



One Year On: How COVID-19 is impacting women's employment in Scotland



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## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on Scotland's labour market, with women's employment being impacted in multiple and specific ways by sector shutdowns, furlough, job losses and increases in the amount of unpaid work, particularly childcare and care. Women and men had different levels of economic wellbeing before the pandemic which have been deepened by the crisis, underscoring the need for a gendered approach to labour market and economic recovery policymaking.

Analysis published by Close the Gap in May 2020 utilised labour market data and analysis of the anticipated economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis to provide insight on the predicted impacts of job disruption on women's labour market participation. The key findings of *Disproportionate Disruption*<sup>1</sup> included:

- Because of occupational segregation, women were more likely to work in a shutdown sector such as hospitality and retail.
- Women were more likely to have lost their job, had their hours cut, and more likely to be furloughed.
- Women were disproportionately affected by the need for more unpaid care, impacting their ability to do paid work.
- Women in low-paid jobs were particularly affected by job disruption, placing them at greater risk of poverty.
- Women were more likely to lose their jobs in the jobs recession.

One year on from the initial lockdown in March 2020, this briefing uses labour market data, statistics relating to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and Scottish Government labour market analysis to assess how COVID-19 has impacted women's employment and labour market equality. It shows that women's employment continues to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 job disruption in a number of key ways. In particular, women are more likely to have been furloughed since July 2020 and two female-dominated sectors, retail and hospitality, continue to have the highest

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<sup>1</sup> Close the Gap (2020) *Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*

rates of furlough. This puts women's employment at greater risk of redundancy over the course of the crisis. Young women have been particularly affected by furlough, with more than a third (39%) of female workers aged under 18 being furloughed in January 2021, signifying the risk that the pandemic exacerbates young women's inequality in the labour market.

This analysis also underscores the importance of gathering and using gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data and ensuring gender analysis informs labour market policymaking. It should be noted that 12 months of data provides only a limited picture of COVID-19 job disruption, as the impact of the pandemic on Scotland's labour market is expected to be far-reaching and long-term. The full effects of the crisis on women's labour market equality, therefore, will only become clear in the coming months and years.

## 2. Key Findings

Overall, in the last 12 months, COVID-19 has had a number of significant impacts on women's labour market participation:

- Cumulative data from March to June 2020 shows that more male employees were furloughed than female employees over the duration of that period. However, **since July 2020, more women have been furloughed than men across the UK**. This data suggests that women have been furloughed for longer than men.
- In Scotland, **women have accounted for the majority of furloughed staff since July 2020**. Data from January 2021 highlights that women account for more than half (52%) of furloughed employees in Scotland.
- There is no intersectional data on the Job Retention Scheme, but **data relating to earnings and occupational segregation point to disabled and Black and minority ethnic (BME) women being more likely to be furloughed**.
- Occupational segregation puts women at particular risk of furlough, and redundancy over the course of the crisis. In January 2021, **accommodation and food services, and wholesale and retail account for just under half (44.5%) of furloughed employments**. Women's concentration in these low-paid service sectors thus puts them at heightened risk of lost hours and earnings.
- **Many of the female-dominated sectors most impacted by COVID-19 job disruption are the same sectors most likely to be affected by automation**, putting women's jobs in sectors such as retail at greater risk over the longer term.

- **Data from January 2021 shows a reduction in the use of partial furlough and an increase in full-time furlough** which implies fewer employees have been able to do any work for their employer during periods of lockdown.
- In the UK, **women accounted for the majority of furloughed employees in eight of the eleven age bands in January 2021**, with men only accounting for more furloughed staff in the 30 to 34 and over 65 age groups.
- Younger workers are at particular risk of furlough, and young women are more likely to be furloughed than their male counterparts in the UK. In January 2021, **39% of eligible female workers aged under 18 were furloughed, compared to 29% of male workers of the same age group, and 23% of female workers aged 18 to 24 were furloughed, compared to 19% of men.**
- Across the UK, the **18 to 24 age band had the highest number of furloughed employments for both female and male workers in January 2021**, but women account for more than half (55%) of those furloughed in this age band.
- **Unemployment among women in Scotland increased sharply at the start of the crisis** (March to May 2020) with a rise of 0.7% on the last quarter and 1.5% on the previous year. By contrast, male unemployment increased at a slower rate in the initial stages of the crisis, rising by 0.4% on the last quarter and 0.7% on the previous year during this period.
- There has been a sharp increase in women working full-time in Scotland over the course of the crisis. **Scottish-level ONS data covering October to December 2020 shows 26,000 more women are working full-time than the same period in 2019.** This is coupled with 22,000 fewer women working part-time.
- **Women accounted for only 33% of Self-Employment Income Support Scheme claims in Scotland received by 31st January 2021.**
- Across the UK, the **value of claims made by men (£4.8bn) to the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme amounts to over three times the value of women's claims (£1.4bn).** Men's average grant value (£3,100) is also £900 higher than the average value of women's grants (£2,200).
- Men are more likely to be eligible for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and are also likely to make a claim to the fund than self-employed women. **Men make up around two-thirds (65%) of those potentially eligible for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and take-up rate among men is 8 percentage points higher than the take-up rate for women (68% compared to 60%).**

### 3. Why is gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data important?

Gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data is data that is broken down by sex, so that it is possible to compare and contrast differences between men and women. However, it is not merely about counting women and men, but also about utilising statistics and other information that adequately reflect gendered differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men.<sup>2</sup> In the context of women's employment, an example of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data would not only present women's employment rate but also use data that reflects why women's experiences of employment are different from men's including, for example, women's greater responsibility for unpaid care. Gender-sensitive analysis and use of evidence must consider the gendered differences in women's and men's lives. In the context of COVID-19 job disruption, these gendered differences include unequal labour market participation, occupational segregation, working patterns, security of employment, and unpaid caring responsibilities.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to proactively embed gender analysis in all policy and legislative development. This gives gender concerns prominence throughout policymaking and facilitates policy coherence across the work of government departments. However, this is not yet visible in the work of Scottish or UK Governments and we continue to see gender-blind policymaking that fails to take account of men's and women's differing needs and experiences.<sup>3</sup> This is despite Scottish public bodies being legally required to gather and use employee data that is disaggregated by gender, and do gender mainstreaming under the public sector equality duty.

Responding to the ongoing crisis in a way that advances women's equality necessitates gathering, analysing and using gender-sensitive evidence and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data. Gender-sensitive evidence and data is also essential in enabling the monitoring and evaluation of policy responses.<sup>4</sup> The 2008

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<sup>2</sup> Engender (2020) COVID-19: *Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights* available at <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>3</sup> Close the Gap (2020) *The Gender Pay Gap Manifesto: Realising fair work for women in Scotland*

<sup>4</sup> Engender (2020) COVID-19: *Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights* available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Covid-19-Gathering-and-using-data-to-ensure-that-the-response-integrates-womens-equality-and-rights.pdf>

recession demonstrates that responses to economic crises that are not sufficiently gendered exacerbate, rather than alleviate, gender inequalities in the economy.<sup>5</sup>

In *Disproportionate Disruption*, Close the Gap called for the integration of gender-sensitive data analysis and gender mainstreaming approaches in labour market and economic recovery policymaking, and programme and service design. This builds on Close the Gap's longstanding advocacy with the Scottish Government and public bodies to improve the range of gender-disaggregated data used in skills, employability and labour market policymaking. While the existence of these data gaps are widely acknowledged, including in Scotland's gender pay gap action plan,<sup>6</sup> as yet there has been very little meaningful action taken to address the problem.

## 4. The limitations of ONS data in understanding the impact of COVID-19

The ONS statistics utilised in this paper are mostly derived from the Labour Force Survey, which covers around 35,000 households each quarter. This is the largest household study in the UK and provides the official measures of employment and unemployment. The Labour Force Survey collects a range of data relating to the labour market that is disaggregated by sex and region providing an insight into the employment experiences of women in Scotland. There have been some questions around the reliability of this data during COVID-19, with increasing difficulties for the ONS in the collection and production of statistics, as well as the need to measure new concepts such as furlough.<sup>7</sup>

There are also limitations to quarterly data during a crisis that is changing as quickly as the ongoing pandemic. This is demonstrated by discrepancies between ONS headline figures and HMRC PAYE data in terms of redundancies and employment figures. For example, while the ONS headline figures show 398,000 fewer people in employment than in the previous year, PAYE data shows 793,000 fewer people on payroll compared to December 2019.<sup>8</sup> While the Labour Force Survey is based

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<sup>5</sup> Emily Thomson (2020) *Gender & Inclusive Growth: Inclusive Growth and its potential to improve gender equality*, Close the Gap and Engender

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2019) *A Fair Scotland for Women: Gender pay gap action plan*

<sup>7</sup> ONS (2020) 'A COVID-19 conundrum: why are nearly half a million 'employees' not being paid?' available at <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2020/07/16/a-covid-19-conundrum-why-are-nearly-half-a-million-employees-not-being-paid/>

<sup>8</sup> Women's Budget Group (2021) *ONS labour market statistics* available at <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ONS-labour-market-data-release-Jan-21.pdf>

on sample surveys, PAYE data utilises the absolute number of employees which means PAYE data is likely to be more accurate. However, this data is also more volatile, is not disaggregated by sex, and does not include workers on the lowest pay as it relates only to employees on payroll who pay income tax. As the lowest paid workers have been particularly impacted by the crisis, and women account for the majority of low-paid workers, PAYE data therefore masks some gendered aspects of the crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Analysis has concluded that, if the job losses reflected in PAYE data were included in ONS data, the unemployment rate in September 2020 would have been 7.2%, rather than the headline 4.9%.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the ONS have highlighted that there are difficulties in analysing survey data from those reporting being in employment, but not being paid as a result of being temporarily away from work because of the pandemic. These individuals fall outside of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and may relate to those who are outside the scheme, but believe they will have a job for them to come back to.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of these respondents in the “employed” category may, therefore, inflate employment figures. In addition, as women are slightly more likely to report being temporarily away from work, it is likely that women’s employment is lower than the reported level.

There are also some questions and inconsistencies around the employment headlines and the impact of the pandemic on women’s employment. It is likely that some of the issues with the data are impacting the numbers for women and men differently. The Women’s Budget Group have highlighted that it appears counterintuitive that inactivity figures for women are at a record low, and women’s employment figures are holding up better than men’s at a time where women are bearing the brunt of additional caring responsibilities and large numbers of redundancies are being announced in female-dominated sectors.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore important to treat some of the results relating to unemployment and employment with a degree of caution.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Alliance for Full Employment (2020) *The Ongoing Wave: The Failure of the UK Government to Measure Unemployment, and the Urgent Need for New Measures to Create Jobs*

<sup>11</sup> ONS (2020) ‘A COVID-19 conundrum: why are nearly half a million ‘employees’ not being paid?’ available at <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2020/07/16/a-covid-19-conundrum-why-are-nearly-half-a-million-employees-not-being-paid/>

<sup>12</sup> Women’s Budget Group (2021) *ONS labour market statistics* available at <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ONS-labour-market-data-release-Jan-21.pdf>



## 5. 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 affected by emerging labour market challenges because of their pre-existing inequality in the labour market.

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>13</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. 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 challenge 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.

Women's disproportionate responsibility for care and other domestic labour affects their ability to enter and progress equally in the labour market. Data from the Annual Population Survey shows that 85% of people in Scotland aged 16-64 who are “economically inactive” due to caring were women. Scotland's overall score on the measure of inactivity due to caring in Scotland's Gender Equality index is 85, leading Scottish Government to conclude that “Scotland is a long way from full gender equality in this area.”<sup>14</sup> These gendered patterns of care have been exacerbated by the current crisis, particularly during school and nursery closures. Despite having a caring role being a reason to be able to access furlough, survey data from the TUC<sup>15</sup> shows that 70% of working women with children had their furlough request turned down by their employer when schools closed. The difficulties in balancing paid work, home-schooling and childcare has seen many

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<sup>13</sup> Grimshaw, Damien and Rubery, Jill (2007) *Undervaluing Women's Work*, Equal Opportunities Commission

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Gender Equality Index*

<sup>15</sup> TUC (2021) 'TUC poll: 7 in 10 requests for furlough turned down for working mums'

available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-poll-7-10-requests-furlough-turned-down-working-mums>

women with caring responsibilities withdraw from paid work or reduce their working hours, posing significant risks for women's economic equality in the longer term. In addition, the reduction of social care packages and changes to eligibility criteria during the crisis has made it more difficult to access care, displacing responsibility for care onto female family members.<sup>16</sup> Unpaid caring roles have traditionally posed a barrier to women entering and retaining employment, and this has been intensified by the ongoing crisis.

While there are commonalities experienced by all women at work, disabled women, BME women, women of minority faiths, lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, refugee women, young women, and older women experience different, multiple barriers to participation in the labour market, and to progression within their occupation as a result of their multiple and intersecting identities. The economic and labour market impacts of the crisis risk further entrenching labour market inequality for BME, young and disabled women who already face multiple barriers to good quality employment.<sup>17</sup> BME women are more likely to work in a sector that has been shut down; more likely to be in insecure work which puts them at increased risk of losing hours and earnings; and are concentrated in low-paid service sectors which are more susceptible to redundancies over the course of the crisis. Disabled women experience gendered labour market inequalities such as childcare and a lack of flexible working, in addition to the range of barriers faced by all disabled people in the labour market including discrimination, inaccessible workplaces and a lack of employer support.<sup>18</sup> This means disabled women experience poorer labour market outcomes and lower pay than disabled men,<sup>19</sup> and these outcomes have been worsened by COVID-19.

## 6. How COVID-19 is impacting women's employment

### The gendered patterns of unemployment are in a state of flux

The Labour Force Survey gathers data on unemployment in Scotland, and this data is disaggregated by gender (table 1). Figures from March to May 2020 show an

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<sup>16</sup> Engender (2020) *Gender and unpaid work: The impact of COVID-19 on women's caring roles*

<sup>17</sup> Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research into Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment in Scotland*

<sup>18</sup> Inclusion Scotland Website 'Employment' available at - <https://inclusionScotland.org/resources/employment/>

<sup>19</sup> TUC (2015) *Disability and Employment: A social Model Study of Employment Experiences of Disabled People in Great Britain, with a Focus on Mental Illness* available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/DisabilityandEmploymentReport.pdf>

initial spike in female unemployment at the start of the COVID-19 crisis and in the first lockdown. During this period, women's unemployment increased on the last quarter (0.7% increase in unemployment) and on the previous year (1.5% increase in unemployment). While the male unemployment rate also increased over this period, both in terms of the last quarter (0.4% increase) and the previous year (0.7% increase), the increase in male unemployment was significantly smaller than the equivalent rise in unemployment among women. These figures show that women's unemployment rose faster than men's at the start of the crisis, indicating that women were initially more likely to have lost their job as a result of COVID-19.

This initial spike in the female unemployment rate may be partly explained by women's greater likelihood to leave or lose their job at the start of the pandemic because of difficulties in balancing paid work with additional caring responsibilities. There are now 1.1 million unpaid carers in Scotland, 61% of whom are women. This is an increase of 392,000 since the start of the crisis with 78% of carers having to provide more care than they were prior to the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>20</sup> Work by Glasgow Disability Alliance, Inclusion Scotland and the ALLIANCE has found that social care packages have been reduced during the crisis, with some Health and Social Care Partnerships increasing their eligibility criteria which has made it more difficult to access care, displacing responsibility for care onto female family members.<sup>21</sup> Research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies found that, during the first lockdown, mothers are doing paid work for two hours fewer a day than fathers.<sup>22</sup> During the first lockdown, women were also spending two-thirds more time on childcare than men,<sup>23</sup> as well as spending around 10% to 30% more time than fathers home schooling their children.<sup>24</sup> The difficulties in balancing paid work and increasing unpaid care responsibilities have forced many women to leave their jobs during school and nursery closures, contributing to this spike in unemployment.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Engender (2020) *Gender and Unpaid Work: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's caring roles*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) *How are Mothers and fathers balancing work and family life under lockdown?*

<sup>23</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) *ONS New data on time use and parenting in lockdown* available at <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ONS-new-data-on-time-use-and-parenting-in-lockdown.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> University of Cambridge (2020) 'Women bear brunt of coronavirus economic shutdown in the UK and US' available at <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/women-bear-brunt-of-coronavirus-economic-shutdown-in-uk-and-us>

<sup>25</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) *How are Mothers and fathers balancing work and family life under lockdown?*

Table 1: Change in unemployment by gender in Scotland, March to December 2020

Time period		Men	Women
October to December 2020	Change on quarter	0.5% ↑	0.7% ↓
	Change on year	2.1% ↑	0.2% ↓
September to November 2020	Change on quarter	0.8% ↑	0.9% ↓
	Change on year	1.4% ↑	0.2% ↓
August to October 2020	Change on quarter	0.9% ↓	0.4% ↓
	Change on year	0.7% ↑	0.5% ↑
July to September 2020	Change on quarter	0	0.1% ↓
	Change on year	0.7% ↑	0.4% ↑
June to August 2020	Change on quarter	0	0
	Change on year	0.1% ↑	0.8% ↑
May to July 2020	Change on quarter	0.4% ↑	0.4% ↓
	Change on year	0.7% ↑	0.6% ↑
April to June 2020	Change on quarter	0.7% ↑	0.1% ↑
	Change on year	0.3% ↑	1.3% ↑
March to May 2020	Change on quarter	0.4% ↑	0.7% ↑
	Change on year	0.7% ↑	1.5% ↑

Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS, available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/labour-market-monthly-briefing-february-2021/>

Data covering the period of October to December 2020 shows that the female unemployment rate has decreased over the last quarter (-0.7%) and the last year (-0.2%). By contrast, the male unemployment rate has increased by 0.5% over the last quarter and is 2.1% higher than the equivalent period in 2019. This means that, while the female unemployment rate has decreased over the last year, more men are now unemployed than the same period in 2019. As highlighted above, however, it should be noted that these unemployment figures appear somewhat out of kilter with evidence relating to job losses in female-dominated sectors such as retail and hospitality, and the impact of school and nursery closures since December 2020.

This snapshot implies that men have been more affected by increasing unemployment during the COVID-19 crisis. However, this trend has not been consistent in the labour market data over the course of the pandemic. Analysis of data from March to November 2020 highlights that the unemployment rate has fluctuated for both men and women over this period. These fluctuations make it difficult to ascertain the accumulative impact of COVID-19 job disruption on unemployment for men and women, particularly as these changes are likely to continue in the coming months. Indeed, it is difficult to make overarching conclusions from data that covers a relatively short timeframe when the pandemic is likely to have long-term implications for the labour market. Previous recessions have highlighted that unemployment can be impacted by shifts in the economic landscape over a period of years.

Scottish Government analysis noted that it took eight years for unemployment in Scotland to return to pre-crisis levels after the global financial crisis in 2008.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore highly likely that increased unemployment will be a feature of the labour market for at least several years, 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>27</sup> This will potentially make this recovery particularly difficult and prolonged.

At present, therefore, making conclusions around who has been affected in terms of overall redundancy and unemployment rates is somewhat difficult. Data on unemployment demonstrates, therefore, that unemployment in Scotland is a constantly changing picture as a result of COVID-19.

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<sup>26</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy – April 2020*

<sup>27</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Getting Britain working (safely) again: The next phase of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme*

## Women’s employment is more likely to be impacted over the course of the recession

Evidence from previous recessions shows that women’s employment is more likely to be impacted over the course of the recession.<sup>28</sup> Research has also highlighted that the growth in women’s formal labour market participation since the last recession has not resulted in a significant improvement in gender equality or led to a redistribution of unpaid work between women and men.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the growth in women’s labour market participation was largely fuelled by increasingly precarious and casual forms of employment, as well as insecure self-employment.<sup>30</sup> This means that women’s employment is more likely to be affected over the longer-term than men’s employment. It is unlikely that the increasing demand in female-dominated sectors which are critical to the pandemic response such as care, cleaning, education and essential retail has entirely offset the increasing redundancies in non-essential retail and hospitality. However, this increasing demand is likely to have some effects on overall unemployment figures for women.

Employers are less likely to be prioritising training and development, particularly non-essential training, during periods of recession. This means that state-funded skills programmes will be the main lever for upskilling and reskilling opportunities to support women to re-enter the labour market.<sup>31</sup> It is essential that skills interventions are informed by evidence on women’s access to skills acquisition and in-work training and development. Gender-blind skills initiatives entrench the occupational segregation that characterises Scotland’s education and skills pipeline, funnelling women into low-paid, undervalued jobs and sectors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Close the Gap (2010) *Women in Recession: Making gender equality a priority for economic recovery* available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/CTG-Working-Paper-1—Recession-and-recovery—Ailsa-McKay-and-Emily-Thomson.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, Emily, Campbell, James and Ross, Susanne (2017) ‘Recession and recovery in Scotland: the impact on women’s labor market participation beyond the headline statistics’, *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, Vol. 7 (1) at <https://researchonline.gcu.ac.uk/en/publications/recession-and-recovery-in-scotland-the-impact-on-womens-labor-mar>

<sup>30</sup> Ross, Susanne and Thomson, Emily (2015) ‘Women post-recession: moving towards insecurity’, *Open Democracy*, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/women-postrecession-moving-towards-insecurity/>

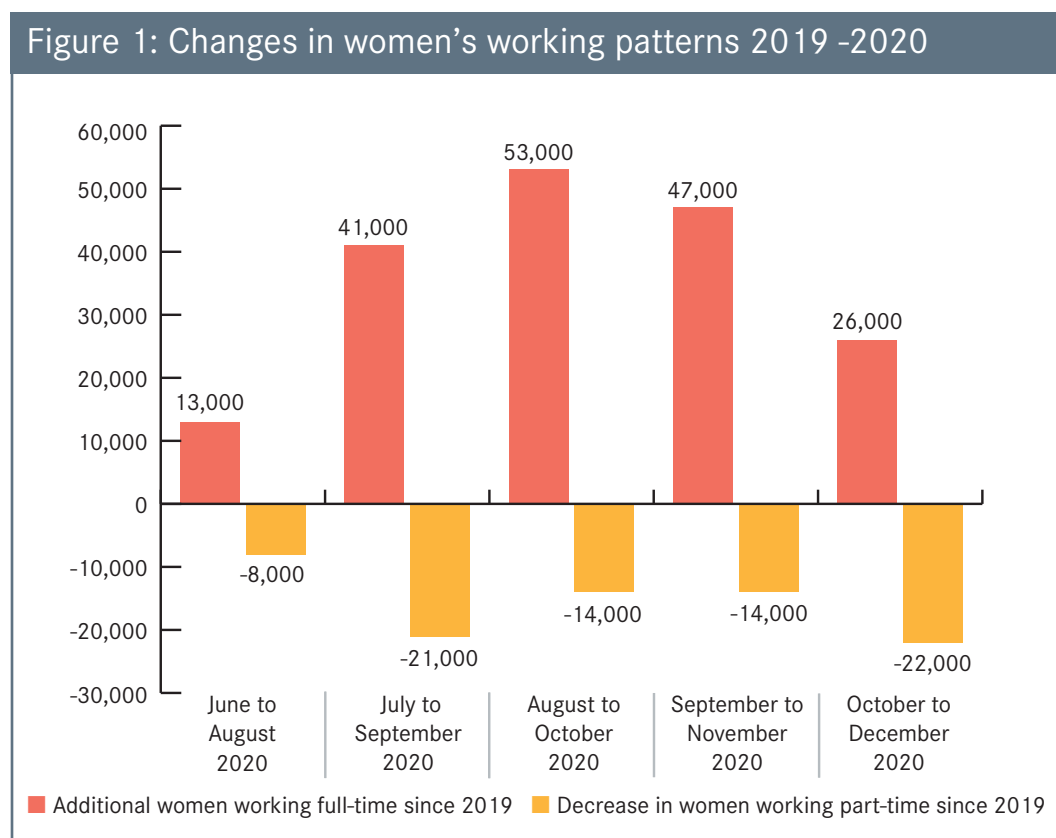
<sup>31</sup> Close the Gap (2020) *Close the Gap response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery* available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-evidence-for-the-Advisory-Group-on-Economic-Recovery—May-2020.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *The Gender Penalty: Exploring the causes and solutions to Scotland’s gender pay gap*

## There has been a sharp increase in women working full-time over the course of the crisis

Data on the employment rate between March and December 2020 also shows significant fluctuations for men and women. Again, it is difficult to make comprehensive conclusions about how men and women’s employment has been impacted by the crisis. In addition, the increasing demand in female dominated sectors highlighted above means figures on employment give only a partial picture of job disruption.

More interestingly, data from the Labour Force Survey shows a significant increase in women working full-time in Scotland during the pandemic (figure 1). Data covering the period October to December 2020, shows 26,000 more women are working full-time in Scotland than the same period in 2019.<sup>33</sup> This is coupled by 22,000 fewer women working part-time over this period. From September to November 2020, 47,000 more women were working full-time and 14,000 fewer women working part-time when compared with 2019.



Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Scottish Labour Market monthly briefing: February 2021*

These changes in women’s working patterns are visible in the data from April 2020 onwards, revealing a correlation between COVID-19 and changes to women’s working patterns. The increase in full-time work among women appears to be driven by growth in demand from key sectors such as social care, healthcare and childcare where women account for the majority of workers. Increases in public sector jobs, where women also dominate, could play a part in the increase in full-time working among women. In addition, the increase in full-time working among women may also highlight that some women are working additional hours to protect household earnings as a result of their partner having lost hours, lost their job, or being placed on furlough.

## Since July 2020, women are more likely to have been furloughed than men indicating that women have been furloughed for longer

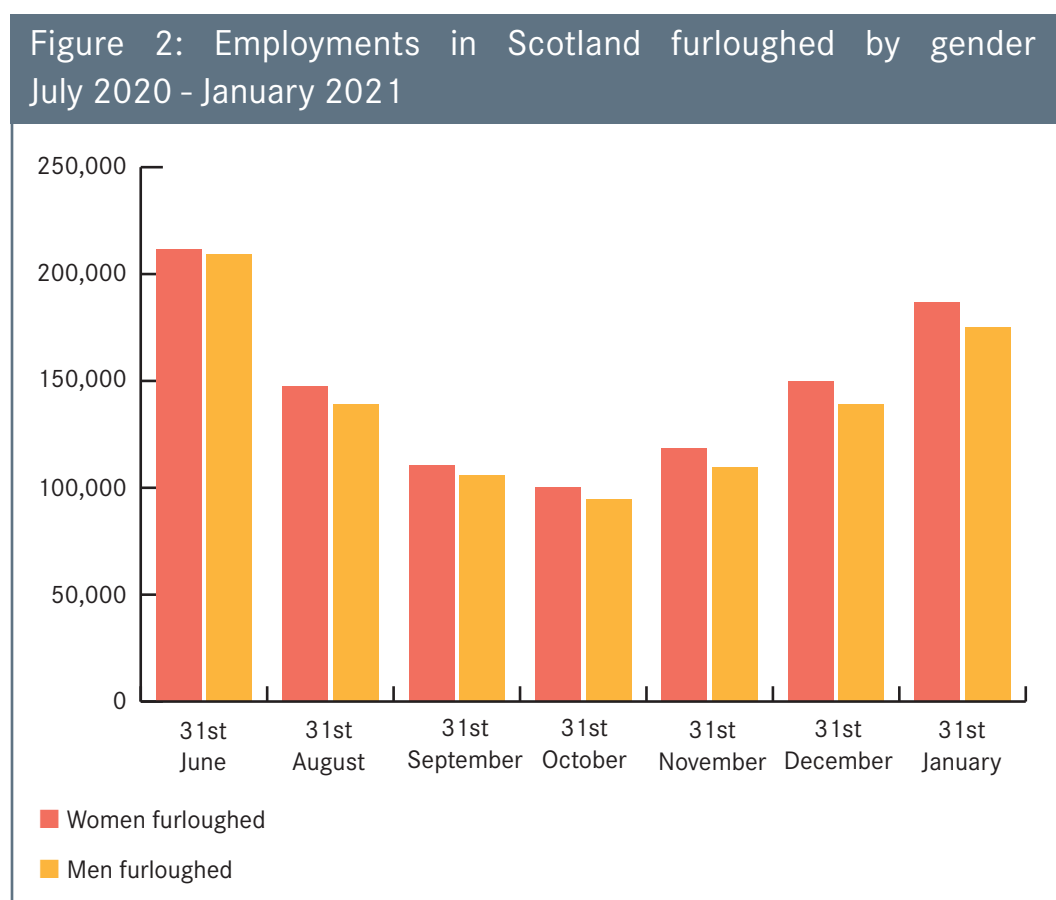
While cumulative UK-level data from March to June 2020 show that more jobs with male employees were furloughed than female employees, figures since July show that more female workers have been furloughed than men (table 2). As the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme closed to additional employees being furloughed at the end of June, this data would suggest that female workers have been furloughed for longer than their male counterparts.

Date	Women furloughed (millions)	Men furloughed (millions)
31st January 2021	2.32	2.18
31st December 2020	1.92	1.88
30th November 2020	1.92	1.79
31st October 2020	1.19	1.14
30th September 2020	1.42	1.35
31st August 2020	1.92	1.74
31st July 2020	2.60	2.46
1st July 2020	2.91	2.72

Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>



This trend is replicated at the Scottish-level (figure 2), with more women being furloughed than men since the 31 July. Data on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme shows that women have accounted for 52% of furloughed staff in Scotland across November 2020, December 2020 and January 2021.<sup>34</sup> This means women are over-represented among those being furloughed, as women account for around 48.7% of those employed in Scotland.<sup>35</sup> While some of these figures highlight that women were a slight majority of furloughed employments, on the 31 August women comprised 55% of furloughed staff in Scotland.



Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>

<sup>34</sup> Figures for January 2021 are provisional estimates released by the HMRC. The data for January is incomplete as while claims relating to January should have been filed by 15 February 2021, employers could file claims later with the agreement of HMRC if they had a reasonable excuse. January claims could also be amended until 1st March 2021. These factors are likely to have a small effect on the statistics, it is estimated that the number of claims reported for December could increase by around 3%.

<sup>35</sup> Annual Population Survey - Regional - Employment by occupation April 2019 - March 2020 available at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/aps168>

While the numbers of furloughed staff in Scotland had been steadily reducing from 31 July to 31 October, the numbers of furloughed employees in Scotland has increased across November, December and January. This increase is likely a result of the extension of the Job Retention Scheme which was announced on 5 November. In addition, these increases will reflect the introduction of tier four restrictions across 11 Scottish local authority areas on 20 November, and the introduction of Scotland-wide tier four restrictions from 26 December. As Scotland remains in lockdown, furlough numbers are likely to remain fairly constant or increase in the March data release.

In addition to data on furlough, data covering the period April to June 2020 also shows that women account for more than half (53%) of those who report being temporarily away from paid work.<sup>36</sup> Those temporarily away from work fall outside the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and will include women who have taken unpaid leave in order to fulfil additional caring responsibilities during the crisis. Among those temporarily away from paid work who report their reason for being away being COVID-19, women accounted for 58% of those reporting receiving no pay during their time away from work. As noted above, these women are categorised by the ONS as being “employed” which may, therefore, artificially inflate the female employment rate.

The publicly available data on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme provides a limited picture of women’s experiences of furlough in Scotland as there is a lack of granular gender-disaggregated data, and some of the data is only available at the UK-level. For example, there is no gender-disaggregated data relating to partial furlough or furlough by sector and gender. There is also a lack of information around women’s experiences of furlough including how requests to be furloughed for caring responsibilities have been handled by employers. As highlighted by Engender,<sup>37</sup> gender-sensitive sex disaggregated data relating to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme should include data relating to how many women and men are being furloughed as a result of caring responsibilities; mean and median value of the 80% of the wages that are being respectively paid to women and men who are being

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<sup>36</sup> ONS – Labour Force Survey – People temporarily away from paid work data table <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/peopletemporarilyawayfrompaidworkintheuk>

<sup>37</sup> Engender (2020) COVID-19: *Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women’s equality and rights* available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Covid-19-Gathering-and-using-data-to-ensure-that-the-response-integrates-womens-equality-and-rights.pdf>

furloughed as a result of their caring responsibilities; how many women and men are having their furloughed salary topped-up by their employer. At present, this data is lacking which makes it difficult to get a granular image of how furlough has impacted women's employment, and how women's particular experiences of the labour market have affected their access to and experience of furlough.

## A lack of intersectional data makes it difficult to draw conclusions about Black and minority ethnic and disabled women's experiences of furlough

There is a lack of intersectional data on experiences of furlough, and no publicly available data on furlough by gender and race or ethnicity, or gender and disability. The lack of intersectional labour market data also makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the impacts of furlough for BME and disabled women. However, pre-existing data and evidence relating to occupational segregation, earnings and precarity for BME women points to these women being disproportionately impacted by job disruption. BME women are disproportionately employed in less secure, low quality work arrangements which puts them at greater risk of job disruption, as evidence highlights that those on zero-hour contracts and in temporary employment are suffering greater falls in earnings and hours over the pandemic than those on more secure contracts.<sup>38</sup> In addition, occupational segregation is particularly acute for BME women, who are more likely than women as a whole to be employed in retail and hospitality.

Polling data from a survey conducted by Close the Gap, Engender, Women's Budget Group, Fawcett, Women Equality Network Wales, and Women's Budget Group Northern Ireland found that BME women and disabled women were significantly more likely to say they were unfairly selected for furlough than their white and non-disabled counterparts. In Scotland, around a fifth of BME women (21%) and 19% of disabled women felt they were unfairly selected for furlough because of their race, sex, age, disability or health condition compared to 1% of white women and 1% of non-disabled women.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Women and Equalities Committee (2021) *Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact fifth report of session 2019-2021* available

at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4597/documents/46478/default/>

<sup>39</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2021) *Joint briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on women with childcare responsibilities in Scotland*

## Occupational segregation puts women at greater risk of furlough and redundancy

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. The Gender Equality Index includes a segregation sub-domain which allocates a score based on vertical and horizontal segregation. Scotland's overall score for the segregation sub-domain is low at 68.<sup>40</sup>

This is significant in the context of COVID-19 as Scottish Government analysis has concluded that “the sectoral variation in terms of impact and recovery is striking”.<sup>41</sup> Women's concentration in service sectors, such as retail and hospitality, therefore leaves them more vulnerable to furlough as a result of these sectors being impacted by social distancing guidelines and changes in COVID-19 restrictions. Analysis of statistics relating to furlough use by sector demonstrates the sectoral impacts of COVID-19 and the subsequent effect of occupational segregation on job disruption (table 3).

Between November and December, the sector with the highest rate of furlough in the Scottish economy was the accommodation and food services sector, accounting for almost a third (29.0%) of furloughed employments in December 2020 and a quarter (25.2%) in January 2021. The sector with the second highest rate of furlough is wholesale and retail which accounted for around a fifth (18.3%) of furloughed employments in December and January (19.3%). Women's concentration in these sectors thus increases their risk of furlough, and heightens women's risk of redundancy over the course of the crisis as these sectors are less likely to bounce back during recovery.

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<sup>40</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Gender Equality Index*

<sup>41</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy – September 2020*

Table 3: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme claims by sector in Scotland					
Sector	As at 31st December 2020		As at 31st January 2021		Percentage of women in the sector <sup>42</sup>
	Employments furloughed	Percentage of total furloughed employments	Employments furloughed	Percentage of total furloughed employments	
Construction	15,500	5.4	25,100	6.9	15.4
Transportation and storage	11,000	3.8	13,900	3.8	22.5
Manufacturing	18,200	6.3	23,400	6.4	26.3
Water supply, sewerage and waste	900	0.3	1,100	0.3	29.3
Information and communication	5,200	1.8	6,000	1.6	33.3
Professional and scientific and technical	16,000	5.5	20,000	5.5	43.3
Administration and Support Services	19,000	6.6	23,200	6.4	45.5
Wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles	53,000	18.3	70,100	19.3	47.8
Arts, entertainment and recreation	25,600	8.9	26,800	7.4	50.5
Accommodation and Food Services	83,600	29.0	91,400	25.2	56.3
Other service activities	14,100	4.9	16,100	4.4	59.3
Real estate	3,700	1.3	5,300	1.5	59.6
Education	5,500	1.9	12,400	3.4	70.3
Health and social work	11,300	3.9	19,300	5.3	75.8
Others	2,600	0.9	4,000	1.1	N/A
Totals	288,900		362,300		

Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>

<sup>42</sup> NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2020, Workforce jobs by industry (September 2020)

Scottish Government analysis has highlighted the “challenging outlook” for in-store retail and accommodation and food. In particular, retail has witnessed structural changes during the pandemic which could have large impacts on employment.<sup>43</sup> There have been increases in online retail sales while in-store retail has continued to decline, evidenced by the permanent closure of prominent high street stores. Data for August shows that online sales were 39% higher than February, while sales in clothing stores remained 16% lower.<sup>44</sup> A number of high-profile retail companies have gone into administration during the pandemic leading to thousands of redundancies across the UK. For example, the closure of Debenhams and Topshop stores alone have put over 20,000 jobs at risk across the UK.<sup>45</sup> The combination of local restrictions and increased pressure on incomes are likely to continue to have effects on these female-dominated service-sectors in the longer-term.

By contrast, male-dominated sectors such as information and communication (1.6%), construction (6.9%), and manufacturing (6.4%) currently have relatively low levels of furlough. These sectors also have relatively low rates of female employment, for example, women account for 15.4% of the construction industry, and 26.3% of those employed in manufacturing. The low rates of furlough in these sectors aligns with evidence that male-dominated sectors, such as construction and skilled trade occupations, were shut down in the initial lockdown but were subsequently reopened and then were less impacted by the next phase of restrictions. Indeed, data from August shows that, following the easing of restrictions over the summer, the manufacturing sector had slightly stronger levels of growth in business activity than the Scottish economy as a whole.<sup>46</sup>

That women account for the majority of furloughed staff is particularly important, as analysis by HMRC has suggested that women’s employment is somewhat protected from the impact of furlough as a result of women comprising the majority of staff in the health and social care sector, and the education sector. In Scotland, women account for 79% of key workers<sup>47</sup> and these essential sectors have relatively low rates of furlough. For example, health and social work accounted for only

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<sup>43</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy – September 2020*

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Butler, Sarah and Sweney, Mark (2020) ‘Debenhams deal and Topshop talks put more than 20,000 jobs at risk’, *The Guardian*, 25th of January 2021 available at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/25/debenhams-deal-and-topshop-talks-put-more-than-20000-jobs-at-risk>

<sup>46</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *State of the Economy – September 2020*

<sup>47</sup> This figure is calculated utilising the methodology established by Autonomy which identified 28 occupations which the highest Risk Indication Factor (RIF over 70). See: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/jari/#1585154656848-79319e80-dc06>

5.3% of furloughed staff in January 2021, and only 3.4% of furloughed employments were from education. The low rates of furlough in these female dominated sectors can partly explain the fact men accounted for the majority of furloughed staff from March to June. Overall, however, a key reason why women have been more likely to be furloughed than men since July relates to their concentration in service sectors such as retail and hospitality.

Evidence from 2008 found that routine jobs that could easily be automated disappeared with the financial crisis, and did not return during the recovery phase, contributing to a “jobless recovery”. 88% of job losses during three recessions in the past 30 years took place in highly automatable occupations, with automation being viewed as accounting for “essentially all” of the jobs lost in the crises.<sup>48</sup> Research also shows that automation tends to happen in bursts, often concentrated in the wake of economic shocks when labour becomes relatively more expensive as firms’ revenues rapidly decline.<sup>49</sup> The ONS finds that women account for 70.2% of employees in jobs at high risk of automation, and 42.6% of employees in jobs at low risk of automation. Many of women’s jobs at risk of automation are the same jobs which are at risk of job disruption as a result of COVID-19, compounding women’s risk of unemployment in the longer-term. Gender-sensitive upskilling and reskilling interventions are therefore critical to supporting women into careers and sectors which have growth potential, supporting women’s employment in the longer-term.

## Younger workers are at particular risk of furlough, with young women more likely to be furloughed than young men

In January 2021, at the UK-level, women accounted for the majority of furloughed employees in eight of the eleven age bands, with men only accounting for more furloughed staff in the 30 to 34, and over 65 age bands (table 6). However, the data shows that the impact on young workers has been particularly acute. This aligns with evidence from previous economic crises which indicates that economic downturns tend to have particularly detrimental effects on younger workers.<sup>50</sup>

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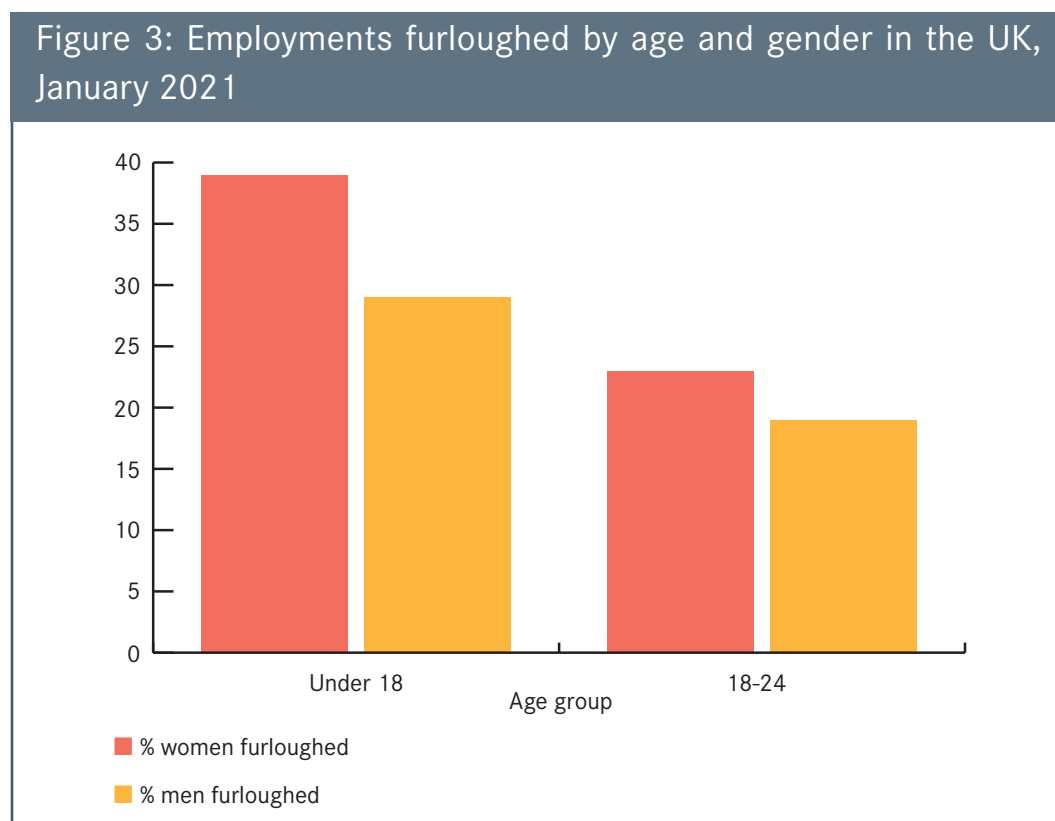
<sup>48</sup> Jaimovich, Nir and Siu, Henry (2012) *Job Polarisation and Jobless Recoveries*

<sup>49</sup> Muro, Mark (2020) ‘Will the covid-19 pandemic accelerate automation?’, *The Economist*, April 22 2020, available at <https://eiperspectives.economist.com/technology-innovation/will-covid-19-pandemic-accelerate-automation>

<sup>50</sup> Resolution Foundation (2020) *Class of 2020: Education Leavers in the Current Crisis*

Assessing the take-up rate for workers by age group in December 2020 and January 2021 shows that younger women are more likely than young men to have been furloughed in the UK (figure 3). 39% of female workers eligible for furlough aged under 18 were furloughed in January 2021, compared to 29% of male workers of the same age category. 23% of female workers aged 18 to 24 were furloughed in January 2021, compared to 19% of men in the same age group. Data relating to January 2021 highlights that female workers account for the majority of those furloughed among workers aged 18-24 (table 4).

In January 2021, the 18 to 24 age band had the highest number of furloughed employments for both female and male workers (table 4). 742,700 employees aged 18 to 24 were furloughed on the 31 January 2021 (21% take-up rate) and women accounted for more than half (55%) of these furloughed employments. The 25 to 29 age band had the second highest number of furloughed employments, with 519,800 workers being furloughed in this age band (15% take-up rate).



Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>



Table 4: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme furloughed employments in the UK, by age and gender

Age	31st December 2020		31st January 2021	
	Employments furloughed with female employee	% furloughed employments with female employee	Employments furloughed with female employee	% furloughed employments with female employee
Under 18	58,200	61.7	69,300	61.6
18 to 24	357,000	54.8	409,700	55.2
25 to 29	222,400	49.1	260,000	50.0
30 to 34	211,300	48.5	254,100	49.9
35 to 39	195,500	48.8	239,600	50.3
40 to 44	175,700	48.6	218,000	50.4
45 to 49	174,800	49.8	217,600	51.5
50 to 54	182,000	50.8	227,700	52.4
55 to 59	159,800	50.3	200,900	51.8
60 to 64	111,500	48.9	139,500	50.1
65 and over	71,700	46.8	85,700	47.2

Source: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: February 2021 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-february-2021>

The economic and labour market consequences of COVID-19 have had a disproportionate impact on young women’s employment and their financial wellbeing, with these trends only likely to worsen over the course of the crisis. Close the Gap’s *Disproportionate Disruption* analysis highlighted that, because of occupational segregation, young women are more likely to work in a shutdown sector such as hospitality and retail; younger women are at particular risk of furlough; women in low-paid jobs will be particularly affected by job disruption, placing them at greater risk of poverty; and, as per previous recessions, younger women are more likely to lose their job. This has implications for education, skills and training policy, as evidence highlights that young women face particular barriers to upskilling and reskilling opportunities.

Generic employability programmes replicate gendered patterns of skills acquisition and employment, entrenching occupational segregation and widening the gender pay gap. This is also evident in the Modern Apprenticeship programme which is characterised by high levels of gender segregation, with the programme ultimately reinforcing pre-existing gender segregation in the labour market. For example, women continue to account for vast majority (84.8%) of starts on the social services and healthcare framework, while men account for almost all (97.4%) of starts on the construction (building) framework.<sup>51</sup> As a result, the Modern Apprenticeship programme sustains women's concentration in female-dominated jobs and sectors.

Young women therefore need targeted support to enable them to re-enter the labour market and to secure good quality, sustainable employment. It is critical that employability and skills policy, such as the Scottish Government's flagship initiative, the Young Person's Guarantee, challenges occupational segregation as a central aim to prevent reinforcement and exacerbation of women's inequality in the labour market. The design of the monitoring and evaluation framework for new programmes such as the Young Person's Guarantee is an important opportunity to address long-standing issues with skills data. A range of gendered indicators, which go beyond headline participation figures, should be utilised to provide an understanding of how these programmes are challenging women's labour market inequality. This should include data that enables an understanding of occupational segregation, including apprenticeship and further education starts and achievements by gender and framework or course, as well as data that relates to gendered breakdowns of employment by occupational group and employment type.

**There has been an increase in full-time furlough and a reduction in partial furlough since October 2020, highlighting that fewer workers have been able to do any work for their employer during periods of lockdown**

Partial furlough, often referred to as flexible furlough, was introduced on 1 July 2020. This enabled employers to bring furloughed employees back to work on a part-time basis, with the scheme giving employers flexibility to decide the hours and shift patterns of their employees. Crucially, employers can use partial furlough for employees with caring responsibilities, providing vital support for women trying to manage work with additional caring responsibilities.

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<sup>51</sup> Skills Development Scotland (2020) *Modern Apprenticeship Statistics Full Year Report 2019/20*

There is currently no sex-disaggregated data relating to partial furlough. In Scotland, 362,300 employees were furloughed as at the 31 January 2021. Almost a third (30%) of these employments were partially furloughed (108,600 employments), and the majority (70%) were fully furloughed (253,700 employments). This represents an increase in fully furloughed employments on December 2020, where 40.7% of employments were partially furloughed (117,700) and 59.3% were fully furloughed. This implies that fewer employees were able to undertake any work for their employer on a part-time basis in January 2021, perhaps as a result of additional lockdown measures introduced in November and December. The lack of gender-sensitive, sex-disaggregated data makes it difficult to draw conclusions around how changes to the patterns of partial and full-time furlough use have impacted women's employment specifically.

The initial lack of provision for part-time furlough through March to June 2020 was particularly problematic for women, as this would have provided a solution for many who wanted to continue to work during lockdown while also having to do childcare at home. There is also evidence that some women have had an involuntary reduction in hours which adversely affects their pay and puts them and their families at higher risk of in-work poverty. The delay in providing for part-time furloughing will have forced some women to leave their job creating longer-term impacts to their income, career, and the wider economy as employers lose women's skills.<sup>52</sup>

There was no Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme or the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. As a result of this failure to embed gender analysis in policymaking, the House of Commons' Women and Equalities Committee concluded that the design of these programmes "overlooked - and in some respects continues to overlook - the specific and well-understood labour market and caring inequalities faced by women."<sup>53</sup> As noted by the Committee, this demonstrates the importance of equality analyses as a number of key features of the Job Retention Scheme increased the likelihood of women leaving work in order to care, particularly at the start of the crisis. In addition, the lack of granular data relating to the furlough scheme will have prevented changes being made to the scheme to ensure it meets women's needs.

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<sup>52</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2020) *Women, Caring Responsibilities and Furloughing during COVID-19*

<sup>53</sup> Women and Equalities Committee (2021) *Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact fifth report of session 2019-2021* available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4597/documents/46478/default/>

## Self-employed women have received less support than their male counterparts

The UK Government's Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) opened for applications in May 2020. The scheme offered taxable grants worth 80% of average monthly trading profit for three months, worth up to £7,500 in total. Since May, there have been several rounds of funding, with the fourth round of funding announced earlier in March. Access to the scheme is particularly important for women, as the rise in women's self-employment has coincided with a rise in low-paid self-employment. There is a high number of women in low-paid occupations, with elementary cleaning occupations the most frequent occupation for self-employed women. A lack of quality part-time and flexible work also sees parents and carers, most often women, forced into casualised work or self-employment because they need flexibility and cannot find it elsewhere in the labour market.

Scottish-level data from Self-Employment Income Support Scheme shows that women accounted for only 33% of claims received by 31st January 2021.<sup>54</sup> Data is available on claims by gender and age; claim amount by gender; ineligible population by gender; and claims by total income and gender. However, this data is only available by gender at the UK-level and there is a lack of data to highlight the specific experiences of the economic and labour market consequences of COVID-19 for self-employed women in Scotland.

UK-level data shows that men had made 1,557,000 claims to the scheme totalling £4.8 billion by 31 January 2021. By contrast, 632,000 claims had been received from women, amounting to £1.4 billion. The value of claims made by men therefore amount to over three times the value of women's claims. Men make up around two-thirds (65%) of those potentially eligible for the scheme, but there are also gendered variations in the take-up with the take-up rate also being higher among men (68% compared to 60%). Men's average grant value (£3,100) is also £900 higher than the average value of women's grants (£2,200).<sup>55</sup>

As per the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, gender equality was not a consideration in the design of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme and, as

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<sup>54</sup> *Self-Employment Income Support Scheme Statistics: February 2021*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

a result, the programme does not meet women's needs. Pregnant then Screwed, an organisation campaigning to end pregnancy and maternity discrimination, have taken forward a judicial review against the UK Government,<sup>56</sup> highlighting that the scheme indirectly discriminates against women who have taken maternity leave within the past three years. As SEISS payments are calculated on average income over the last three years, women who took maternity leave during this period have lower average earnings which subsequently brings down the average payment for women who have taken time out to care. Research estimates that this has affected around 75,000 women.<sup>57</sup> The design of the programme is thus likely to limit the value of women's claims, threatening their financial security and pushing low-paid self-employed women into poverty.

## 7. Conclusion

One year on from the initial lockdown, COVID-19 job disruption has disproportionately impacted women's employment in a multitude of ways. Women are more likely to have been furloughed and have been furloughed for longer than men. Women's financial security is therefore more likely to have been impacted by receiving only 80% of their salary over a prolonged period of time. Women accounting for the majority of furloughed employees also puts women at greater risk of redundancy over the course of the crisis. While changes in the unemployment rate for men and women are currently in a state of flux, it is therefore likely that women's unemployment will rise more significantly than men's in the coming months with female-dominated sectors such as retail and hospitality less likely to bounce back at the end of the crisis.

COVID-19 job disruption is having a disproportionate impact on particular groups of women, including low-paid women, BME women and young women, and the crisis therefore has the potential to cement labour market inequality for women who already face multiple barriers to good quality employment. Pre-existing gendered patterns of unpaid work and care have only been exacerbated by the current crisis, particularly during periods of school and nursery closures. Increasing unpaid caring responsibilities have ultimately impacted women's ability to do paid work, threatening women's financial security and pushing some women into further and deeper poverty.

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<sup>56</sup> Topping, Alexandra (2021) 'UK Government accused of discriminating against maternity leave-takers', 19 January 2021, The Guardian, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/jan/19/uk-government-accused-discriminating-maternity-leave>

<sup>57</sup> Women's Budget Group (2021) *Women and employment during COVID-19*

Improving the range of gender-sensitive, sex-disaggregated and intersectional data used in policymaking, service design and evaluation has been a long-standing ask of Close the Gap. Robust equalities data is crucial to effective policy responses, and the economic, social and labour market impacts of the pandemic have made improving the data used to inform policymaking even more critical. As women and men had different levels of economic wellbeing before COVID-19, that have subsequently been deepened by the crisis, the principle of equality and non-discrimination must be core to the economic recovery.<sup>58</sup>

Delivering a gendered economic recovery requires gender mainstreaming approaches and evidence-based policy solutions based on robust labour market data that highlights women's and men's different experiences of employment. Improving the range of intersectional and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data used in labour market policymaking must, therefore, be a key priority of economic recovery. The publication of the Scottish Government's Gender Equality Index in December 2020 is an important starting point, and provides a centralised hub of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data. However, the process of developing the Gender Equality Index also highlighted many of the critical data gaps that continue to exist, including long-standing gaps around the experiences of specific groups of women. It is vital that policymakers and service designers utilise this resource and design data gathering systems that build upon the work of the Index in order to address data gaps that the development of the Index has exposed.

In recent months, Close the Gap have welcomed the increasing focus that has been afforded to improving the quality of equalities data in Scotland. In the 2020/21 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to developing an equality and human rights mainstreaming strategy as part of a comprehensive approach to improving data collection and analysis.<sup>59</sup> The expert reference group on COVID-19 and ethnicity also made recommendations on data including an Observatory which brings together quantitative and qualitative data on ethnic and racial inequalities in Scotland and greater leadership on improving the quality of Scottish Government, local authority and other public body ethnic minority data and evidence. The expert group also noted that, where data disaggregated by ethnicity is not available, investment and policy changes should be made to address these data gaps.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2020) *Gender and Economic Recovery*

<sup>59</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland*

<sup>60</sup> Expert reference group on COVID-19 and ethnicity (2020) *Initial advice and recommendations on systemic issues*

Improved use of data also features in the recommendations of the Social Renewal Advisory Board,<sup>61</sup> with actions relating to co-designing how progress towards renewal is measured, including deeper engagement with those people and communities who have first-hand experience of poverty, inequality and restricted life chances. The Board notes that this requires “a step change in the collection and consistent use of granular data on equalities and human rights to improve monitoring, alongside independent evaluation of how far investment is driving renewal and for whom.” In their response to the Social Renewal Advisory Board, Scottish Government have committed to implementing the data recommendations made by the expert research group, and have also committed to an Equality Data Improvement Programme, starting in April 2021.<sup>62</sup> This programme will build an understanding around issues of data collection for public bodies, with the final output being an updated Equality Evidence Strategy. These commitments are important mechanisms to begin to address longstanding issues in the data used to inform labour market policy. Within this work, it must be remembered that merely counting women is insufficient and the surrounding gendered analysis is of vital importance to ensure programmes, services and policies meet women’s needs.

The UK Government budget in March announced a further extension to the Job Retention Scheme until September 2021 which enables some protection of employment over the coming months. However, it is important that this is accompanied by proactive policymaking and service design around skills and employment to respond to job disruption over medium and longer term. To date, the Scottish Government have announced a number of early policy initiatives and programmes in the realm of employment and skills, including the Centre for Workplace Transformation, the National Training Transition Fund and the Young Person’s Guarantee. The design of these programmes is the key determinant as to whether they address women’s inequality in the labour market, necessitating gendered approaches to design, implementation and evaluation.

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<sup>61</sup> Social Renewal Advisory Board (2021) *If not now, when?* Social Renewal Advisory Board

<sup>62</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Social Renewal Advisory Board: Our response*

## 8. Recommendations

### Close the Gap call on the Scottish Government to:

- Integrate gender-sensitive data analysis and gender mainstreaming approaches into labour market and economic recovery policymaking, and programme and service design.
- Ensure all skills policymaking and service design developed in response to COVID-19 addresses occupational segregation and the under-utilisation of women's skills as a central aim.
- Ensure the Scottish Government's commitments on achieving women's labour market equality are integrated into the development and implementation of the Centre for Workplace Transformation.
- Develop or bring in gender competence to those functions responsible for labour market and skills policymaking and economic recovery responses.
- Gather intersectional gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data for all skills programmes and interventions to ensure that gender equality is core to the evaluation and monitoring of new programmes.
- Gather and utilise a range of intersectional gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data, including on caring roles and occupational segregation, across all Young Person's Guarantee opportunities in training, education, employment and volunteering, to ensure that young women's experiences and outcomes are measured.
- Ensure that the key performance indicators for the Young Person's Guarantee measure occupational segregation in opportunities and in sectors which engage with the initiative.
- Prioritise action on occupational segregation in policymaking to promote green jobs, ensuring that new investment does not disproportionately benefit men and "men's jobs".
- Deliver on the commitment to review the public sector equality duty, and ensure the outcome is an effective duty that will advance women's equality at work.
- Create an occupational segregation commission to drive public bodies' action to tackle occupational segregation.



- Ensure that the next Child Poverty Delivery Plan, due to be published in 2022, prioritises substantive action to tackle women’s low pay in addressing child poverty, in recognition of the link between women’s poverty and child poverty.
- Ensure that the focus on key growth sectors within the COVID-19 Transition Training Fund does not reinforce women’s concentration in low-paid female-dominated jobs and sectors but instead challenges occupational segregation by design. This should be coupled with the gathering of robust intersectional gender- disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of the fund, including data relating to the types of training accessed.
- Gather and publish intersectional gender-disaggregated data on employee beneficiaries of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund and Individual Training Accounts, including data on the types of training accessed, and make addressing occupational segregation a central aim of future rounds of the programmes.

### Close the Gap call on Skills Development Scotland to:

- Build on and improve the range of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data used to develop skills planning policy, including improving gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data in the data matrix, Regional Skills Assessments and Skills Investment Plans.
- Gather intersectional gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data for all skills programmes and interventions administered by Skills Development Scotland to ensure that gender equality is core to evaluation and monitoring.
- Develop an action plan to address the gender gaps in data used to develop and evaluate skills policy.



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

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