff about remote and agile working practices, and conduct Equality Impact Assessments before changes are implemented
- 2 Ensure that staff are fully equipped and supported to work from home during the Covid crisis and beyond by:
 - A Investing in equipment for all home working staff to support home working in the long-term, and reimbursing staff for equipment they have purchased to support home working
 - B Embedding modern working practices such as flexible and remote working throughout the organisation in the long-term, in consultation with staff
 - C Training staff and managers in good practice around remote and flexible working
 - D Investing in digital skills training for all staff
- 3 Continue to encourage staff to work from home where possible, and ensure the health and safety of staff who are returning to workplaces by:
 - A Following Welsh Government guidance on Covid safety at work
 - B Providing suitable PPE and other protections, including physical distancing, to keep staff, customers and service users safe
- 4 Collect and analyse data on workers to ascertain who is doing what type of roles and on what kind of contracts
- 5 Implement Fair Work practices including paying workers the real Living Wage and offering workers secure contracts

Chwarae Teg



Inspiring, leading and delivering gender equality in Wales
Ysbrydoli, arwain a chyflwyno cydraddoldeb rhywiol yng Nghymru



www.chwaraeteg.com



02920 462 745



policyandresearch@chwaraeteg.com