



# Disproportionate disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality

May 2020

## 1. About this briefing

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a rapid, and unprecedented shift in the economic landscape in Scotland. The Scottish Government estimates that during the current lockdown, output in the Scottish economy could fall by 33%.<sup>1</sup> While analyses as to how this economic contraction will impact the labour market remain somewhat speculative, it is clear that there will be stark implications for unemployment, underemployment and in-work poverty. One of the early implications has been to further highlight women's labour market inequality. Despite this, to date there has been little focus on the impacts of the expected "jobs recession" on women's employment.

This briefing uses evidence on women's labour market participation, and analysis of the anticipated economic impacts of the current crisis to outline the impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality. It also underscores the importance of gathering and using gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data, and ensuring gender analysis informs labour market policymaking. The main conclusion is that women will experience disproportionate labour market disruption. Overall, COVID-19 is likely to impact women's labour market participation in a number of significant ways:

- Job disruption will disproportionately impact women because men and women tend to do different types of work.
- Women in low-paid jobs will be particularly affected by job disruption, placing them at greater risk of poverty.
- Women are disproportionately affected by the need for more unpaid care, impacting their ability to do paid work.
- Women are less likely to do a job that can be done from home during periods of social distancing, creating increased risk to their job retention and financial security.
- Women, particularly BME women, young women and women on zero-hour contracts, are more likely to work in a sector that has been shut down.
- The predicted "jobs recession" will bring increased unemployment, with women more likely to lose their job than men.
- The rise in underemployment will disproportionately affect women.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy*

## 2. The context: Women's labour market inequality

Measures to contain COVID-19 will have far-reaching impacts on Scotland's labour market that are likely to last at least several years. Women, particularly those in lower paid jobs, will be disproportionately impacted by emerging labour market challenges because of their pre-existing inequality in the labour market. The gender pay gap, the key indicator of women's labour market equality, represents the divergent experiences men and women have not only in employment but also in education, training, care and other domestic labour. It is a persistent feature of Scotland's labour market, remaining stubbornly high at 13%.<sup>2</sup>

Women comprise the majority of low-paid workers, and work that is seen as "women's work", such as care, cleaning and retail, is systematically undervalued in the labour market.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the key worker jobs identified by the Scottish and UK Governments are undervalued female-dominated occupations including nurses, carers, early learning and childcare workers and supermarket workers.<sup>4</sup> Many of these key worker jobs, such as those in adult social care, childcare and retail, are characterised by low pay, and poor terms and conditions. The undervaluation of "women's work" results in the low pay associated with those jobs and sectors and has lifelong impacts for women such as having less access to resources and assets, including occupational pensions, and a higher risk of in-work poverty. Women are more likely than men to have caring responsibilities and therefore face the additional pressure of finding work that allows them to balance earning with caring. As a result, women are further concentrated into low-paid and often insecure work, as most part-time work is found in the lowest paid occupations and sectors.

## 3. Job disruption will disproportionately affect women because of occupational segregation

Scottish Government analysis concludes that over half of sectors in the Scottish economy are considered at high risk of job disruption.<sup>5</sup> This is where:

- businesses have closed due to social distancing guidance;
- higher absence rates have been reported due to COVID-19;
- there are higher rates of people with caring responsibilities; and
- existing labour supply shortages exist.

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<sup>2</sup> Close the Gap (2020) *Gender Pay Gap Statistics*

<sup>3</sup> Grimshaw, Damien and Rubery, Jill (2007) *Undervaluing Women's Work, Equal Opportunities Commission*

<sup>4</sup> UK Government (2020) 'Guidance for schools, providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision' available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy*

The causes and the outcomes of the disruption are highly gendered:

- Women are more likely to work in sectors that have been affected by social distancing measures;
- 77% of people working in high exposure jobs in the UK are women;
- Women do the majority of unpaid care for children, older people, sick people and disabled people; and
- Women are twice as likely to give up paid work in order to care.<sup>6</sup>

A key contributing factor in gendered experiences of job disruption and the differing impacts of COVID-19 is occupational segregation, which describes where men and women do different types of work and different levels of work. The Scottish labour market is characterised by acute and persistent segregation by occupational group and sector. Women comprise 72% of those working in public administration, education and health while men comprise the overwhelming majority of workers in energy and water (81%); agriculture, forestry and fishing (78%); manufacturing (77%); and construction (87%).<sup>7</sup> There is also significant segregation by occupational group with women dominating in the “five Cs”,<sup>8</sup> comprising 77% of administrative and secretarial jobs, 83% of caring, leisure and other services jobs, and 66% of sales and customer service roles. By contrast, men comprise 91% of skilled trades and 91% of process, plant and machine operatives jobs.<sup>9</sup> The “glass ceiling” also means women are under-represented in senior positions in the vast majority of workplaces, and comprise only 39% of managers, directors or senior officials in the Scottish labour market.<sup>10</sup>

The economic impact of COVID-19 is expected to vary by sector which, because of occupational segregation, means that the impact will not be equally shared by women and men. Women’s over-representation in these sectors and jobs makes them particularly susceptible to the labour market disruption, as they are more likely to be concentrated in low-paid, lower-skilled service-sector roles.

Table 1 shows the gender breakdown of sectors most exposed to labour market disruption, the majority of which are female-dominated, and highlights that women account for the majority (51.5%) of those in jobs that are deemed to be at high exposure to job disruption. Occupational segregation ultimately puts women at greater risk of unemployment, enforced reduction of hours and being furloughed. Some of the sectors where women’s high exposure roles are concentrated will be less likely to recover after the end of the COVID-19 crisis, including accommodation, food services and retail, as these sectors will be impacted by consumer spending power, tourism and changing consumer preferences.

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<sup>6</sup> Engender (2020) *Women and COVID-19*

<sup>7</sup> NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2018, Annual Population Survey (April 2017 – March 2018)

<sup>8</sup> The “five Cs” refers to women’s concentration in five undervalued and low-paid occupations: clerical (admin), cleaning, care, catering, and cashiering (retail).

<sup>9</sup> NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2018, Annual Population Survey (April 2017 – March 2018)

<sup>10</sup> NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2019, Annual Population Survey – Workplace Analysis (October 2018 – September 2019)

**Table 1: Gender breakdown of sectors most exposed to labour market disruption**

Industry (SIC2007)	Male employment rate (%)	Female employment rate (%)
Manufacturing	73.4%	26.6%
Construction	86.2%	13.8%
Retail and wholesale; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	50.2%	49.8%
Accommodation and food services	44.4%	55.6%
Administrative and support services	58.5%	41.5%
Public administration and defence	49.8%	50.2%
Education	31.3%	68.7%
Health and Social Work	24.4%	75.6%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	52.7%	47.3%
Other services	36.7%	63.3%
Total	48.5%	51.5%

Source: NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2019, Annual Population Survey – Workplace Analysis December 2019

#### 4. Women in low-paid jobs will be particularly affected by job disruption, placing them at greater risk of poverty

Table 2 shows that the sectors where women are concentrated are low-paid in comparison to male-dominated sectors. For example, men account for the majority of workers in manufacturing and construction, where the average hourly pay for men is £17.07 and £16.15, respectively. By contrast, women are predominantly found in accommodation and food services, and administrative and support services where women’s average hourly pay is £9.59 and £13.22, respectively. All sectors designated high risk have a gender pay gap. In some cases, the gender pay gap is significantly higher than the national figure of 13.3%,<sup>11</sup> including health and social care (27.8%), manufacturing (18%) and retail and wholesale (16%).

Low paid women in both key worker roles and shut down sectors will be most impacted by job disruption. Research by the Women’s Budget Group’s found that women account for 98% of the workers in high exposure jobs earning ‘poverty wages’.<sup>12</sup> Equally, typical

<sup>11</sup> Close the Gap (2020) *Gender Pay Gap Statistics*

<sup>12</sup> Women’s Budget Group (2020) ‘It is women, especially low-paid, BAME & migrant women putting their lives on the line to deliver vital care’ available at <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/it-is-women-especially-low-paid-bame-migrant-women-putting-their-lives-on-the-line-to-deliver-vital-care/>

pay for workers in shutdown sectors (£348 per week) is less than half the average pay for workers who are able to work from home (£707 per week). Four in ten of those working in retail and wholesale are paid less than the real Living Wage.<sup>13</sup>

Table 2: Mean hourly pay (excluding overtime) for male and female employees in high exposure roles in Scotland			
Industry (SIC2007)	Combined men's average hourly pay	Combined women's average hourly pay	% pay gap
Manufacturing	£17.07	£13.99	18%
Construction	£16.15	£15.25	5.6%
Retail and wholesale	£13.13	£11.03	16%
Accommodation and food services	£10.01	£9.59	4.2%
Administrative and support services	£13.81	£13.22	4.3%
Public administration and defence	£18.41	£17.16	6.8%
Education	£19.35	£17.11	11.6%
Health and Social Work	£21.77	£15.72	27.8%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	No available data	£13.01	N/A
Other services	£15.43	£13.25	14.1%

Source: ONS (2019) Table 5.6a Hourly Pay – Excluding Overtime Work regions by industry

COVID-19 is therefore very likely to increase the female poverty rate.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly the case for women facing involuntary reduction of hours and redundancy who are forced to access social security which is not designed to meet the needs of women's lives and after a decade of austerity and welfare reform has proven to push women further into poverty.<sup>15</sup> Women in these high-exposure roles are already more likely to be experiencing in-work poverty and are therefore less likely to have savings to rely on if they have their hours reduced or are made redundant.

<sup>13</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Risky Business: Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers*

<sup>14</sup> Close the Gap (2020) 'Women, work and COVID-19: The stark implications for women's poverty' available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/news/blog/women-work-and-covid-19-the-stark-implications-for-womens-poverty-/>

<sup>15</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know*

## 5. Women are disproportionately affected by the need for more unpaid care

Women's disproportionate responsibility for care and other domestic labour affects their ability to enter and progress equally in the labour market. Analysis by the ONS identified that women in the UK carry out on average 60% more unpaid work<sup>16</sup> than men.<sup>17</sup> Women are four times more likely to give up employment because of multiple caring responsibilities and are more likely to be in low-paid, part-time employment than male carers.<sup>18</sup> These trends have been exacerbated by the current crisis with women across the UK typically providing at least 50% more childcare, as well as spending around 10% to 30% more time than fathers home-schooling their children.<sup>19</sup>

Unpaid carers, 60% of whom are women, save Scotland an estimated £10.8bn per year which amounts to a third of the national budget.<sup>20</sup> The OECD indicates that around one third to a half of all valuable economic activity is not accounted for in traditional measures of economic performance.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, estimates around the impact of COVID-19 on the economy which focus on the measure of GDP render women's unpaid labour invisible and do not, therefore, fully capture the economic impact of the crisis on women's lives.

School closures and increased caring responsibilities in the home will have a disproportionate impact on women's ability to do paid work. The increase in unpaid care could have long-term implications, particularly when coupled with the announcement by Scottish Government that local authorities will, temporarily, no longer be legally obliged to deliver 1140 hours of funded childcare from August 2020. There is no indication how long implementation will be delayed and, given there were challenges with delivery around flexibility and choice,<sup>22</sup> it may be some time before the full entitlement is implemented. Access to childcare is a critical enabler of women's labour market participation and the delay to the implementation of the additional funded hours is likely to have far-reaching implications. The threat of nursery closures during the crisis may lead to a shortage in provision, creating further barriers for women in returning to work or resuming their normal working hours. It also risks the job security of many early years and childcare workers, 97% of whom are women,<sup>23</sup> and the sustainability of many women-owned businesses.

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<sup>16</sup> Unpaid work includes childcare, adult care, laundry, and cleaning.

<sup>17</sup> ONS (2016) *Women shoulder the responsibility for "unpaid work"* available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

<sup>18</sup> Carers UK and Employers for Carers (2012) *Sandwich Caring: Combining childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives*

<sup>19</sup> Ferguson, Donna (2020) "I feel like a 1950s housewife": how lockdown has exposed the gender divide' *The Guardian*, 3 May, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/i-feel-like-a-1950s-housewife-how-lockdown-has-exposed-the-gender-divide>

<sup>20</sup> Engender (2016) *Securing Women's Futures: Using Scotland's new social security powers to close the gender equality gap*

<sup>21</sup> Engender 'Making Work Visible' available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/makingworkvisible>

<sup>22</sup> Audit Scotland (2020) *Early Learning and Childcare Follow-up*

<sup>23</sup> Skills Development Scotland (2018) *Skills investment plan for Scotland's early learning and childcare sector*

Evidence gathered by Engender has highlighted that gendered patterns of care are being replicated during lockdown, and in many cases magnified. Women report that they are expected to assume full responsibility for home-schooling and childcare while working from home, while their partners are able to concentrate on paid work elsewhere in the home, undisturbed. Other women have reported that, as their partners are still going out to work outside of the home, they are left to balance work and childcare on their own resulting in extremely long days, and increased stress and anxiety.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, there are growing concerns about the impact of balancing work and caring responsibilities on women's mental health. 57% of women have reported feeling more anxious and depressed since lockdown began, compared to 40% of men.<sup>25</sup> This is supported by data from the University of Cambridge which found that, on average during a typical working day in April, men in the UK spent under 2.5 hours on childcare, and did under two hours of home-schooling. By contrast, women spent over 3.5 hours on childcare, and over two hours on home-schooling.<sup>26</sup>

Changes to the Job Retention Scheme from August, designed to support the transition back to work, include increased employer contributions to the cost of furlough and the introduction of part-time furloughing. This provides some protection of earnings and part-time furlough has the potential to assist women with balancing paid work and care. While the return to work in Scotland is unlikely to be imminent, more information is required around how women will be supported to return in the longer-term when they may be unable to access childcare and schools may not be fully reopened. Incentivising employers to recall employees must be coupled by measures to support women with caring responsibilities to return to paid work.

Despite COVID-19 measures requiring families to spend more time at home, this is unlikely to disrupt the deeply entrenched gendered patterns of caring. Rather, these patterns are likely to be exacerbated. As a result of the gender pay gap, women earn less than men and consequently, only one third of women in dual earner households bring home at least half of the household income.<sup>27</sup> If there is a shortage in childcare provision, or if families are unable to afford childcare in the aftermath of the crisis, when making decisions as to which parent should reduce their hours or give up work in order to care, it is highly likely that the higher earner will remain in employment. As this is more likely to be the father in mixed sex households, this further entrenches women's inequality and the gender pay gap.

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<sup>24</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2020) *Women, Caring Responsibilities and Furloughing during COVID-19*

<sup>25</sup> Ferguson, Donna (2020) "I feel like a 1950s housewife": how lockdown has exposed the gender divide' *The Guardian*, 3 May, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/i-feel-like-a-1950s-housewife-how-lockdown-has-exposed-the-gender-divide>

<sup>26</sup> University of Cambridge (2020) *Inequality in the impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence from real time surveys*

<sup>27</sup> Women's Budget Group (2018) *Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave: Briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group on the state of maternity, paternity and parental leave in the UK*

## 6. Women are less likely to do a job that can be done from home during periods of social distancing

Scottish Government's *State of the Economy* analysis highlights a disparity in the ability of higher skilled and lower skilled workers to work from home. Less than one in ten of those in the bottom half of earners say they can work from home, compared with 50% of workers in the top half of earners.<sup>28</sup> However, this pattern is also gendered because the majority of low-paid workers are women.

Only 3% of employees in sales and customer service occupations and 19% of those in administrative and secretarial roles, jobs which are overwhelmingly done by women, are able to work from home. This is compared to 34% of managers and senior officials, jobs in which women are under-represented.<sup>29</sup> This gendered impact is particularly problematic, as the average percentage of tasks workers report being able to do from home is a key determinant of job loss probability. The percentage of tasks that can be done from home varies substantially across occupations but is also a significant predictor of job losses within occupations, too.<sup>30</sup> In the longer term, economic analysis by the Centre for Economic Policy Research has shown that UK occupations in which over 50% share of tasks can be done from home could be more resilient in the longer-term.<sup>31</sup>

## 7. Women, particularly BME and young women, are more likely to work in a sector that has been shut down

Overall, women are more likely to work in a sector that has been shut down (18%, compared to 14% for men).<sup>32</sup> Shut down sectors also have an over-representation of Black and minority ethnic women (BME), migrant women,<sup>33</sup> and young women. 39% of women under 25 work in these sectors, compared to 26% of men aged under 25.<sup>34</sup> Women account for three-quarters of part-time workers and 55% of workers on zero-hour contracts which places them at further risk, as 45% of all workers on zero-hours contracts work in shutdown sectors, as do 30% of those working part-time.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore likely that COVID-19 will further entrench women's labour market inequality, particularly for groups of women who face multiple barriers such as BME women. Women in shutdown sectors are more likely to be accessing the UK Government Job

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<sup>28</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Doing what it takes: Protecting firms and families from the economic impact of coronavirus*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> CEPR (2020) *COVID Economics: Vetted and real-time papers*

<sup>32</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy*

<sup>33</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) 'It is women, especially low-paid, BAME & migrant women putting their lives on the line to deliver vital care' available at <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/it-is-women-especially-low-paid-bame-migrant-women-putting-their-lives-on-the-line-to-deliver-vital-care/>

<sup>34</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy*

<sup>35</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Risky Business: Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers*

Retention Scheme. As women are the majority of low-paid workers, and account for two-thirds of workers earning less than the living wage, receiving only 80% of their usual salary through the Job Retention Scheme may push women into poverty. Many women may also find that their furloughed salary means they will now have earnings below the Universal Credit earnings threshold.

## 8. Women are more likely to lose their job in the predicted “jobs recession”

While usual trends during an economic downturn dictate that unemployment lags by three to six months when the economy contracts, on this occasion there has been an immediate and sharp rise in job losses. This is highlighted by a dramatic increase in Universal Credit claims. There have been over 110,000 household claims for Universal Credit in Scotland between 1 March and 7 April, up from an average of 20,000 per month in 2019.<sup>36</sup> In Scotland, data from March highlights that private sector staffing levels fell at their sharpest rate since 2009, and there has been the sharpest decline in permanent staff appointments since April 2009. So far, 15% of the UK population have lost their jobs due to the economic impact of coronavirus.<sup>37</sup> This trend is likely to worsen if social distancing measures are extended, as it has also been reported that just over half of firms (54%) said they could survive under current levels of trading for less than three months while a further 32% said they could survive for four to six months.

As service sector businesses, such as retail and hospitality, are more likely to be impacted by social distancing measures, the majority female workforces in these sectors are at greater risk of redundancy over the course of the crisis. Women are four percentage points more likely to have lost their jobs than men, and this gender gap in job loss due to COVID-19 persisted even after controlling for education, occupation and regional location.<sup>38</sup> Also, the proportion of companies across the UK reporting they have laid off staff in the short term to combat the impact of COVID-19 varies from around 1 in 10 for information and communication businesses, where men are more likely to work, to around 1 in 2 for accommodation and food services, where women are more likely to work. Across the UK, two female-dominated occupations have experienced the most significant job losses, with 33% of cleaners and maintenance workers losing their jobs, closely followed by personal care services.<sup>39</sup> Scottish Government has noted that it took eight years for unemployment in Scotland to return to pre-crisis levels after the global financial crisis, and it is therefore highly likely that the increased unemployment will be a feature of the labour market for at least several years,

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<sup>36</sup> Scottish Government (2020) ‘Additional 110,000 Universal Credit Claims since coronavirus outbreak’ available at <https://www.gov.scot/news/additional-110-000-universal-credit-claims-since-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<sup>37</sup> University of Cambridge (2020) *Inequality in the impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence from real time surveys*

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

but possibly longer. During 2010 and 2011, hospitality and non-food retail accounted for 22% of employment entries from unemployment. However, these traditionally labour-absorbing sectors during recoveries are the very sectors most likely to be shedding labour in the aftermath of COVID-19.<sup>40</sup> This will potentially make this recovery especially difficult and prolonged, with women's employment particularly impacted as they are more likely to work in these sectors.

The threat of recession and widespread job losses will be felt most by women in low-paid, precarious jobs and women who are lone parents. Women's employment was already increasingly precarious, and 55% of workers on zero-hour contracts are women.<sup>41</sup> There are therefore particular risks for different groups of women, with BME workers over a third more likely than white workers to be in precarious work, with BME women even more likely to be in insecure work than BME workers as a whole.<sup>42</sup> This puts BME women at increased risk of loss of hours and earnings and is likely to further cement the disadvantage BME women face in the labour market.<sup>43</sup>

The lack of consideration afforded to gender in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis resulted in the recession having a disproportionate impact on women's employment.<sup>44</sup> To prevent similar disproportionate impacts on women, it is vital that Scottish Government enact a gendered response to the anticipated jobs recession, with interventions specifically designed to tackle women's labour market inequality.

## 9. The rise in underemployment will disproportionately affect women

Emerging evidence highlights that underemployment<sup>45</sup> is likely to increase as a result of COVID-19. The Scottish Business Monitor reported that 81% of businesses have reduced the number of hours staff are working. This is problematic for protecting earnings, as the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme does not currently provide financial support to staff who have lost earnings due to their employer reducing their hours. While part-time furlough will be introduced from August, the impact of involuntary reductions in working hours are already putting women under great financial pressure. Across the UK, the use of reduced working hours to manage the impact of COVID-19 varies by sector, with the greatest use being found in female-dominated sectors such as accommodation and food service activities (where 50.5% of enterprises

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<sup>40</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Getting Britain working (safely) again: The next phase of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme*

<sup>41</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know*

<sup>42</sup> Trade Union Congress (2017) *Insecure work and ethnicity*

<sup>43</sup> Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment in Scotland*

<sup>44</sup> Close the Gap (2010) *Women in Recession: Making gender equality a priority for economic recovery*

<sup>45</sup> Those people in employment who are willing to work more hours, either by working in an additional job, by working more hours in their current job, or by switching to a replacement job. [Source: ONS (2014) *Underemployment and Overemployment in the UK*]

have reduced staff hours) and administrative and support service activities (38.9%). By contrast, only 14.4% of information and communication enterprises, where men are more likely to work, have decreased working hours.<sup>46</sup> While the reduction in hours may be a temporary measure for some workers, in sectors where the recovery is expected to be more slow because of external demand, consumer preferences, and significantly changed business models, there may also be more long-term reduction in available hours.

An increase in the male underemployment rate will also affect women, as more men will be working part-time creating fewer opportunities for women who need to work reduced hours to manage caring roles.

## 10. Conclusion and recommendations

There are a number of uncertainties around the medium-term outlook and Scotland's economic recovery. Ultimately, this means there remains a lack of clarity on the full extent of labour market disruption, and how long the disruption will last. However, the extant predictions imply that there will be far-reaching implications for Scotland's labour market. Applying a gendered analysis to these predictions highlights that women are likely to be disproportionately impacted by this disruption in a range of ways.

It is therefore critical that gender analysis and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data on the impacts of COVID-19 are incorporated into labour market and economic recovery policymaking. Close the Gap supports the recommendations for Scottish Government and public bodies made by Engender in the paper *COVID-19: Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights*,<sup>47</sup> and we draw on this work in our recommendations below. A forthcoming paper by Close the Gap and Engender sets out principles for a gender-equal economic recovery<sup>48</sup> which includes taking action to tackle women's labour market inequality by addressing the undervaluation of "women's work"; redistributing unpaid care in the household; and investing in social care infrastructure to enable women to participate equally in employment. A return to the status quo after the COVID-19 crisis will merely cement women's labour market and economic inequality.

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<sup>46</sup> ONS (2020) Business Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Survey (BICS) (23 March 2020 to 5 April 2020)

<sup>47</sup> Engender (2020) *COVID-19: Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights* <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Covid-19-Gathering-and-using-data-to-ensure-that-the-response-integrates-womens-equality-and-rights.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Engender and Close the Gap (Forthcoming) *Principles for a Gender-Equal Economic Recovery*

## Close the Gap call on Scottish Government to:

1. Ensure that gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data informs future labour market analyses.
2. Integrate gender-sensitive data analysis and gender mainstreaming approaches into labour market and economic recovery policymaking, and programme and service design.
3. Develop or bring in gender competence<sup>49</sup> to those functions responsible for labour market policymaking and economic recovery responses.
4. Ensure policymaking to address COVID-19 labour market disruption addresses occupational segregation as a central aim.
5. Addressing the undervaluation of “women’s work”, including in adult social care and childcare, should be core to labour market and economic recovery policymaking in response to COVID-19.

## About Close the Gap

Close the Gap is Scotland’s expert policy advocacy organisation working to advance women’s labour market equality. We work with policymakers, employers, and trade unions to enable and influence action that will address the causes of the gender pay gap. Close the Gap has been operating since 2001.

More information is available at: [www.closethegap.org.uk](http://www.closethegap.org.uk).

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<sup>49</sup> Gender competence – refers to the skills, knowledge and analytical capability to develop policy that is well-gendered; that takes account of the socially constructed difference between men’s and women’s lives and experiences. ‘Intersectional’ gender competence is that which understands that women are not a homogenous group, but the disabled and Black and minority ethnic women’s experiences will be inflected by ableism and racism.