

## MINUTES

### Securing the Future of Women's Work

Women and Work APPG Meeting, Monday 19 April 2021  
3-4.30pm via Zoom

**Chair:** Laura Farris MP, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

#### Minutes

**Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG, Laura Farris MP** convened the meeting, welcoming attendees and panellists to the APPG's virtual meeting.

**Laura** explained that the pandemic has specifically impacted on women's employment and that there are three specific triggers which caused this. Firstly, women are disproportionately represented in sectors such as retail, hospitality, tourism, personal care and the beauty industry. Secondly, a large proportion of women are engaged in insecure employment, women part time work, as agency workers, or on zero hours contracts.. The third factor is childcare and the impact of home schooling during the pandemic.

She introduced the first speaker on the panel, **Larice Stielow, Senior Economist, Strategy& UK, PwC.**

**Larice** explained that the gender pay gap on average, across the OECD, is currently at 15% and is 16% in the UK. It is expected to take 112 years to close the gap. The female labour force participation rate is currently at 70% for women compared to 81% of men across the OECD. It will take 24 years to close the gap at current rates.

Larice explained the proportion of female employees in full time employment is an important metric because full time employment is considered to provide greater economic security, especially in times of economic downturn. PwC estimate that it is going to take 60 years for female workers to match male workers on that statistic across the OECD. The UK is currently 68<sup>th</sup> and is behind on the share of female employees in full time employment, compared to the OECD average. She explained that women were starting at a disadvantage to begin with and then coronavirus hit people in lower paid contact intensive service sectors, such as hospitality, the arts, entertainment and recreation, and these people are disproportionately women. Whilst more men than women may have actually lost jobs in total, if you look at it compared to a percentage of the actual workforce and increasing employment rates across the OECD, the female unemployment rate has actually risen more than the men's unemployment rate in 17 out of 25 OECD countries for which data has been published so far.

PwC found that 52% of those furloughed between July and October last year were women's jobs, despite women only making up 48% of the workforce.

The pandemic is amplifying existing inequalities in the amount of unpaid care and domestic work that women do around the world, and there is evidence from the US and

UK that more women than men have exited the workforce or reduced hours because additional unpaid care and diversity burden, caused by COVID. According to the UN, women spent, on average, six more hours than men just on childcare every week and during COVID-19 women have taken on a greater share, spending 7.7 more hours than men. All in total, it means that women are spending over 31 hours a week on average, just on childcare. The longer this higher burden on women lasts for, more women are likely to leave the labour market permanently and that will mean less economic security for women but also lower economic growth and productivity for the for the economy. She argued for policies to redistribute and reduce this burden of care, such as equal pay, parental leave, access to affordable childcare and flexible working options.

**Laura** agreed with all of the points raised and said the comprehensive database analysis was fascinating and present growth areas. She then introduced the next speaker, **Kudsia Batool, Head of Equality and Strategy, Trade Union Congress (TUC)**.

**Kudsia** said that in January the TUC conducted a snap survey on the experiences of working mothers. They had 55,000 responses within two days, and 50,000 respondents within the first few hours. Working mums said that home-schooling was one of the most difficult experiences they've had to endure during the pandemic, in regard to the mental, physical and emotional cost. Women (and men) were entitled to make furloughed requests for childcare, however, 7 out of 10 of those requests were turned down. Over 50% of parents said they didn't know that they were actually eligible for furlough in the first instance and 80% of working mums who were affected by the school closures were not offered furlough by their employer. 9 in 10 said their mental health has been negatively impacted. 25% of the stress and anxiety was job security, loss of job, and being singled out for redundancy, denied hours for flexible and being sacked.

**Kudsia** explained that the threat of long COVID is more significant for women up to the age of 50, that women were in the majority of the frontline working roles, and were therefore exposed to COVID, and that the public sector pay freeze affected women more. She said cases of harassment and abuse, went up, cases of domestic violence went up, violence went up, and that women often were not in safe situations, and those conducting jobs from home, sometimes just couldn't do it, so flexible working, needs to move beyond remote working and must address some of the long term, inequality issues. She said the TUC alongside a range of women's organisations is calling for equality impact assessments to be conducted as men and women are affected differently. She called for the Equalities Office to create an inequalities roadmap, which reflects the context we are currently in, the challenges working on space, and what actions are going to be taken to address those issues. She mentioned examples such as access to the self-employment income scheme, insisting on a real living wage, right to flexible work for parents, paid parental leave and paid carers leave.

**Laura** said that she had received many emails from female constituents explaining their high levels of exhaustion due to balancing home schooling and working a full-time job. She then stressed the importance of flexible working rights.

She then introduced the next speaker, **Damilola Ojuri, Women in Enterprise Portfolio Lead, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB).**

**Damilola** began by summarising some of the main findings from a survey carried out by the Women's Budget Group. Damilola said the the majority of women respondents thought that the Government's response did not look to address their specific issues and women's specific issues. Interestingly, women who identified as having an additional protected characteristic or some other vulnerability such as disability, being a single mother or being from a lower socioeconomic background, are more likely to be underwhelmed by the Government support.

The FSB would want the Government to include women in their COVID recovery, stating the 2015 statistic from McKinsey, that advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to the global purse. Women entrepreneurs contribute around £105 billion to the UK economy every year. Damilola explained that these statistics are important because they show both the economic reality, and the economic potential that women entrepreneurs can have on the domestic and the international landscape. She explained that there is a growing number of women entrepreneurs who want to begin exporting and that Secretary of State for Trade, Lizz Truss has made the support for women and traders as a departmental priority.

She then focused on working beyond COVID, centralising women entrepreneurs and women and work as part of the economic recovery. She said FSB set out a number of asks to Government such as increasing gender disaggregated data, ensuring the Government supports enterprise and the importance of equality impact assessing and lastly to introduce new programmes which offer greater access to finance for women entrepreneurs.

**Laura** then introduced **Mark Gale, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Young Women's Trust (YWT).**

Mark explained that there are 5.4 million young women in the UK and that 1.5 million of them lost income as a result of the pandemic. He spoke about the discriminatory effects young women describe experiencing in decisions around fair labour. Young women feel they have been the first ones to be furloughed and are the last ones to be brought back, explaining a drop in income for a longer period of time. There has been a different impact on different groups of young women; disabled young women and young mums in particular have been affected and have spoken about the impact of increased care and responsibilities and increased responsibility for unpaid work. He explained that YWT completed research that the unpaid work young women contribute to the economy is worth around £140 billion each year. He said 85% of young women told YWT that the pandemic has had a large impact on their mental health. He explained there is a lack of protection for statutory sick pay and a lack of support to take temporary time out of workplace, meaning they have had to give up work altogether. He explained there is a significant increase in the number of young women claiming benefits, with 7 out of 10 young women claiming benefits for the first time.

Mark explained that in the short term, young women need immediate financial support and mental health support needs to be prioritised. In the longer term, he said we need to focus on how work is structured and how we make sure that the discrimination young women are facing is eliminated, such as issues around sick pay, parental leave, flexible working, gender pay gap, asking for young women salary history and advertising jobs without the salary.

#### Q&A

**Baroness Uddin** asked the panel to address the issue of minority women and their employment prospects, as well as what needs to be done to change the imbalance, where particularly in some parts of the community, women are missing out significantly from the economy.

**Kudsia** responded that any consideration must include intersectionality and that conducting equalities impact assessments, and holding government and employers to account over the findings of those is key. She also said that flexible working arrangements encourage minority women to get involved.

**Laura** asked how we can get more women into the growth industries and thoughts on quotas.

**Damilola** said we be careful with quotas when we look at equality, she said they are positive in that they allow minorities to join the firm but ethnicity gaps or tensions begin because women identify with various other factors. She said: *“you're not just a woman you're a black woman, or a disabled woman or a woman in a particular class. And so it's important that where quotas are done, they don't divide, as opposed to advance.”* She then said the objective of quotas is good because it does what it intends to do, get people into spaces where they ordinarily may not be. She then stressed the importance of visibility, especially within male dominated industries.

**Laura** thanked the panellists and attendees and brought the meeting to a close.