



Close the Gap briefing for members' business: Young Women Lead Report on How to Increase Employment Opportunities for BAME Women

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

1. Introduction

In Scotland, Black and minority ethnic (BME) women face an intertwined set of gendered and racial barriers that affect their ability to enter, progress and stay in good quality employment. As highlighted by the Young Women Lead report, these barriers also exist in education settings, and in the transitions between education and employment. While there are gendered commonalities in the experiences of all women in the labour market, BME women's lived experiences of employment are also inflected by racism and, for some, Islamophobia or other religious discrimination. Young BME women are concentrated in low-paid, precarious work and face barriers to progression, development and good quality employment. An intersectional approach to policymaking and employer interventions to advance equality are therefore critical.

Despite the increasing emphasis on race equality policy in Scotland, and a growing consensus on the need to move toward intersectional approaches to equalities work, the experience of BME women has not been afforded significant focus in labour market policymaking, race equality policymaking or in equalities work by employers. There remains a lack of data relating to BME women's experiences of the labour market which makes it difficult to have a granular understanding of the way different groups of women engage with the labour market. COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated BME women's pre-existing inequalities in the labour market, and Brexit is likely to further exacerbate this inequality. It is therefore vital that the Scottish Government maintains a focus on equality and prioritises action to address BME women's labour market inequality specifically.

2. Still Not Visible: Research on Black and ethnic minority women's experiences of employment in Scotland

Close the Gap published research in 2019 on the labour market experience of BME women in Scotland. Providing an important insight into the lived experiences of BME women at work in Scotland, *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and ethnic minority women's experiences of employment in Scotland* captures data on key aspects of employment across

recruitment, development and workplace culture.¹ The findings and recommendations are based on analysis of primary and secondary data.² The key findings include:

- **Almost three-quarters of respondents reported they had experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice and/or bias in the workplace.**
- **47% of respondents believed they had experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice, and/or bias when applying for a job.**
- **42% of respondents indicated they had experienced bullying, harassment or victimisation because they are a BME women.**

Despite this, **just over half (52%) of respondents who had experienced racism, discrimination or harassment in the workplace said they did not report it** and of those who did report, **less than a quarter were satisfied with how their complaint was handled.**

Reasons for not reporting included feeling that their line manager would not support them; feeling it would not make a difference; a belief that their complaint would not be kept confidential; and a belief that reporting would make things worse. These findings highlight critical failings in current reporting mechanisms and suggests poor employer equalities practice. Close the Gap's work on compliance with the public sector equality duty (PSED) and gender pay gap reporting regulations has highlighted that employers are not yet prioritising work on equalities, and intersectional approaches to equalities work remain minimal. Employers are not yet thinking about, or taking action on, BME women's inequality. Concerningly, **Close the Gap's research found that BME women working in the public sector were more likely to report experiencing racism, racial prejudice, discrimination and bias than respondents from the third and private sectors.** These findings therefore highlight the need for further action in the public sector, and emphasise the failure of PSED to facilitate transformative change.

The main conclusion drawn from this research is that BME women continue to face high levels of racism, racial prejudice, discrimination and bias in the labour market which ultimately impacts their ability to secure, retain and progress within sustainable, good employment. These findings highlight the need for substantive action by employers and policymakers to tackle the causes of BME women's inequality at work. Close the Gap are in the process of developing guidance for employers, focused on how employers can address BME women's inequality at work through recruitment practice; enabling a workplace culture which feels inclusive to BME women; improved flexible working; supporting BME women with caring responsibilities; and creating gender and race-sensitive development opportunities. This guidance has been informed by engagement with BME women and reflects their lived experiences.

3. COVID-19 is exacerbating BME women's labour market inequality

¹ Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experiences of employment in Scotland*

² The primary data was collected through four focus groups with BME women in Scotland, and an online survey which received 127 responses. The content and format of the focus groups were designed to capture an understanding of the discrimination and inequality that BME women face because of both their ethnicity and gender. The survey covered areas such as recruitment, employment status, development opportunities, qualifications and caring roles.

Research by Close the Gap, *Disproportionate Disruption*, found that **women account for the majority (51.5%) of workers in roles that have been assessed by the Scottish Government as being at high exposure to job disruption.**³ This research also highlights that COVID-19 is very likely to further entrench labour market inequality for young BME women who already face multiple barriers to good quality employment.⁴ **BME women, particularly young 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 loss of hours and earnings; and are concentrated in low-paid service sectors which are more susceptible to redundancies over the course of the crisis.**⁵

BME women are more likely to be in low-paid work, and women account for two-thirds of workers earning less than the living wage. Receiving only 80% of their usual salary through the Job Retention Scheme is therefore likely to push more BME women into poverty.⁶ Indeed, **42.9% BME women said they believed they would be in more debt** than before the pandemic compared to 37.1% of white women.⁷ This evidence highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to labour market and economic recovery policy making.

Evidence from previous economic crises also indicates that economic downturns tend to have particularly detrimental effects on younger workers.⁸ As highlighted in the Young Women Lead report, young BME women need targeted support to enable them to re-enter the labour market and to secure good quality, sustainable employment. The Young Person's Guarantee is a key intervention developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The design of the Guarantee is vitally important in determining if the scheme will benefit both young women and young men, and young BME women specifically. Evidence highlights that generic employability and skills programmes reinforce women's labour market inequality. The Guarantee must therefore challenge occupational segregation by design so as not to funnel young BME women into low-paid, female-dominated work which will merely reinforce their higher rates of poverty.

Gathering intersectional, gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data is also vitally important to enable monitoring and evaluation of the Young Person's Guarantee to provide a granular picture of how women and men are interacting with, and benefiting from, the Guarantee. This means that headline participation data is insufficient in understanding whether the Guarantee is reinforcing gender inequality in the labour market, primarily because it masks the importance of occupational segregation. Other skills interventions, such as the Flexible Workforce Development Fund, have relied on headline participation data which makes it very difficult to determine whether these programmes are replicating pre-existing inequalities in the labour market. It is important that, in the evaluation of the Guarantee, a range of indicators are utilised across the various aspects of the programme.

³ Close the Gap (2020) *Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*

⁴ Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research into Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment in Scotland*

⁵ Close the Gap (2020) *Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Women's Budget Group (2020) 'New data reveals "crisis of support" for BAME women' available at <https://wbg.org.uk/media/new-data-reveals-crisis-of-support-for-bame-women/>

⁸ Resolution Foundation (2020) *Class of 2020: Education leavers in the current crisis*

4. The DYW Strategy and CIAG have failed to deliver for young BME women

The Young Women Lead report highlights the importance of interventions such as the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy and Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) in tackling the barriers experienced by young BME women in education, and in the transition between education and employment. The DYW strategy contains a number of specific recommendations relating to race in the DYW Strategy, including the promotion of modern apprenticeships (MAs) to BME people; a targeted campaign to promote the full range of MAs to young people and parents from the BME community; and realistic targets to increase the number of young people from BME groups starting MAs. Progress against these recommendations has been extremely slow. There is also only one KPI on race and ethnicity, which relates to the number of MA starts from minority ethnic communities equalling the population share by 2021. **MA starts from minority ethnic communities have increased by 1.2 percentage points, rising from 1.1% in 2012/13 to 2.3% in 2018/19. As the population share in these years was 3% and 4.1% respectively, the gap between starts and the population share has only been closed by 0.1 percentage points over this period.**

As a result of the lack of KPIs relating to race equality, there has been very little clear progress reporting against these recommendations. This aligns with the findings of Close the Gap's gender review of DYW.^{9,10} Additionally, while the majority of the recommendations have clear gendered and race equality impacts, gender and race equality has not been mainstreamed in the strategy and thus these recommendations have been taken forward with little consideration of the experiences of young BME women and girls.

Skills Development Scotland's CIAG Equalities Action Plan highlights that discrimination is the main explanation for the educational achievements of BME people not being reflected in labour market outcomes. Despite this, the action plan is focused on promoting 'services to ethnic minority communities and signposting to the information they need to understand their rights and enter and sustain education, employment or training.'¹¹ While an overarching action contained within the plan is to ensure colleagues have access to enhanced equality-related learning and development resources, there is no indication that this equalities training will be mandatory or form a central part of qualifications. More specifically, actions relating to ethnic minorities are firmly focused on supply-side initiatives, such as sharing information with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and promoting CIAG services to BME people. Evidence from previous financial crises¹² indicates that economic downturns tend to have particularly detrimental effects on younger workers, and BME women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 job disruption,¹³ making CIAG especially important. Attention should therefore be afforded to how CIAG meets the specific needs of BME girls and women during periods of economic recession.

⁹ See Close the Gap (2020) *A Gender Review of Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's youth employment strategy*

¹⁰ Scottish Government has since committed to working with Close the Gap in a range of ways including building gender competence in teachers and other education practitioners. See Scottish Government (2019) *Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy – 5th annual progress report*

¹¹ Skills Development Scotland (2019) *Careers Information, Advice and Guidance Equality Action Plan 2019-2021*

¹² Resolution Foundation (2020) *Class of 2020: Education Leavers in the Current Crisis*

¹³ Close the Gap (2020) *Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*

5. Conclusion

COVID-19 has highlighted in particularly stark terms the existing inequalities in Scotland's labour market, and the long-term impacts of the economic crisis are likely to cement and intensify the barriers experienced by BME women in accessing and progressing within good quality employment. It is therefore essential that the Scottish Government adopt an intersectional approach to addressing the labour market issues raised by COVID-19. The Young Women Lead report serves as a timely reminder of the importance of tackling the continued inequalities experienced by BME women in the labour market.

To advance BME women's labour market equality requires transformational change, with targeted action by employers and policymakers. There is a mounting global evidence base to suggest that the gains to employers in advancing equality and diversity are wide-ranging.¹⁴ This includes improved staff morale; reduced costs through higher retention; enhanced creativity and innovation in product and service design; enhanced productivity and profitability; reputational gains and being able to recruit from a wider talent pool; and reduced financial risk by avoiding costly tribunal claims.¹⁵ To date, however, there has been a lack of intersectional equalities work by employers, and broader equalities work is not delivered to a high standard. While BME women will benefit from gender-sensitive policies in the workplace, employers must also go further and adopt an intersectional approach.

The motion places focus on increasing employment opportunities for young BME women. However, the focus for action must go beyond improving employment rates for young BME women, and also consider the types of work BME women are entering, thus challenging occupational segregation and BME women's concentration in low-paid work, as well as progression opportunities to address BME women's underemployment.

¹⁴ Close the Gap (2016) *Gender Equality Pays: The Economic Case for Addressing Women's Labour Market Inequality*

¹⁵ McGregor S. (2017) *Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith Review*