

Executive Summary: Gendered Asymmetries in the Response to the Global Health Pandemic

The economic consequences of the efforts to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic highlight the interdependence of the value-chains that characterise current market systems. Formerly referred to as low-skilled, essential workers formed the backbone of service delivery, health care, social reproduction and education. For this reason, the evidence set out here takes particular notice that both men and women have struggled at this time, but that there are gender-specific aspects to said struggle.

Coronavirus is not the cause of gender asymmetries in work, nor the cause of the rise in the incidence of domestic abuse; of poverty, or of low rates of political participation and decision-making by so-called minority demographics. Intimate partner violence during ‘normal’ times takes place with alarming frequency: two women are murdered a week in England. The last published statistics for 2019 revealed 1.6 million women suffered domestic abuse.¹ More than a million children in the U.K. experience hunger on a regular basis, yet approximately 10 million tonnes of food is wasted every year.² Public spending data between 2010 and 2019 reveal that public welfare measures to assist children and families, outstripped cuts in other areas of government expenditure.³ Subsequent measures that focus on supporting families into work, providing income assistance, and improving standards of living have had disappointing results, given the evidence to hand.⁴

Yet, Gross Domestic Product per capita at year-end 2019 rose by 6.5% to US\$42,580, making the U.K the fifth largest economy in the world in terms of GDP⁵ at the start of 2020. The unemployment rate, in March 2020, was the lowest in 40 years, with 3.3 million more people in work than in 2010.⁶

However, 79% of the jobs created from 2010 until February 2020 were full-time, and hence out of reach of carers⁷. Government-funded provisions for nursery and child-minding places⁸, social and elderly care

¹ Year-on -year to March 2019. From the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police records Office for National Statistics (2019). *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019*, November. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
[Accessed 10 July 2020].

² The Felix Project (2020). FOOD WASTE FACTS <https://thefelixproject.org/news/food-waste-facts>
[Accessed 20 April 2020].

³ Human Rights Watch (2019). ‘Nothing left in the cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK’ https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/uk0519_web4.pdf
[Accessed 19 May 2020].

⁴ Browne, James and Hood, Andrew (2016). *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2015–16 to 2020–21*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, February.

⁵ Listed in US\$ as per Financial Times, *Country Economy: United Kingdom* <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/uk>, as better indication of relative GDP in light of the currency fluctuations of 2018-2019. U.K. population as at November 2019 stood at 64.6 million.

⁶ United Kingdom employment statistics mirror those experienced in recent years in many OECD countries

⁷ In the three months to February 2020, out of the 172,000 new jobs, 107,000 were full-time.

⁸ When housing costs are accounted for (AHC), an extra 300,000 children are pushed into poverty. (*IBID*, CPAG, 2019)

have been subject fiscal retrenchment.⁹ While overall labour market participation outperformed expectations, with more parents in work in 2018/2019 year-on-year, the opportunity costs of working in flexible employment have been reduced pay¹⁰ and financial security, particularly for women.¹¹ Real regular pay and real total pay registered lower than the downturn peak reached in February-April 2020. The rate of growth, overall, in income had significantly slowed since mid-2019 to the first three months of 2020, but the monthly growth in weekly average earnings rose faster than inflation.¹² Yet, one person in six in the U.K. is in relative low income before housing costs (BHC), rising to more than one in five, after accounting for housing costs (AHC). In-work poverty, is a major and growing problem in this country, outpacing rates in the growth of employment in 2019.¹³

Socio-economic institutions and political institutions possess deep fault lines which are made invisible through the unremitting oversights of centralised planning, and cumbersome bureaucratic systems for the delivery of welfare services.¹⁴ The legacy of a decade of austerity¹⁵ notwithstanding, these failings can be attributed to the informal and *ad hoc* arrangements for delivering on the Equality Act (2010) which can be attributed to: **i)** the position within Government of the Minister for Women and Equalities; and **ii)** the absence of formal accountability and scrutiny to the national budget which would be provided through Gender Responsive Budgeting. These two points are set out as Recommendations.

⁹Office for National Statistics (2019). *Public sector finances, UK: November 2019: How the relationship between UK public sector monthly income and expenditure leads to changes in deficit and debt.* (November).

Office for National Statistics (2019) *Dataset Public sector finances time series.* December.

¹⁰ Pascale Bourquin, Agnes Norris Keiller and Tom Waters (2019). *The distributional impact of personal tax and benefit reforms, 2010 to 2019*, Institute for Fiscal Studies

¹¹ The National Living Wage was set to increase by 6.2% in 2020, roughly averaging to an annual pay rise of up to £930 for a full time worker, to affect nearly 2.8 million people.

See: Government's official announcement, 31 December 2019.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-pay-rise-for-28-million-people>

[Accessed 28 April 2020].

¹² Office for National Statistics (2020). *Average weekly earnings in Great Britain: May 2020*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/averageweeklyearningsingreatbritain/may2020>

[Accessed 20 May 2020]

¹³ This paragraph was submitted as evidence to the Education Committee.

Pimentel de Cetin, E.M. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services: Hunger and learning*

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/202/the-impact-of-covid19-on-education-and-childrens-services/publications/written-evidence/?page=5>

[Accessed 1 July 2020].

¹⁴ Since 2010, attempts to address the UK budget deficit through cuts on social services have in particular affected women who turn to such organisations for support. There has been an estimated loss, across 152 English councils, of GBP 5 billion in government funds, which has had an immediate impact on the voluntary and community sector: domestic violence shelters; health care services; child care and family centres have been shut down or scaled back, as of the 2014 Financial Year. Many of the proposed reforms or legislation seeking to address this imbalance remain in the pipeline.

Perversely, current equalities legislation makes it difficult for specialist women's organisations to make a case for women-only services, as they threaten the legality of the Equality Act, according to public bodies. See Andy Hirst and Sini Rinne: 'The impact of changes in commissioning and funding on women-only services,' Equality and Human Rights Commission Research report 86, 2012. Manchester.

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/rr86_final.pdf> [January 25 2016]

¹⁵Professor Alston on his visit to the U.K. in 2018: the U.K.'s experience of austerity 'underscore[d] the conclusion that poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so'.

Introduction

It may seem the evidence presented here deviates from the narrow focus of the inquiry. It is nevertheless paramount to broaden the scope of the investigation, by taking into account the inter-related phenomena that drive gender-based inequality and socio-economic inequality, in order to avoid presenting these as a zero-sum game between men and women.

The United Kingdom's overall gender parity positioning has steadily fallen by 12 places since 2006 to 21st place (out of 153 countries; or 12th out of 22 Western European and North American countries) in 2020.¹⁶ Institutionalised invisibility entrenches ingrained biases.¹⁷ Bias is the result of the persistent challenges related to the division of labour, long-established on the basis of biological sex and assumptions about the types of work women and men are supposed to engage in, and roles over parenting and caring. Domestic and caring responsibilities remain under-valued, and unremunerated in the national accounts because the activities of social reproduction are not considered economically productive. In times of crises, these misplaced, but entrenched views translate into policies that do not always account for the potential of social programmes to help women and carers in a way that specifically addresses the variability in the experiences of family and household living; paid employment and unpaid work, caring and social provisioning.

Some Key Concepts

Intersectionality: The experience of persons negotiating the new circumstances brought on by the national lockdown and the subsequent economic contraction is both subjective and intersectional.¹⁸ Any form of gendered dynamic in the experience of employment, access to health care, and decision-making intersects with other socio-economic, identity and cultural stratifiers.¹⁹ These qualifiers are further

¹⁶ World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report: WEF tracks the global progression in gender equality. In 2020, the Swiss-based organisation estimated it would take 99.5 years for women and men to be on par, an assessment that is still discouraging despite women taking high-profile leadership roles at the World Bank, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund; and as heads of countries, including Iceland, Finland, Germany, Bangladesh, Switzerland, Norway, Nepal, Estonia, Serbia, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Slovakia, Denmark, Belgium, Bolivia and New Zealand.

See also: Fuhrmans, Vanessa (2020). 'Where are all the Women CEOs' in *Wall Street Journal*, 6 February 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-so-few-ceos-are-women-you-can-have-a-seat-at-the-table-and-not-be-a-player-11581003276> [Accessed 24 June 2020]

¹⁷ The first UNDP Gender Social Norms Index analysed data from 75 countries, collectively accounting for more than 80% of the global population, and found nearly 90% of those interviewed have 'a deeply ingrained bias' against women. United Nations Development Programme (2020). *Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities*. Human Development Perspectives 2020 http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hd_perspectives_gsn.pdf [Accessed 24 January 2020].

¹⁸ Intersectionality driving inequality and poverty is particularly experienced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women, older women, women with disabilities, asylum-seeking and refugee women, and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and intersex persons.

¹⁹ *Being*, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, refers to the lived experience of the body through the senses. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge: London and New York, 2012)

compounded by opportunities: for education, for security and mobility, and for expression – all of which are conditioned by the parameters of the body politic.

Social Provisioning and the Economy: When accounting for the gendered impact upon any given circumstance, existing economic inequalities become pronounced. As a discipline, economics is foremost a social science and a study of human behaviour, the core tenets of which have deviated significantly from the principles espoused in Adam Smith's²⁰ classic political economy. Smith conceptualised a more productive economy based on the division of labour, yet one based on strengthening systems of social provisioning and improving collective welfare. This framework does not entirely align with neoclassical mechanisms of exchange which bear the hallmark of abstract technicalities that shape fiscal and financial policy without due regard for those that bear the brunt of care work and the activities of social reproduction, or who work for less than a fair living wage – pre-pandemic this number totalled 5 million.²¹

Women:²² Persons who are socio-economically excluded contend with discriminatory aspects that prevail despite a fairly robust legislative equality framework. It is not always women who are marginalised, but historically, this demographic group, by virtue of their exclusion from citizenship, political representation and participation, and by the socio-culturally circumscribed division of labour in economic life do face certain challenges.

²⁰ Adam Smith – moral philosopher, prominent figure of the Scottish Enlightenment and founding father of economics – was concerned with: how society is organised by contractual exchange for basic goods and services; and with how is society provisioned. The purpose of this inquiry developed into *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), a tome of classical economics that dwells on the productivity of labour, labour specialisation and free markets. Smith based his theories on long-running debates on economics and the conditions of society during the first stages of the Industrial Revolution. Considered to be a paradigm shift in the field of socio-economic organisation, the book offered a practical application for reforming economic systems away from mercantilism, and dependence upon agricultural production. Smith's two most prominent theories in *Wealth of Nations*, centred on: solidifying the economy as a system, with rules to govern it; and systematising the division of labour. What is less known (or more disputed) is that *Wealth of Nations* is the continuation of Smith's first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), outlining a commitment to a moral evaluation of the interpersonal dynamics of the social body, and chimes with the moral evaluation of the final outcome that each self-interested economic agent aims to achieve, and the ends pursued in that regard that appears in the later work.

Smith, Adam (1759: 1793). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments: An Essay towards an Analysis of the Principles by which Men naturally judge concerning the Conduct and Character, first of their Neighbours, and afterwards of themselves*, (Basil: London). Referring to the Edition of 1790, where Smith writes that 'due to various occupations in which the different accidents' of his life had involved him in, he had until this later day put off revising this work 'with the care and attention which I always intended'. Smith refers to the *Wealth of Nations*, and a 'promise' made to add some general principles of law and government, including 'police, revenue and arms' to this last edition.

²¹ <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/living-wage-foundation-responds-governments-april-2020-rise-national-living-wage> [Accessed 2 July 2020].

²² Feminism is actuated by respect for oneself and for others, despite difference or ability, visible or otherwise, and without any desire to lump all persons who identify as women in an undifferentiated category, or suggesting identity necessarily aligns with the biological body, or with the gendered binary. Not conforming with established binaries, transcending gendered structures and choosing to live in the fullness of the freedom of expression granted to citizens as persons in their own right are forms of *being* included within this discussion.

Evidenced-Based Framework

1. **Political representation.**²³ Women ought to be adequately represented in politics and invested in the decisions that affect their lives. Key decisions during the national lockdown have been made, and communicated to the public, by men. It is not because they are men that this fact is here raised, but because they represent the majority - and the face - of Government, which has not fully considered the gender dimensions of emergency measures to address the pandemic.
 - 1.1. Since 1918, when the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act granted women over the age of 21 the right to stand for election as a Member of Parliament, 552 women have been elected to the House of Commons. After little over 100 years, June 2020 marks the first time women make up approximately a third (34%) of MPs in the House of Commons, with 220 female MPs elected at the 2019 General Election, the highest number to date. Women were first admitted to the House of Lords in 1958. There are currently 218 (27%) of the 793 female Members of the House of Lords.
 - 1.2. 27.3 % of women are in senior ministerial roles (the Cabinet), the lowest it has been since 2014.²⁴
 - 1.3. The coronavirus “war cabinet” is exclusively male, with the Home Secretary leading Government briefings on less than a handful of occasions.

Women’s bounded access to power sharing is evidenced by:

1.4 *the early floundering on abortion services and sexual and reproductive health.*²⁵ On 25 March 2020, the State reneged on a pledge announced two days earlier that would ensure continued early access to medical abortion services during the health crisis and national lockdown. A week later, following widespread concern, the provision of at-home abortion pills was reinstated. The Department of Health and Social Care provided no further explanation, though the liberalisation of the law was taken in consultation with the Royal College of Obstetricians, the Royal College of Midwives and 14 other related agencies.

²³ Uberoi, Elise; Watson, Chris; Kirk-Wade, Esme (2020). Women in Parliament and Government. (House of Commons Library). 25 February 2020.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01250/>
[Accessed 18 June 2020].

U.K. was one of the first 5 countries, alongside Finland (1907), Norway (1911), the United States (1917) and Denmark (1918), Ireland (1918), Netherlands (1918) and Austria (1918) to do so, but progress since has lagged significantly.

²⁴ Uberoi, et al., Ibid.

²⁵ In England, Scotland, and Wales abortion is allowed in certain circumstances specified in the Abortion Act of 1967 (and revised by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1990). Abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland in 2019. In England and Wales abortions that are not covered by the circumstances listed in the 1967 Act are covered by the Offences against the Person Act of 1861. This means abortion is part of criminal law, and therefore, not available on demand.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/contents>
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/section/58>

The law has also failed keep pace with best practice and medical advances. In England, Scotland and Wales women seeking abortion services require a two doctors to sign off on the termination, after first having demonstrated she is at physical or mental health risk as a result of her pregnancy. Women still risk prosecution, and the law is subject to interpretation.

See: British Medical Association (2017). *Decriminalisation of abortion: a discussion paper from the BMA*, February

1.5 a *woeful disregard for the consequences of isolation on victims of domestic abuse*.²⁶ Put in the right context, it is not that more partners have become increasingly violent or coercive during lockdown. It is that women already suffering abuse are being subjected to violence more often, due to isolation. This is an important distinction to make as specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) services and refuges have been, and remain, critically underfunded. It took weeks for Government to address the rising incidence of violence,²⁷ and as of June 2020, the Domestic Abuse Bill was still in the stage of Parliamentary scrutiny. The legislation passed on 7 July 2020, yet is not tied to statutory funding.

1.6 and a *dearth of robust contingencies for at-risk children with regard to food security, and education*.²⁸ 1.3 million children in England receive free school meals –breakfast and/or a hot meal. There have been catastrophic failures in the delivery of vouchers, with schools and food banks having to step in for Government to help families in distress. One in three households experience at least one symptom of food deprivation, defined as eating a hot meal every second day, or going a fortnight without a substantial meal due to lack of money. One in five households regularly run out of food, or do not eat on a regular basis, or sufficiently. One in three households with children has to ration food.²⁹ There is scant Government-led research³⁰ on the consequences of food insecurity to the health and nutrition of low-income children,³¹ specifically on learning and cognitive development.³²

2. **Formal economic participation:** women are three times as likely to work in a sector that ceased to operate during national lockdown. Unemployment rose to 6.2%, from 3.9% in the three-month period to May 2020. Women represented 50% of payroll employment in February 2020. In March 2020, women represented 58.8% of job losses. Nearly 75% of those who work part-time are women, with nearly half of these on a temporary contract, or a zero-hours contract. Women make up 61% of all low paid employees.³³

²⁶ Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales reported the number of women killed by men during national lockdown was the highest recorded in 11 years.

<https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/>

[Accessed 30 June 2020]

²⁷ Human Rights Watch (2020). 'UK Failing Domestic Abuse Victims in Pandemic', 8 June 2020.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/08/uk-failing-domestic-abuse-victims-pandemic>

[Accessed 28 June 2020].

²⁸ In 2018, the National Institute of Health Research commissioned a literature review into the extent and consequences of child food insecurity. However, it is riddled with problems, not least of which is agreeing on the definition of food insecurity.

Aceves-Martins, Magaly., *et al.* (2018) 'Child food insecurity in the UK: a rapid review'. *Public Health Research* Volume: 6, Issue: 13, November.

²⁹ Furey, Sinéad. (2018) *Measuring the existence and extent of food poverty*. Abstract from Irish Academy of Management Conference 2019, Dublin, Ireland.

In the absence of an established indicator of food security, in 2018 Ulster University Business School (UUBS) researchers investigated the reliability and comprehensiveness of three food poverty indicators: EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions; Food Insecurity Experience Scale; and Household Food Security Survey Module. The purpose of the investigation was to contribute to evidence-based policy making for use in Government-endorsed Health Survey or Family Resources Survey for possible interventions aimed at eradicating food poverty and to support national efforts in tackling food insecurity.

³⁰ In July 2016, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) censured the U.K. Government for a lack of systematic data on child food insecurity. The same year, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) rebuked the U.K. for not prioritising a national strategy to address the increasing reliance on food aid.

IBID, Human Rights Watch (2019).

³¹ The Food Foundation supports the Children's Future Food Inquiry and the Children's #Right2Food Campaign, with the support of a cross party group of 14 parliamentarians and two All Party Parliamentary Groups. It also has the support of the Children's Commissioners in all four U.K. nations.

³² Field, Frank (2010). *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children becoming Poor Adults*

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110120090141/http://povertyreview.independent.gov.uk/media/20254/poverty-report.pdf>

[Accessed 22 March 2020].

Field's (Labour MP) work is the result of the UK Government Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances. In it he argues for an expansion of provision for children in their early years.

³³ Pro Bono Economics, (2020) Ibid

- 2.1. Workers in the bottom decile of the earnings distribution – a third of all workers – are seven times more likely to work in a sector that will suffer long-term consequences as a result of redundancies and rollback in activities as a result of ceasing operations during Covid-19. For comparison, roughly 5% of workers in the top decile work in these sectors.³⁴
- 2.2. Sectors include non-food and non-pharmaceutical retail; hospitality, restaurants and hotel; passenger transport and travel; childcare; arts and leisure; beauty, aesthetics and personal care; domestic services and cleaning. Initial estimates on gender representation by sector suggest a more significant effect on women’s earning, since a disproportionate number work in these sectors.³⁵
- 2.3. By May 2020, up to 5.6 million people were at risk of unemployment, and 4.2 million had signed on to Universal Credit.
 - 2.3.1. the number of formal employees on payroll decreased by 600,000³⁶, and the number of claimants for Universal Credit rose by nearly 2 million³⁷ since April 2020, with women accounting for approximately 53% of these claims, or 2.2 million compared with 1.9 million men.³⁸ More than half of women on Universal Credit are not in employment.
 - 2.3.2. For women and other economically vulnerable groups this means a long-term impact on earnings power and ability to save long-term, and a widening of the gender pay gap as a result in hours spent home-schooling and caring for children. A collapse in State childcare support, with subsequent job losses was also reported.³⁹

3. **Social Reproduction and The Economy:** The working week for women, generally, and when compared to 1971,⁴⁰ has gotten longer as the rate of formal employment has also increased.⁴¹ This

³⁴Joyce, Robert and Xu, Xiaowei. (2020). ‘Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?’ *Briefing Note*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 6 April 2020.

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>
[Accessed 18 June 2020].

Nearly 50% of all the jobs at risk are in occupations earning less than £10 per hour. This makes up the bulk of the food retail and accommodation sector.

³⁵ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020), *Ibid*.

³⁶ Office for National Statistics (2020). ‘Labour Market Overview, U.K.’ 16 June 2020. *Ibid*.

³⁷ Office for National Statistics (2020). *Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 4 May 2020*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/14may2020>
[Accessed 19 May 2020].

³⁸ Taking into account job losses by gendered asymmetries in sectors most affected by the national lockdown.

Department for Work and Pensions (2020). Official Statistics: *Universal Credit: 29 April 2013 to 9 April 2020*, 19 May 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-29-april-2013-to-9-april-2020/universal-credit-29-april-2013-to-9-april-2020>

[Accessed 29 June 2020]

³⁹ Vignoles, Anna (2020). *Inequalities in Education and Labour Market Outcomes Under COVID*, University of Cambridge, Covid-19 Research <http://covid.econ.cam.ac.uk>

[Accessed 28 June 2020]

⁴⁰ Since estimates began in 1971, total hours worked by women has generally increased. The Office for National Statistics says this reflects an increase in the employment rate for women, making no mention of hours worked in the home. Total worked by men has been relatively stable.

Office for National Statistics (2020). ‘Labour Market Overview, U.K.’ 16 June 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/june2020>

[Accessed 18 June 2020].

⁴¹ Franklin, Jon; Henehan, Kathleen; Rahman, Fahmida and Whittaker, Matt (2020). *Women’s Work : policy, pay, progress, and the penalties that remain*, Pro Bono Economics, April.

https://www.probonoeconomics.com/sites/default/files/files/Women’s%20Work%20-%20policy%2C%20pay%2C%20progress%20and%20the%20penalties%20that%20remain_0.pdf

[Accessed 28 June 2020].

increase is partly due to the changes to the State Pension age for women, meaning fewer are retiring between 60 and 65, but have more than a third less wealth accumulated than men at this stage. Women are doing the same amount of care and domestic work as they were 40 years ago. It is estimated women are working 30.5 more full-time working days on a yearly basis.⁴²

- 3.1. *Economic inactivity* is the indicator of the percentage of those (aged 16-64) out of work, but not classed as unemployed. Since comparable records began in 1971, the economic inactivity rate has generally followed a downward trend, save for periods of recession. The rate of gradual decline is due to the 'out of work' status attributed to women because since 2008, the economic inactivity rate for men has been relatively flat.⁴³
- 3.2. The percentage differential (as presented in the figures throughout) between men and women may seem small, but these still represent hundreds of thousands of women who have had to revert to traditional roles of prioritising household and parenting duties over formal employment. The U.K.'s economic gender gap has widened significantly since 2006. The country is in 58th position (out of 153), largely due to the wide disparities between men and women's earned income.⁴⁴
- 3.3. During a recession period, usually the gender differential rate of unemployment is more severe for men, because they participate consistently in the labour market. During the Covid-19 period, female unemployment rates have outstripped male unemployment. The reasons cited: difficulties in working from home because of employer inflexibility, and/or the requirements of the sector/industry/occupation; giving up work in order to care for, and home-school children; less available hours to work, now given over to domestic work, and home schooling. Nearly 3% more women than men have lost their jobs during lockdown.⁴⁵
- 3.4. Despite Government funded job protection and income support schemes, many have been left out: the self-employed; part-time workers, and those on zero-hours contracts. More than 60% of self-employed mothers are more likely to work part-time than their employee counterparts (51.8%). Only 10% of self-employed fathers work part-time and there is not a statistically significant change with their employee counterparts.⁴⁶

⁴² Office for National Statistics (2020). Ibid.

⁴³ ONS (June 2020), Ibid.

⁴⁴ The World Economic Forum 2020 Global Gender Gap Report
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>
[Accessed 3 June 2020].

⁴⁵ The Fawcett Society (2020). 'Exiting Lockdown: The Impact on Women'. May 2020.
<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/exiting-lockdown-the-impact-on-women-1>
[Accessed 30 June 2020]

⁴⁶ Approximately 3% of all self-employed people in the U.K. have become continuously self-employed since April 2019, therefore many were not eligible for the government's Self-employment Income Support Scheme.

Office for National Statistics (2020). 'Coronavirus and self-employment in the UK' An overview of self-employment across the UK, looking at the industrial, occupational, geographic and demographic characteristics of those who are self-employed.' 17 April 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandselfemploymentintheuk/2020-04-24>
[Accessed 30 June 2020].

4. Intersectionality, other factors to consider:

4.1. Security: enforced isolation in the home represents, for some women and children, the least safe place to be. Within a few weeks into lockdown, the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales reported the number of women killed by men was the highest recorded in 11 years.

4.2. Race and ethnicity: By June 2020, and where ethnicity is known, Black Asian and other Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) represent 15% of overall deaths in England from coronavirus. Accounting for age, gender and geographic profile, the mortality index, relative to the white population, is more striking for most minority groups than the data suggests, with excess fatalities reaching 3 times over.⁴⁷

4.2.1. The cause of coronavirus-related deaths on ethnic minorities is inconclusive. An independent review found no genetic pre-disposition to the virus.⁴⁸ Accounting for the incidences of comorbidities amongst particular groups, it can be inferred inequalities in health are exacerbated by the material and psychological instances of racism.

4.2.2. In other words, disproportionate deaths by Covid-19 amongst racial and ethnic groups are not explained uniquely by biomedical factors but represent well-worn issues of political economy.

4.3. Ability: The mortality rate for those 'limited a lot' who were female, compared to those that were not was 2.4 times higher, and for men, 1.9 times higher.⁴⁹

The shift in women's formal economic participation – which stood at 72.7% before the national lockdown⁵⁰ – suggests that women have been able to take up more roles as conditions have enabled them

⁴⁷ Based on 23,351 deaths recorded in NHS England hospitals, with 40% of BAME deaths recorded in London, the highest concentration of BAME communities.

For further information, refer to: Platt, Lucinda and Warwick, Ross (2020). 'Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to Covid-19 than others?' Institute for Fiscal Studies and Nuffield Foundation, May 2020.

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/chapter/are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-covid-19-than-others/>
[Accessed 26 June 2020].

⁴⁸ Public Health England (2020). 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19'. June.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891116/disparities_review.pdf
[Accessed 10 June 2020]

'It confirms that the impact of COVID-19 has replicated existing health inequalities and, in some cases, has increased them.'

Office of National Statistics (2020). 'Coronavirus-related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales methodology'. 7 May 2020

⁴⁹ Office for National Statistics (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England and Wales: 2 March to 15 May 2020*, 19 June 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/2marchto15may2020>
[Accessed 26 June 2020].

Adjusting for differences according to region, population density, socio-demographic and household situations. "limited a lot" as defined by the 2011 census. For deaths registered by 29 May 2020 for the period between 2 March and 15 May 2020. Disability status is not recorded on the death certificate, so this information is extrapolated through record linkage of death registrations, in accordance with the 2011 Census along and other socio-demographic factors.

⁵⁰ ONS, Labour Force statistics (June 2020), Ibid.

to do so. However, over a third of women who take up employment, work part-time, and these hours are circumscribed by care duties and work within the home. Part-time employment, largely characterised by hourly wage contracts, or flexible working, also implies work that is insecure in the long-time, lower wages, and limited opportunities for job progression.⁵¹ As care and the activities of social reproduction are unpaid, women do not acquire sufficient economic independence, or the resources required, to take up political work.⁵² Coronavirus is referred to as an equaliser, with politicians and pundits claiming ‘we’ were all in this together. Like most diseases, natural and man-made disasters, and conflict, Covid-19 is not blind to gender, race, and wealth. The pandemic has magnified the less than egalitarian gendered and racial dynamics already in place. Low-skilled workers were not always considered essential, and yet have taken on roles with the least economic protections. This sector is overly represented by those in minority racial and ethnic groups, the young, older workers, and women. Overall, and as we enter into a tentative period of post-pandemic deliberation, it is important to link the demonstrable gender gaps to: labour market participation; remuneration; entrepreneurship and representation in management; and health and education outcomes to conventional expectations on the roles men and women take up.

I. *How has the economic impact of Coronavirus affected men and women differently?*

Historical and methodological frameworks on the value of work and productivity are gender-weighted:

Economic frameworks make certain assumptions about the behaviour of rational actors driven by utility maximising self-interest. These assumptions are made in the abstract so that models run as efficiently as possible, with little information. Neoclassical Utilitarianism does not take into account individual preferences for two primary reasons: perfect information is hard to come by; and trust that economic systems, like the market, will self-regulate to the point of equilibrium. This is the trade-off to practical equality, where the price of achieving blanket equality for all is offset by the practical implications of implementing policies that would make everyone in society better off at no one’s expense. The 2008 financial crisis – the most recent comparable event to the present economic fallout– has perhaps put paid to the assumption that reason and balance are sufficient to counter self-interest.

The WEF 2020 Global Gender Gap Report reveals that **taking time out of formal work – or working part-time** – often to perform caring duties, has measurable impacts on pay and progression in the labour market, and the most significant driver of the gender pay gap.

⁵¹ Fawcett Society (2020), Ibid.

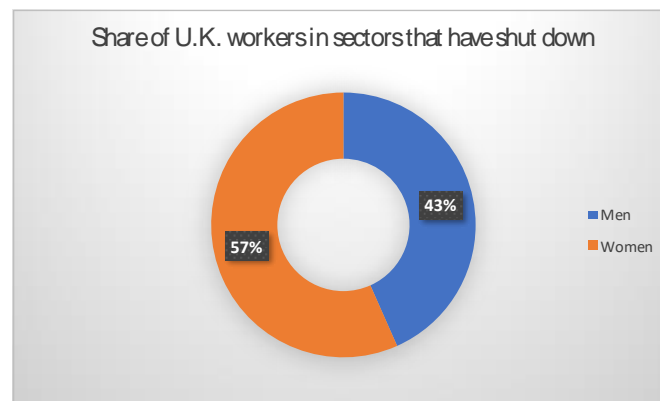
⁵² British Council (2018). Women, Power and Politics: What’s Changed in 100 Years?

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/research-reports/women-power-politics-100>

[Accessed 18 June 2020].

- i Despite high labour force participation 37% of women workers are employed part-time, compared with 11.5% of men, with twice as many women than men taking on unpaid work in the home per day.
- ii Of those who are economically active and engage in caring activities, around 90% are women.
- iii 86% of the 2.9 million single-parent households, were headed by women.⁵³

Division of Labour: Gendered employment practices reveal how the disruption of certain sectors can affect women and men because of the stratification of the division of labour based on sex, and on cultural expectations on the types of work men and women ‘do’. Nearly 57% of women in formal employment are affected by the economic disruptions attributed to the pandemic.



Data from Office for National Statistics of Centre for Time Use Research, for the period March to May 2020

Nevertheless, it is critical to understand that the types of employment in sectors such as beauty and personal care, domestic services, cleaning and childcare reflect the feminised segmentation of the economy, away from frontier frontline of the STEM and AI fields which represent the future of work. Professional and technical workers in the U.K. make up 49.8% of the workforce. The country lags behind similar sized political economies in this area. The country is ranked 76th on the wage equality index (for similar work) and 102nd place for estimated earned income.⁵⁴

⁵³ Office for National Statistics (2019) *Labour Market Statistics :Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK*. May
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/may2019>

[Accessed 25 April 2020]

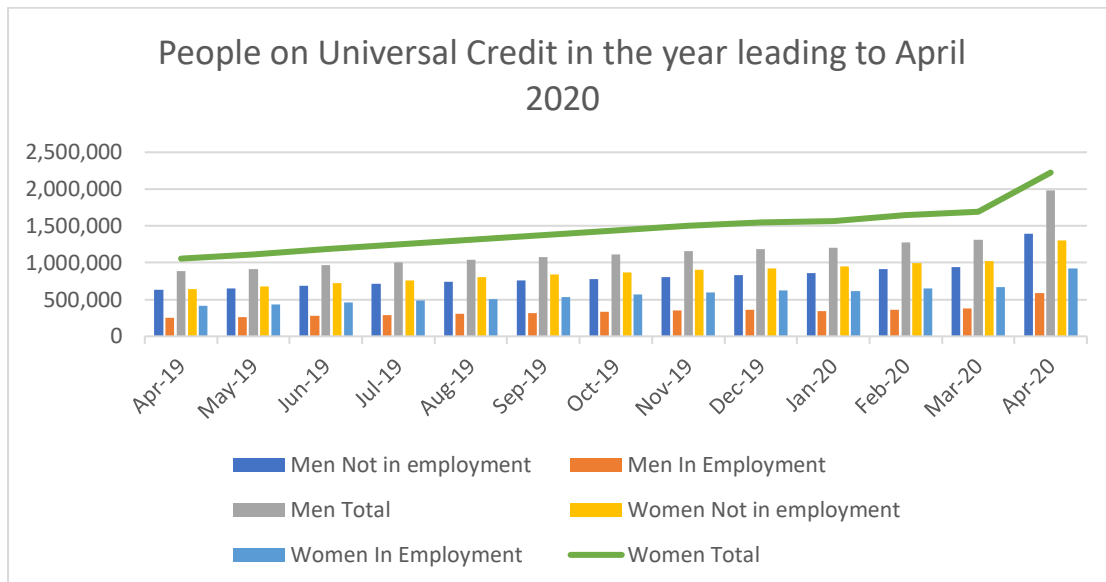
This statistic is important for welfare programming.

⁵⁴ WEF 2020, Ibid.



Data from Office for National Statistics of Centre for Time Use Research, for the period March to May 2020

The Benefits System: There has been a 55% increase, year-on-year to April 2020 of women in employment and on Universal Credit. While the conditionality imposed upon single parents to look for work once the child is three years of age has been removed in the Covid-19 period, this is a temporary stopgap against a looming problem post-lockdown, particularly when the status on state-funded childcare services was already on the knife’s edge at end of 2019. Approximately 90% of single parents have dependents. Men make up 39% of all persons on Universal Credit who are in employment, compared with 61% of women.⁵⁵



⁵⁵ Statistics generated from the Department for Work and Pensions Stat-Xplore database.

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>

[Accessed 30 June 2020].

Under the conditionalities of Universal Credit, the lead carer must look for work (for maximum of 16 hours a week. When the child turns five, this rises to a maximum of 25 hours a week, and from the age of 13 years old it rises to 35hours a week.

The experience of poverty, therefore, can be more acute for lone parents because they must handle the logistics of childrearing and work. The type of work that could accommodate this scenario is part-time, or informal work, which by its very nature, is precarious and transient. *In-work conditionality* assumes people have choices: in working more hours; in job opportunities; for employment security; or in earning higher wages. Situations where claimants who lose out on benefits if they are judged to be earning less than they could, or are seen to be making less than a ‘reasonable effort’ to work, are one of the most intractable paradoxes of UC.⁵⁶

Criteria for interventions that address these existing biases ought to examine the socio-institutional foundations that fuel bias in the first place. Empowerment and gender equality remain normative terms if they are not accompanied by an inclusive understanding of how the world is negotiated through intersectional discriminatory structures that persist despite a relatively robust equality framework that performs better in the non-concrete, non-representational proviso for State mandated egalitarianism. Quite simply, these frameworks have not safeguarded gender equality.⁵⁷

Social Reproduction: The rational economic actor is presumed to have no sex, sexual identity, gender, ethnicity, age, difficulties arising with ability, level of education or access to a living wage. No particular socio-historical or geographical context seems to influence upon his or her behaviour. As a result of this assembled neutrality, the differences between men and women are left largely unrecognised in policy prescriptions.

Consider how labour, as a factor of production is still accounted for, despite research that quantifies the value of care in the United Kingdom at £411 billion.⁵⁸

- Labour is the work done by those people who contribute to the production process. The population who are available to do work is called the labour force.
- There’s usually also a number of people who are capable of working and who are old enough to work but who don’t have a job. Economists refer to these people as unemployed.

⁵⁶ For further information see:

Wright S, Dwyer P, Jones K, Mcneill J, Scullion L, Stewart (2018). ‘Welfare conditionality, sanctions, support, and behaviour change’. Final findings: Universal Credit’, *Economic and Social Research Council*
Fletcher, D. R. and Wright, S. (2020) ‘Special Issue: International perspectives on the theories and practices of welfare conditionality’, in *Social Policy & Administration*, 54(2): 185-326.

⁵⁷ United Nations Population Fund (2020). *COVID-19: A Gender Lens: Protection Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality*, March.

https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_A_Gender_Lens_Guidance_Note.pdf

[Accessed 26 June 2020].

UNFPA is the sexual and reproductive health agency for the United Nations.

⁵⁸ The estimated value of unpaid care to the economy. Office for National Statistics (2018) *Household Satellite Account, UK: 2015-2016*

- There are also people who aren't in paid employment but still provide things people need or want, e.g., homemakers.
- Different people have different levels of education, experience or training. *These factors can make some people more valuable or productive in the workplace than others – they have a greater amount of human capital.*

This verbatim text describes current definition for productive labour.⁵⁹ Despite decades of activism by feminist economists, it reveals the bases for blinkered policy frameworks that bear little resemblance to the difficulties faced by carers and essential workers. *Contra* theory, this methodological blindness renders the collective contribution that goes into social reproduction as immaterial, and significantly diminishes the value of women in society. Carers save the economy £132 billion per year, and number 6.5 million who look after the elderly, disabled persons or those who are ill. Nearly 3.4 million carers in the U.K. are women (58%). Women are more likely to provide round the clock care, and to be 'sandwich' carers – supporting the elderly, and raising children. Women between the ages of 40-60 years of age are more than twice as likely as men to have given up paid employment to provide support to others, but like men, are likely to be in an elementary (or low skill) occupation.⁶⁰

II. *To what extent do the different impacts on men and women reflect existing sex or gender-based inequalities?*

To the extent existing inequalities are gendered, the answers are complex, yet directly attributable to the long-standing problems of the visibility and participation of women in our political economies. The steady decline across all basic gender parity indicators, according to WEF's evaluation of 153 countries, is testament to this fact.

⁵⁹ Text from D. Broadbent et al., (eds.) (2015) *A-Level Economics*, (Elanders, Newcastle-upon-Tyne), italics author's own. The same opinions appear in Rinaldi, Gustavo (2019) *Economics for Policy Makers* (Routledge: London and New York).

⁶⁰ Statistics from Carers UK. The organisation estimates the value of unpaid care done by women to value £77 billion a year. Carers UK (2016) 10 facts about women and caring on International Women's Day - based on analysis from Valuing Carers 2015 <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/press-releases/facts-and-figures> [Accessed 1 July 2020]

	<u>2006 rankings</u>	<u>2006 score</u>	<u>2020 rankings</u>	<u>2020 score</u>
Global Gender Gap Index	9	0.736	21	0.767
Economic participation and opportunity	37	0.664	58	0.704
Educational attainment	1	1.000	38	0.999
Health and survival	63	0.974	112	0.970
Political empowerment	12	0.307	20	0.396

- i. **Political participation and representation.** The General Election of 2019 saw the highest number of women elected to Parliament to date, yet the gap in political empowerment remains wide :21st position (out of 153 countries) in 2020, after a drop of 12 places since 2006, according to the World Economic Forum.
- ii. **Participation in the labour market,** where the economic slowdown has been widespread but disproportionately felt across a handful of sectors, and by women, the young, and the less educated.

In addition:

Lack of Data: Calls for improvements in sex-disaggregated data on equality indicators underscore the concerns and recommendations issued repeatedly since 2008. The latest U.K.’s Shadow CEDAW report (2018)⁶¹ voices the concern of hundreds of U.K. independent and Government agencies, and civil society groups working in the area of economic, and socio-political reform for women. The lack of transparency and of systematic collection of indicators to monitor women’s equality implies exclusion. No data means no voice, and hence no problems to report, and no accountability demanded upon the agencies that are meant to promote substantive equality. Reliable indicators that speak to the concrete experience of poverty or of discrimination, and that can be analysed and related to other indicators represent the foundation of sound public policy.

Lack of Visibility: The work carried out by the hundreds of organisations, and the thousands of individuals working towards gender equality is heeded to the point where only the minimum indicators for practical equality are met. The CEDAW report continues to call for bringing into force the provision of the

⁶¹ Also known as the International Bill of Rights for Women, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (1979:1981). The U.K Shadow report is the result of consultations with women’s and human rights organisations across the four nations, providing an accurate account of the status of women in the U.K. The report is submitted to the CEDAW monitoring body as evidence in their examination of Government’s deliverables to commitments made to women’s equality.

CEDAW (2019) ‘Concluding observations on the eight periodic report of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’ (8 March 2019)

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-annotated-concluding-observations-formatted.pdf>

[Accessed 24 June 2020].

Equality Act (2010) relating to equality duty on socio-economic inequality and the effects of combined discrimination. The consequences of 10 years of austerity continue to affect women, in distinct ways and relative to the ability and opportunity to generate income, and access in support of the activities of social reproduction. The CEDAW Committee notes ‘with concern’ that fiscal retrenchment has placed an additional burden on primary caregivers.

i. Political Representation

The year 2018 marked the centenary of the Representation of the People Act.⁶² In the scope of our organised systems of government, women have only been enfranchised these last 100 years. This legacy means it is appropriate to reflect on this question about sex- and gender-based inequalities within the context of how representation and political power continue to be shared between women and men.⁶³

Social and political leadership, and participation, particularly at the local level, are indispensable elements in improving the visibility and involvement of women in power and politics. Nevertheless, women continue to be under-represented in Parliament, the devolved administrations, and in local councils.⁶⁴

- ⇒ **Political under-representation is not occasioned by choice:** Low representation in politics is assumed to be a ‘problem of supply’. Women choose not to run and this scenario is addressed by ‘qualifying’ the candidate through ‘soft’ equality measures which include training, or financial assistance schemes. In the U.K. (and no doubt in other countries with comparative, or lower, statistics on power-sharing), the issue is one of demand:⁶⁵ years of party service, personal resources and job experience are required to enter politics.
- ⇒ **Insidious gendered asymmetries** within party rules and systems on the basis of perceived gender roles within society, and the division of labour, and documented incidences and accounts of discrimination
 - There are 6 women in cabinet posts⁶⁶, or 27% of the 22 full cabinet posts. One of these is held by a woman and is unpaid. There are 39 Government Ministers and Whips, which is exactly a third of the total in Government.
 - Female MPs and candidates have reported instances of sexual harassment, physical assault, verbal abuse and death threats.⁶⁷

⁶² The Representation of the People Act of 1918 granted the vote to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification. The same Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21.

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/birmingham-and-the-equal-franchise/1918-representation-of-the-people-act/>
[Accessed 21 June 2020].

⁶³ British Council (2018), *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ In England the rate of women’s representation hovers at around 30% across local and national government. Local government participation stands around 25% in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The devolved national legislatures witness higher participation rates than in England: 36% Scottish Parliament; 42% National Assembly for Wales; 30% Northern Ireland Assembly.

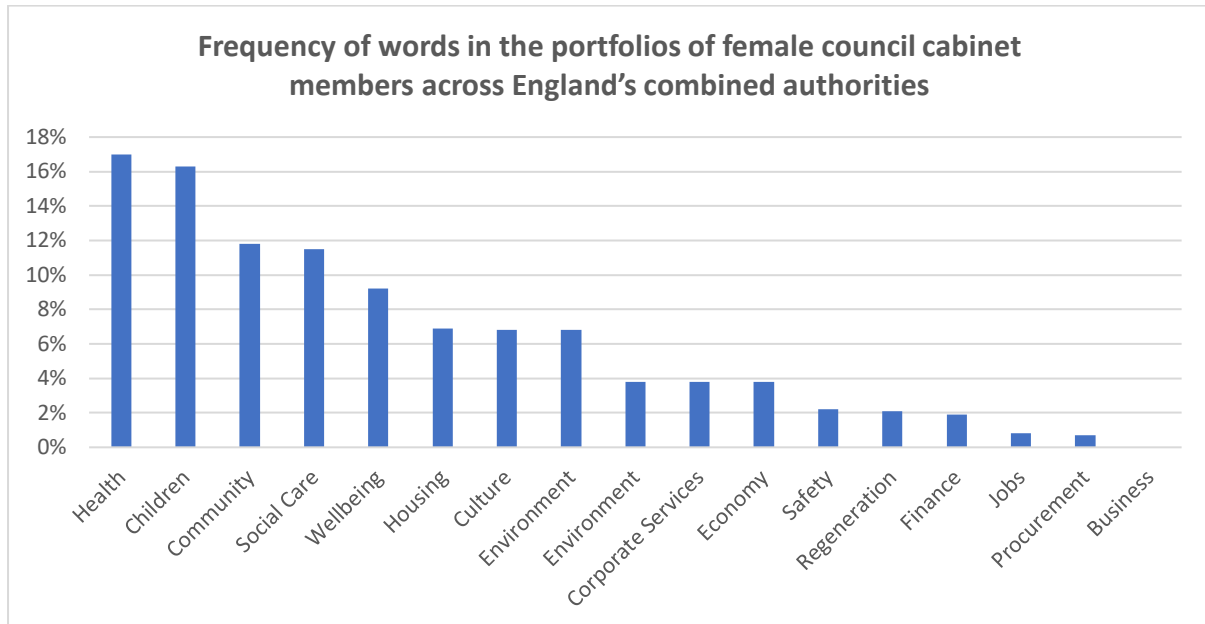
⁶⁵ British Council (2018). *Women, Power and Politics: What’s Changed in 100 Years?*

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/research-reports/women-power-politics-100>
[Accessed 18 June 2020].

⁶⁶ One of these is unpaid, and currently held by a woman (as of February 2020).

⁶⁷ British Council (2018). *Women, Power and Politics: What’s Changed in 100 Years?*

A mature political system – from policy proposals and legislation, to post-implementation scrutiny and debate – should not be resistant to gender analyses. And gender analyses cannot be solely confined to ‘feminised’ areas of concern – such as children and health.⁶⁸



Political party ideologies reflect conventional socio-cultural frameworks that circumscribe areas of concern for women, in that they replicate these as ‘women’ problems, as opposed to socio-political ones. The table above shows areas of work local councillors engage in, with finance and jobs low on their agenda. Gender-based violence; sexual and reproductive health and rights; women and work; and social care - none of these briefs can be considered separate from economic security.

III. How have Government measures affected economic inequalities for men and women?

Before the onset of measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the economy, after the 2008 financial crisis, was beginning to stabilise. Social recovery, however, has lagged, due in no small part to the fiscal consolidation measures which began in 2010, that oversaw widespread retrenchment in social care and welfare provision.⁶⁹

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/research-reports/women-power-politics-100>

[Accessed 18 June 2020].

⁶⁸ British Council IBID, p. 43

⁶⁹ Hastings, Annette; Bailey, Nick; Bramley, *et al.* (2015). ‘The Cost of the Cuts: The Impact on Local Government and Poorer Communities’, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/Summary-Final.pdf>

[Accessed 22 May 2020]

Through poor provision of childcare services: At the end of 2019, almost 15% of families in the United Kingdom were lone parent families, 86% of these of these 2.9 million households, were headed by women, an increase of 13.4% since 1999. Over the past 10 years, the number of lone-parent fathers has increased by 22%.⁷⁰ Approximately 47% of children in lone parent families live in persistent low income

.⁷¹

At the end of 2019 there was a £662 million gap in Government underfunding of childcare⁷² for early years education – and many working mothers, already up against a pay gap or zero-hour contracts, lived with the uncertainty of whether their childcare facility was slated to close its doors as many already operate on hollowed-out local authority budgets. Their plight is not unique. Half of childcare workers (98% of whom are women) earn poverty wages - over 70% of whom are themselves working mothers.⁷³

Through a dearth of reliable social safety nets: As of May 2020, 2.3 million women were on Universal Credit, compared with nearly 2 million men, 70% of whom were not in employment. Compare this figure with the 59% of women on UC but were also not working.⁷⁴ This is an interesting statistic, that correlates with the data generally. Certain socio-economic groups of both men and women have been hard hit by the economic fallout. There have been accounts of mental health distress related to unemployment, increased debt, rent arrears and evictions. Therefore, utilising purely economic data, growth differentials or labour market statistics to paint a picture of before and after the pandemic, would be entirely misleading.⁷⁵

In 2019, £850 billion was allocated to public services, social security payments and capital investments. Yet, this level of investment runs counterfactual to the realities that see low-income households budgeting ‘pennies’ and earmarking irregular income streams to offset the cost of living. Despite strong pre-

⁷⁰Over the last 10 years, there has been an increase of 14.5%.

Office for National Statistics (2019) Statistical Bulletin: *Families and households in the UK: 2019*, 15 November 2019

⁷¹ Statistics from: Child Poverty Action Group (2019)

<https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures> [Accessed 16 May 2020]

⁷² Parton, Dan (2019). *DfE bids to plug SEND funding gap in spending round*, Children and Young People Now

<https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/dfе-bids-to-plug-send-funding-gap-in-spending-round>

[Accessed 20 May 2020].

⁷³ Francis-Devine, Brigid; McGuinness, Feargal; Booth, Lorna (2019). *Poverty in the UK: statistics* (House of Commons: London). September.

⁷⁴ Statistics generated from the Department for Work and Pensions Stat-Xplore database.

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>

[Accessed 30 June 2020].

⁷⁵ The devastating consequences of austerity were laid bare in a 2019 report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Poverty. It says poverty in the UK is the result of ideological and political choices. The social safety nets have been ‘deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos’, Philip Alston UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty, May 2019

Human Rights Council Forty-first session

24 June–12 July 2019 Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, April 2019 [<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>]

pandemic economic growth variables. The year 2020 marks the first decade, since record-keeping began in which absolute poverty in the U.K. has risen.⁷⁶

Particular to the national response to Covid-19, however, there are gender-specific problems that are known to result from gaps in the provision, and delivery of benefit transfers. This period of socio-economic instability was already peppered by: high unemployment and low wages;⁷⁷ the mushrooming Government fiscal deficit;⁷⁸ and fractious political divergence on delivering welfare programming.

- i) **UC Payments made to an individual within the household:** Households vary. What can be determined with near-certitude and based on the evidence provided throughout the pandemic by various sources, is that poverty and isolation increases women's vulnerability to financial coercion, and money may not be shared equally amongst all members, including children.
- ii) **Conditionalities:** As a conditional benefit designed to incentivise people to work – temporarily suspended during the pandemic – the main payee must demonstrate he or she is completed all work-search related tasks. For single-parent households trying to manage childcare duties at the same time there have been roll-backs in the provision of early years education and nursery spaces, this poses an additional challenge.
- iii) **Needs and Coping Mechanisms: Sex Work.** Survival sex, as a means to meet basic survival needs, including money, food and shelter – and as a result of the complexities of applying for UC and the bureaucratic mismanagement of delayed payments – is a reality in this country.⁷⁹

IV. What measures should the Government put in place to ensure gender equality in the longer-term economic recovery from Coronavirus, with specific reference to any upcoming financial announcements?

⁷⁶ Office for National Statistics (2020). *Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 4 May 2020*
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/14may2020>
[Accessed 19 May 2020].

⁷⁷ Despite better than expected pre-pandemic employment figures (March 2020), the U.K. has an entrenched demographic of 6 million low-paid workers.

⁷⁸ March 2020: the estimated employment rate for all people was at a record high of 76.6%; this is 0.6 percentage points up on the year and 0.2 percentage points up on the quarter. By April 2020 the unemployment rate rose by 856,000 to 2.1 million.

Office of National Statistics, (2020). *Employment in the UK: May 2020*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/may2020>

[Accessed 22 May 2020]

⁷⁹ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2019). **Universal Credit and “survival sex”**, 25 October 2019.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmworpen/83/83.pdf>
[Accessed 2 July 2020].

In order to make progress towards a gender-equal society, and alongside a longer-term post-pandemic recovery, Government ought to **i)** establish a full-time role for the Minister for Women and Equalities, with a permanent post in Cabinet, statutory budget and specific mandates which have egalitarianism and fairness at its core; and **ii)** formally institute and mainstream Gender Responsive Budgets.

Recommendations: A Feminist Economics Perspective

The recommendations set out here are expressed broadly, but they are practicable and achievable, within the short-term, as much work in this area has been put in place.⁸⁰

On purely objective (and gender-neutral) empirical data, analyses by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the House of Commons Library, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the ONS and the DWP consistently show the cumulative effects of fiscal retrenchment on social security, and income distribution. What is missing is sustainably resourced critical evaluation on the realities underlying the numbers. Data is not a single time-frame snapshot of the situation as it *is*, but as it has developed over time, and despite equality legislation. Taxation is a good illustration. Women work longer hours, inside and outside the home yet pay little or no taxes, not because the personal allowance is generous, but because they do not earn enough.

As with the legal and juridical institutions, tax policy is based on principles of equity⁸¹ which encompass notions of formal equality that are ultimately unrealisable, from a gender policy perspective, if care work is rendered economically unproductive.⁸² The U.K. tax system is not explicitly gender biased – it does attempt to treat like groups alike while adjusting for differential levels of income through progressive taxation.⁸³ The gender dimension comes in with the understanding that citizens that do not have the ability to formally contribute to budgetary processes face exclusion.

⁸⁰ For more information on Gender Responsive Budgets from a comparative perspective, see: Downes, Ronnie; von Trapp, Lisa; Nicol, Scherie (2017). **Gender budgeting in OECD countries.** (Public Governance and Territorial Directorate: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development)
Based on: *2016 OECD Survey of Gender Budgeting Practices*

⁸¹ The issue of tax equity – horizontal and vertical – exceeds the scope of this paper but form the contextual understanding of what tax systems attempt to achieve. The problem is, given the variability and the scale of human experience and needs, comparing individuals or even household would not yield sameness across the board. Wealth is variable: households may be made up of one person holding down two jobs at less than a living wage; or a family of 10 with 2 dual-earners on whom children and ageing parents depend. Corporate tax can refer to profits of 'big' business, but likely too, of medium-sized enterprises, or of small businesses or entrepreneurial concerns who may enjoy a high level of tax breaks but be unprofitable.

For more information, and additional reading see: Caren Grown and Imraan Valodia (eds.) (2010). *Taxation and Gender Equity A comparative analysis of direct and indirect taxes in developing and developed countries* (Routledge: London and New York)

⁸² Pimentel de Cetin, EM (2020). 'Considerations on Tax Policy Reform', U.K. Women's Budget Group's Commission on a Gender Equal Economy

<https://wbg.org.uk/commission/calls-for-evidence/call-for-evidence-social-security/>
[Accessed 20 June 2020].

⁸³ Exemptions, deductions as a result of formal employment carry implicit biases for many tax systems the world over. Why? Because primary carers, generally women, do not participate in the formal market continuously, rather working life is split between work inside and outside the home. In combination with other legislation, such that carry barriers to access for financial instruments, for example, sets up a financial and fiscal regime replete with both explicit and implicit biases in taxation.

Feminism is seen as an oppositional movement when in fact, its idealistic tendencies are wide in reach and scope for all persons. Feminism challenges the universality of certain values, such as equality, without being opposed to the utopian reach of truth and objectivity. Feminism demands only that these be understood as partial views of the world: disciplinary tools for the maintenance of the status quo, subject to bias and self-interest. As such, feminism represents a compelling mechanism for exerting public pressure and holding legislators to account. Feminist economics challenges a discipline that will not productively account for care, through combined budget analysis and advocacy to do more than is being done to address poverty and inequality. Covid-19, as disruptive and all-consuming as it has been, is not the cause of these phenomena, it has simply made the gaps more visible, and widened them on all accounts.

The period of national lockdown and socio-economic flux is bounded by: high unemployment and low wages; burgeoning Government debt; collapse of firms and fractious political divergence on delivering social, education and work programming. These factors cannot be disassociated from the subsequent period of mobilisation around racial and identity politics, which necessarily touches on gender and other intersectional dynamics. These events pivot around one another as people strive to be heard and take up a meaningful and substantive place within the rights framework.

Gender Responsive Budgets

‘The budget reflects the values of a country – who it values, whose work it values, and who it rewards...and who and what and whose work it doesn’t.’ (Govender in Budlender, 1996: 7⁸⁴)

Gender asymmetries in labour market, occupation clusters, and lower pay as the standard in sectors where women work in the majority, demonstrate that the mechanisms to address gender bias are not enmeshed within the budgetary process. Without the substantive materiality to back a stated interest to further equality, gender cannot be a key aspect of public financing, policy development and resource allocation. Feminist economics advocates for a rigorous process of gender budget analysis. This work is not sporadic. It reflects the knowledge and cooperative spirit to work to immediate, medium-term and sustainable

⁸⁴ Budlender et al (2002) Gender Budgets Make More Cents Country Studies and Good Practice. UK, Commonwealth Secretariat. <http://www.gender-budgets.org/uploads/user-5/10999500721GBMMC.pdf>

interventions that prioritise collective welfare. For this reason, feminist economics is not economics for women. The characterisation in itself perversely ‘feminises’ the macroeconomic policy commitments and acts as a stumbling block to consistency, funding and delivering on economic goals and welfare policy.

Gender budgets are not formally instituted in the U.K., though women’s groups and economists across the four nations have conceptualised own strategies for delivering on this important work. Gender budgets do not imply drawing up separate budgets for men and women. Gender budgets align equality with public financial management and resource allocation. The process is about participatory engagement through awareness, and sensitivity to the notion that people rarely conform to a status quo. Fiscal policies that integrate awareness into the framework – budget preparation, execution, accounting and reporting, control and audit – do not require a new approach, rather explicit recognition of the glaring disparities in income distribution.

How do gender budgets contribute to a gender-equal and a more productive economy? Investments in human capital, education, health, infrastructure and safe living spaces ought not to be seen as burdens on the public purse. Investments generate benefits in terms of collective health and social welfare, trust in Government through an engaged citizenry, a more balanced and heterogeneous economic system, and openness to creating capabilities through innovation. The biggest driver of poverty is not a lack of material possessions.⁸⁵ It is the inability to cultivate human capital and strengthen systems of social provisioning and social cohesion which develop the resilience of societies to cope in times of stress.⁸⁶ Lack of inclusive economic participation, limited scopes for livelihoods, job insecurity and low wages result in poverty. Consider other intangible goods which may help lift an individual out of poverty: education, and access to health, care and information all enable resilience with which to weather periods of economic volatility, market failures and political uncertainty. From this perspective, the current budget cycle represents a normative element of policy reform, and not yet an effective apparatus for social welfare reform or economic justice.

Minister for Women and Equalities⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Greenhill, R., Carter, P., Hoy, C., & Manuel, M. (2015). *Financing the future: How international public finance should fund a global social compact to eradicate poverty*. (London: ODI).

⁸⁶ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2019). *Good Economics for Hard Times: Better Answers to our Biggest Problems* (London: Allen Lane)

⁸⁷ Since 1997, the policy brief for women and equalities issues has been shuffled through eight different government departments. The rate of change in ministers (based in other departments) within the last three years is disruptive, unsustainable and confusing. <https://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/minister-for-women-and-equalities--3> [Accessed 2 July 2020].

While discrimination is not solely experienced by women, it is gendered. Discrimination can be found in all socio-cultural, political and economic institutions. While progress has been made, the way women leaders are perceived and treated, has evolved at a slower pace. The Minister for Women and Equalities (since 1997) sits in the Cabinet, but she (generally, and at an alarming turnover rate) takes on this *brief* jointly with other parliamentary duties. Sitting in Cabinet (by virtue of another office) has thus far provided little evidence of political clout, or influence.⁸⁸ The part-time role of the Minister diminishes the brief on gender equality and reduces the capacity for implementing robust legislation on the very issues the legislation seeks to address by giving the impression the office exists as an afterthought to other policy matters. A fully-fledged Government machinery would contribute to the variability and sustainability of efforts to address discrimination.

Establishing a full-time Minister for Women and Equalities who oversees a departmental budget and a discrete mandate would invest our leaders with the visibility and the legitimacy to carry forward the work on a gender equal society. A robust national women's machinery would help enforce the basic elements of the 2010 Equality Act, such as the public sector equality duty; concretise the work of the Women and Equalities Select Committee; institutionalise gender responsive budgeting, which are the gateway to resource allocation and income redistribution and raise the standard of public policy formulation and delivery.

⁸⁸ Thorne, Magdalena E. (2005). *Women in Society: Achievements, Risks, and Challenges* (Nova Science Publishers: New York), p. 9