



Response to the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on business, workers and the economy

19th May 2020

1. Introduction

Close the Gap is Scotland's policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We have been working with policymakers, employers and employees since 2001 to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's labour market inequality.

The ongoing crisis has resulted in a rapid, and unprecedented shift in the economic landscape in Scotland, and one of the early implications of COVID-19 has been to further highlight women's labour market inequality. Close the Gap welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee's inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on business, workers and the economy. In particular, we urge the Committee to consider the impacts of COVID-19 on women's labour market participation and women's wider socio-economic inequality.

It is essential that responses to the crisis are gendered with labour market and economic recovery policymaking integrating gender equality and addressing the inequalities women face at work as a core aim. Otherwise, one of the key long-term impacts of COVID-19 will be to exacerbate gender inequality in the labour market.

This paper accompanies our recently published report, [*Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*](#), which we have submitted to the Committee as initial evidence for the purposes of this inquiry. The research assesses the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women's employment, and the effects that the anticipated "jobs recession" is likely to have on women.

2. Close the Gap research finds that women workers will be disproportionately impacted by job disruption

Disproportionate Disruption highlights the specific impacts of COVID-19 on women workers and provides important insights for the Economy, Energy and Fair Work

Committee's inquiry into the potential impacts of COVID-19 on Scotland's workforce.

The key findings of the report are:

- Because of occupational segregation, women are more likely to work in a shut down sector such as hospitality and retail, and this is especially the case for BME women and younger women.
- Women are more likely to have lost their job, had their hours cut, and more likely to be furloughed.
- Women make up the majority of key workers, in care, early years and childcare, nursing and in supermarkets, but are undervalued, underpaid and under-protected.
- Women are bearing the brunt of the increase in childcare and care for adults in the home, making it difficult to do their paid work from home, where this is required by their employer.
- Women in low-paid jobs will be particularly affected by job disruption, placing them at greater risk of poverty.
- Women are more likely to lose their jobs in the recession, and be affected by underemployment.

Close the Gap's analysis highlights the importance of gender analysis and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data in labour market policymaking. Applying a gendered lens to existing predictions and analysis around the labour market impacts of COVID-19 highlights that women are likely to be disproportionately impacted by labour market disruption in a number of ways. It is therefore critical that gender-sensitive data analysis and gender mainstreaming approaches are integrated into all labour market and economic recovery policymaking.

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. It is therefore vital that the lessons of 2008 are incorporated into the responses to this economic crisis, which is expected to be deeper and more prolonged. It is essential that the Scottish Government enact a gendered response to the anticipated jobs recession, with interventions specifically designed to tackle women's labour market inequality.

To this end, the report makes a number of recommendations to Scottish Government including:

- ensuring that that gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data informs future labour market analysis;
- ensuring policymaking to address COVID-19 labour market disruption addresses occupational segregation as a central aim;

- integrating gender-sensitive data analysis and gender mainstreaming approaches into labour market and economic recovery policymaking, and programme and service design; and
- addressing the undervaluation of women's work should be core to labour market and economy recovery policy responses.

3. Conclusion

Close the Gap urge the Committee to consider the findings and recommendations of *Disproportionate Disruption* over the course of this inquiry. It is vitally important that the Committee adopt a gendered lens when analysing evidence submitted to this inquiry and make gender-sensitive recommendations which seek to tackle women's inequality in the labour market. This should include gathering and utilising gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data around the impacts of COVID-19. Without such a gendered approach, a likely impact of the crisis will be to exacerbate women's inequality in the labour market.

We note that 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. In addition, this remains a fast-moving environment, with Government interventions, labour market changes and the economic landscape developing at pace. For this reason, in line with the open-ended nature of this inquiry, Close the Gap would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Committee as the crisis develops.