

Institute for Public Policy Research



# **WOMEN IN THE NORTH**

**CHOOSING TO  
CHALLENGE  
INEQUALITIES**

**Amreen Qureshi and  
Sarah Longlands**

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Lastly, we would like to thank all the attendees and panellists who participated in our International Women's Day event this year, as their voices inspired the analysis and recommendations in this paper



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# SUMMARY

Women have borne the brunt of the pandemic's impacts in the past year. Around 45 per cent of working women across the North work in sectors that have seen the biggest negative impacts during the pandemic, such as in the health and social care, retail and hospitality sectors – and are therefore at greater risk of infection and mortality. And more women have been furloughed, including approximately 382,000 across the north of England.

In this paper, we draw on the evidence to begin to understand the impact of Covid-19 on women, particularly in the north of England. We take an intersectional approach, exploring how the confluence of pre-existing regional economic and social inequalities with the unequal impact of Covid-19 are making life disproportionately difficult for women, particularly those on the lowest incomes.

This paper is a call to leaders across the North to commit to a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on women and to take action to help build back fairer.

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## FIGURE S1

Our recommendations for building back fairer for women



### Income

As part of the recovery, leaders and policymakers across the North must explore what they can do to tackle low pay and its disproportionate impacts on women



### Understanding

Central and local government, local enterprise partnerships and other policymaking organisations in the North could work together to examine how stronger gender equality could support a stronger economic recovery for the North.



### Representation

Women should be better represented in decision making in the North. This would aid better democratic participation and trust in local and national decision making, paving the way for an empowered North.

Authors' analysis

Instead of looking where we differ, we must come together and better understand our similarities to create better solutions starting from common ground, not difference. In the last five years, we have seen an increase in people's confidence levels being willing to call out unrepresentative panels or organisations that need to do better, especially in the aftermath of Black Lives Matter.

We all know organisations are far from perfect. However, in 2021 we do have better representative spaces, with more women now being asked to sit at the 'table'. We must continue to put the pressure on to make sure that people start to include more voices of those from minority ethnic backgrounds, lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with disabilities are also heard, from towns and in geographical regions other than city centres.

*Kirsty Devlin – chief operating officer at Manchester Codes*

Muslim women in the North had pre-existing barriers even before the pandemic, which has been exacerbated even more in the past year. Islamophobia has become increasingly prevalent in the middle of the pandemic in parts of the North and evidence also shows that there are a high percentage of Muslim and minority ethnic families living in the most deprived areas of the North, which makes it harder (but not impossible) for Muslim women to engage in social mobility and engage in political spaces that white males often dominate. Any Muslim women that are in politics in the North are also very isolated, and as a result it is difficult for them to 'rock the boat'. If we are looking towards a recovery plan after the pandemic, mayors and combined authorities and councils across the North must listen to a broad category of women.

*Women representatives from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)*

## INSIGHTS FROM WOMEN LEADERS IN THE NORTH

As a senior female at Lloyds Banking Group, I'm really proud to work for an organisation which realises that diversity makes for a richer economy. Being able to attract, develop and retain female talent is high on the agenda for the group as we recognise that companies with gender diverse leadership teams perform better. We take this very seriously and have set aspirations for a leadership team of 50 per cent women in senior roles by 2025, which reflects the society we serve.

Looking at this more broadly, the untapped potential from women across the region could have a huge impact on the North's economy. If female entrepreneurial activity matched the same level as men's, it could be worth £180 billion to the UK by 2025. This suggests that providing more support for women, building their confidence and helping them to create new networks will go a long way in building a richer and more diverse economy here in the North.

*Catherine Rutter – managing director customer contact at Lloyds Banking Group*

Changing Lives supports women across the North during those times when life is most challenging: experiences of homelessness, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and contact with the criminal justice system. The pandemic has exacerbated circumstances which were already hard.

However, women have also told us that in other ways lockdown has been a welcome relief. They have told us that for the first time, professionals have treated them with compassion and asked how they are and whether they need a food parcel.

This tells us so clearly that the system is not working for women and the reality of our lives. But if we are willing to listen, we could have the biggest chance we may ever get to do things better. This will require cross-sector collaboration, radical listening, putting relationships at the centre and creating the conditions where women across the North can build our own agency and our own power.

*Laura Seebohm – executive director at Changing Lives*

Everybody has been affected by the pandemic, but we haven't been affected equally. It's a gendered impact. Women are more likely to be furloughed than men and pick up the traditional caring responsibilities for children and older parents. The last year has shown that so many jobs in our economy and society that are undervalued have kept us going in the last year, from the NHS to care homes and supermarkets. Those jobs are low paid and do not have the status attached to them that I think they should. We need a rethinking of what matters in our lives, but also a reassessment of how we value those things in our life.

*Rachel Reeves – MP for Leeds West*

Women have been put in an impossible situation during the pandemic – often expected to work and look after children at the same time. Too many working mums are having to cut their hours or are being forced to leave their jobs because they cannot manage. If we do not act, women will be pushed out of the labour market. And that means women's and children's poverty will soar. Ministers must fix the UK's dreadful support for working parents. Unless ministers strengthen rights and support for working parents, women's equality risks being set back decades.

Furthermore, all women have the right to use public spaces, both in the daytime and after dark, without the fear of sexual harassment and assault. As a trade unionist I stand against the epidemic of male violence. Government must act now to dismantle institutional sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination. This is a joint trade union statement condemning violence against women.

*Beth Farhat – regional secretary for the Northern TUC*

In the midst of this chaos, Inspire has adapted and innovated to become a better version of ourselves so we can continue to serve women. Our passion empowered us to carry on despite the devastating impact of the external environment. This vision and culture has taken us on a journey that completely took our organisation online, resulting in our membership and engagement increasing. What's important is what those numbers mean, the connections, the sharing and getting through the good and not so good days together. The comfort through loss, grief and sickness, knowing we had someone to talk to and a space where we were not judged. The joy, laughter and growth that happened in the spaces women created, sharing skills and dedicating time to focus on pursuing goals despite what was going on in the world. The support to keep women connected, safe and well, including financial support for women who faced the impacts of unequal systems. If we hadn't innovated we would have disappeared, Covid-19 definitely drove that.

*Sally Bonnie FRSA – founder of Inspire Women Oldham*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Even before the pandemic, women were at a disadvantage in regions like the North. While regional inequalities in England are among the worst in the OECD, life is particularly unequal for women on the lowest incomes (Raikes et al 2019; Raikes and Giovannini 2019). At a most basic level, life expectancy for women in the North has declined since 2010, especially for women living in the 10 per cent most deprived communities in the North (Marmot et al 2020a). There has been a particularly dramatic fall in female life expectancy in parts of the North East, a situation that Marmot et al (2020b) argues has been exacerbated by austerity.

The pandemic has further exposed and intensified these inequalities and threatens to undermine recent progress in gender equality. Reports by UN Women (2020) have shown that ‘even the limited gains made in the past decades for gender equality are being rolled back.’

This paper is a call to leaders across the North to commit to a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on women and to take action to help build back fairer. We adopt an intersectional approach, arguing that as we recover, we must challenge siloed thinking to fully understand how different inequalities interact with one another. In doing so, we can not only improve policy for women, but build a fairer recovery for everyone in the North.

Our analysis draws on the discussion from IPPR North’s International Women’s Day event in March 2021 and we have included quotes and testimonials from some of the women that attended and spoke at this event. Our conclusions have also been informed by a review of data and policy research about Covid-19 to date. In doing so, we recognise that this is very much a work in progress as the pandemic is ongoing and that the full impacts of the crisis are still emerging.

## **What do we mean by intersectionality?**

Taking an intersectional approach means examining systems of power and types of oppression, such as sexism, ableism, classism, and racism, and understanding how they interact to create injustices and socio-economic inequalities in our society (Christofferson 2019).

## 2.

# WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN IN THE NORTH?

### THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON WOMEN

*"What does it say about how we value women's role in society when the key worker roles (caring/retail/health) are woefully underpaid [and] the industries which employ women predominately were not appropriately supported financially through the pandemic?"*

Attendee at IPPR North's International Women's Day event

Women earn less, save less, are more likely to have precarious and unstable employment, and have to take on a more significant burden of responsibility for informal care. This leaves them particularly vulnerable in the context of Covid-19 (UN Women 2020). In the North, the challenges women face have been compounded by more than a decade of austerity, which has further weakened communities' resilience, particularly those experiencing social and economic deprivation (Johns 2020; Marmot et al 2020a).

The pandemic has severely disrupted the labour market, with significant and damaging impacts on workers, business and local economies. While young people have experienced some of the most severe falls in employment, women, part-time workers, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with disabilities have also been disproportionately affected (Marmot et al 2020b). Social and health care workers are at particular risk and have had exceptionally high rates of death as a result of Covid-19 compared with other professions (ibid). In the UK, women make up most of the health and care workforce, with 77 per cent of healthcare workers and 83 per cent of social care workers comprising of women (WBG 2020a). In the North, approximately 849,000 women work in health and social care, which is estimated to be around 79 per cent of the total workforce of health and social care the North (ONS 2020a). Recent research exploring health and care workers' experience through the gender lens has illuminated the presence of ingrained inequalities and asymmetric power structures within the NHS, which results in poor health policy and decision-making and a 'feminised burden of care during Covid-19' (Regenold and Vindrola-Padros 2021).

While the North generally has a low wage economy, women are particularly disadvantaged within that broad statistic. IPPR North's *State of the North 2020/21* report found that the gender pay gap is wider in the North than anywhere else in the UK (Johns et al 2020). Covid-19 is likely to exacerbate this trend further. However, it is difficult to understand precisely how the pandemic will further impact the gender pay gap, particularly as one of the consequences of Covid-19 is that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) suspended gender pay gap reporting for 2019/20. This suspension may affect initiatives that would otherwise have sought to equalise pay (Fawcett Society 2020a). Outdated views on women's economic contribution have had a detrimental impact on their livelihoods, and women have had to manage their jobs' precarity to ensure that they can still run households, pay bills, and generally make ends meet amid the pandemic. This is

a recurring theme in the causes of the gender pay gap, occupational segregation, women's unequal share in caring and pay discrimination (Close the Gap 2017).

Women are also more likely to run and work in businesses directly affected by social distancing requirements, such as personal care, health, social care, retail and hospitality. It has also been suggested that the burden of additional caring responsibilities has adversely affected female entrepreneurship. For example, there is evidence that the pandemic is exacerbating the diversity challenges in the technology sector, which were already endemic within the sector with fewer women starting and sustaining new tech businesses than previously (Barber 2020; Longlands et al 2016).

### Figures on women workers in the North during Covid-19

- In the North, approximately 849,000 women work in health and social care, working in challenging conditions due to their high-risk occupation (ONS 2020a). They make up 23 per cent of working women across the North. In comparison, men make up 6 per cent.
- Outside of the health and care sector, around 813,000 women in the North work in hospitality, wholesale and retail trade (ibid.) These sectors have been the most affected by lockdown measures, as many establishments have remained closed for long periods, causing huge amounts of financial strain on businesses.
- As of December 2020, 1.9 million people were furloughed across the UK, and approximately 382,000 of these were women based in the North (HMRC 2021). That means one in 10 working women across the North has been furloughed. There are increasing concerns that being furloughed will increase the risk of redundancy if the scheme ends before the economy recovers. Women are also less likely to have their wages topped up by their employers beyond the 80 per cent granted to them through the scheme (WEC 2020). The financial impact of the crisis is likely to be made worse when the £20 uplift to universal credit finishes in September 2021, what is known as the 'family stimulus' (Parkes et al 2020)
- 2.7 million women are currently categorised as 'economically inactive' in the North (ONS 2020b). This is measured by the number of people aged 16 and over without a job who have not sought work in the last four weeks or are not available to work in the next two weeks.

### THE IMPACT OF CARING RESPONSIBILITIES ON WOMEN

*"Affordability of childcare is a huge barrier for women. What about women who want to return to work within the first year of their child's life? I understand that maternity/paternity leave can be shared. However, the gender pay gap prevents this in many cases. Women are forced to take leave because their partner earns more."*

Attendee at IPPR North's International Women's Day event

Unpaid care can be defined as 'all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons and housework' (Xue and McMunn 2021). Over the past year, many people have juggled their employment alongside unplanned caring responsibilities for people with disabilities, older and/or vulnerable adults, or children and young people who have been unable to attend school and colleges because of the need for recurrent lockdowns. However, the evidence suggests that the burden of this has fallen predominantly on women (ONS 2021, EHRC 2020).

Pre-Covid-19, women tended to bear the brunt of caring responsibilities along with household chores, but the pandemic has exacerbated this trend, with impacts for women in work, particularly those on the lowest incomes. Mothers in paid work before the pandemic worked an average of 73 per cent of the hours fathers worked, but this percentage has now dropped to 68 per cent (Andrew et al 2020). Additional data analysis from the Fawcett Society has shown that, as a result of school closures, parents on the lowest incomes are nine times more likely to report the risk of losing their job, and twice as many mothers have reported that they would be compelled to take unpaid leave from work as a result of school closures, in comparison to fathers (Fawcett Society 2021).

New research suggests that the increased burden of unpaid care work is having a negative impact on psychological wellbeing. For example, one study has shown that unforeseen school closures in the past year, irregular working patterns, and long-hour days have evidentially strained parents and caregivers (Xue and McMunn 2021). The ONS (2021) also reported that since the start of, and at every point during the pandemic, women had reported significantly higher anxiety than men, and were reported to be 1.3 times lonelier than men.

The challenge for single-parent families (85 per cent of whom comprise women as the sole parent) has been even more acute during the past year. A report by Gingerbread has highlighted that single parents are twice as likely to be on 'zero hours' contracts compared with other family types. This not only puts them at greater risk of job insecurity, but means they must make difficult trade-offs between their working and caring roles, as a result of the pandemic (Clery et al 2020, Agenda 2021).

Unpaid care work carried out by women has too often been overlooked or marginalised within economic and social policymaking schemes for generations, but Covid-19 has shown us just how dependent our society is on women to provide this care. Despite this, there is still a lack of recognition and support for the vital role women play, which, in the longer term, could have regressive effects on the progress that has been made on women's participation in the labour market, politics, and public life (Xue and McMunn 2021; Engender 2020).

## **THE IMPACT ON WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE RACIAL INEQUALITY**

***"Covid-19 has brought the harsh realities of pre-existing racial inequalities into sharp relief, and nowhere is this more manifest than the disproportionate social and economic impact of Covid-19 on black and ethnic minority women."***

Zubaida Haque, former interim director of the Runnymede Trust (WBG 2020b)

Towns and cities in the North have experienced, and continue to experience, deep racial and ethnic inequalities which have a negative impact on people's lives including employment opportunities, housing, educational attainment, health and neighbourhood safety (Barbulescu et al 2019). calls have been made for these issues to be part of an integrated approach to inclusive economic development in the North led by central and local government. Evidence has shown that Covid-19 runs along racial lines. Ethnic minority communities are most likely to have the starkest health inequalities, and as a result, an increased risk of death by Covid-19 (Patel et al 2020). Thomas et al (2020) illustrated that the West Midlands, North East and North West saw the highest mortality rates during the first wave of the pandemic and were also the areas that experienced the most severe public health cuts. A key reason for this is the intersectionality of racial inequality combined with other risk factors, including over-representation in high-risk occupations, greater likelihood of living in a deprived area and the fact that people living in these areas are more likely to be living with pre-existing health inequalities. Given that women are generally over-

represented in all key worker roles, this means that minority ethnic women are at particular risk during the crisis (WBG 2020c; Platt and Warwick 2020). These factors are compounded by structural racism (Marmot et al 2020b).

A survey conducted by the Fawcett Society, Queen Mary University of London, London School of Economics and the Women's Budget Group (2020c) showed that over twice as many minority ethnic women reported losing social security payments from the government in comparison to white women. Moreover, half of the minority ethnic women stated they were 'not sure where to turn to for help' as a result of the pandemic. Life satisfaction and happiness were also lower for this group, with two in five women saying they were having difficulties with social isolation (ibid). Women who experience racial inequalities are marginally more worried about being in debt due to the coronavirus outbreak (42.9 per cent compared to 37.1 per cent of white women) and would struggle to make ends meet (ibid). We know that problem debt is not evenly distributed across our societies, with evidence pointing towards the fact that minority ethnic groups are at greater risk, especially since the pandemic (Round et al 2020).

The implementation of a three-tier restriction system in June 2020, which resulted in local lockdowns and additional restrictions placed on certain parts of the North, not only had a detrimental impact on business and the local economy, but it also created further challenges for minority ethnic women. A report published by the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in July recognised that the effects of the local restrictions would have a particular impact on communities in the North that experience racial inequalities, as they 'disproportionately live in crowded accommodation or multi-generational households, and are more likely to be financially disadvantaged.' It also highlighted concerns that this could lead to more racial stigmatisation in the North (UK GOV 2020).

Many Muslim communities were also concerned that local lockdowns were announced the evening before Eid celebrations in the North, without prior notice (Williams 2020). Women representatives from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) expressed that minority ethnic women in parts of the North heavily relied on family or community ties to receive up-to-date information on restrictions, as government guidance on local lockdowns was not always accessible. This was also reflected in the Women and Equalities Committee's report, *Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and the gendered impact*, which highlighted issues of language barriers in practical public health messaging in the minority ethnic communities (2020). Naz Zaman, chief officer of the Lancashire BME Network, also explained the importance of using a range of channels to engage with minority ethnic communities, as 'males in many communities are still gatekeepers of this knowledge' (ibid).

Overall, the pre-existing social and economic inequalities that had a discriminatory impact on minority ethnic women made them even less resilient to the pandemic than other demographic groups. Although the full extent of these collective risks is still being understood, evidence is already pointing towards a heightened risk of physical, financial, and psychological impact on minority ethnic women in the North as a result of the intersectional issues of regional, health and racial inequalities (Marmot et al 2020b).

## **IMPACT ON WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC ABUSE**

***"The Covid-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for women facing abuse and violence. Lockdown measures introduced by governments across the globe as a necessary step to curb the spread of the virus has created a surge in reports of domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation."***

*Nowhere to Turn* report (Changing Lives 2020)

The increase in domestic violence has been well publicised since the start of the pandemic, and frontline specialist services issued an urgent call to action to protect women and children experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence, and other forms of violence against women and girls (Women's Aid 2020a). From the outset, it was evident that lockdown measures would create 'pressure cooker' conditions that would exacerbate experiences of violence and abuse and create barriers for routes to safety and support. Lockdowns have led to a surge (an increase of 60 per cent) in women seeking help through domestic abuse helplines (Grierson 2021), and of the people surveyed by Women's Aid (2020b), 66.7 per cent pointed out that their abusers were using lockdown restrictions as part of the abuse. Changing Lives, a charity that provides services for women and children, have reported that across their services, there has been a 62 per cent increase in the number of women disclosing they experienced sexual violence in the first four months in the pandemic, and in the North East alone, there was a 179 per cent increase in reports from women of abuse (Changing Lives 2020). Imkaan (2020), a women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against black and minority ethnic women and girls, has described the emerging crisis of domestic abuse resulting from Covid-19 as 'two pandemics colliding' simultaneously.

Organisations that support migrant women experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence have reported that their caseload has increased significantly during the pandemic. For instance, Safety4Sisters, a Manchester-based charity working with migrant women who have experienced gender-based violence, has reported some of the severe challenges women with 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) faced during the first lockdown period (Safety4Sisters 2020).

Those in the UK subject to the NRPF condition are excluded from most benefits. People with a temporary visa or 'limited leave to remain' are likely to have the NRPF condition attached to their visa – whether they are here to join family, study, or work (Gower 2020). The condition means that women often cannot access a refuge space because they cannot get the housing benefit to pay for their rent (ibid). The adverse impacts of the NRPF conditions have been exacerbated during the pandemic, especially as the economic crisis has resulted in a surge in unemployment and puts migrants at risk of falling into poverty or destitution. Yet it is women who have been disproportionately impacted, as they make up 85 per cent of those who are appealing to have this condition removed (The Migration Observatory 2020; Woolley 2019).

The *Locked in Abuse, Locked out of Safety* report by Safety4Sisters, particularly highlights the difficulties for women with NRPF in accessing the government's 'Everyone In' scheme, which ostensibly sought to provide accommodation to all those experiencing homelessness during the height of the pandemic. Safety4Sisters report a lack of clarity over who was eligible for accommodation within this policy, such as women with NRPF.

Women with insecure immigration status face additional challenges in accessing safety and support. A complex and hostile immigration system means that there are often few avenues to regularise their status; they are turned away from refuges because they do not have access to public funds, and they are at risk of facing detention and deportation for reporting their abuse to the police. These measures have driven women to destitution, and many are too afraid to access health services or report crimes due to fears of their data being shared (Qureshi et al 2020).

### 3.

## POLICY RESPONSES TO COVID-19 FOR WOMEN IN THE NORTH

Northern leaders and policymakers have worked in close partnership with civil society organisations, frontline service providers and private sector partners to mobilise a response to Covid-19 that would address the immediate needs of the most vulnerable. Below are just a few examples of how some of these responses have tried to address the impacts of the crisis on women.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority launched a Women and Girls' Equality Panel in December 2020, representing women across the 10 boroughs, to accelerate gender equality and work to understand the issues and inequalities of women and girls' as a result of Covid-19 (GMCA 2020). This has fed into the work carried out by the Greater Manchester Independent Equalities Commission (2021) which looks at a broad range of inequalities across the city region since the pandemic.



Lancashire County Council commissioned Northern Power Women and Groundswell Innovation to create Two Zero: Female, a business growth programme supporting female-led Lancashire businesses. This programme was then re-designed at the start of the pandemic to be delivered online to ensure that entrepreneurs remained supported and resilient. Northern Power Women have reported that none of the companies that took part in this programme needed to scale down their trading level or make employers redundant in the middle of the pandemic (NPW 2020).



As part of the 'Everyone In' scheme, Leeds City Council established a 'women's only hotel' to provide housing support for vulnerable women. This scheme was deemed very successful, especially due to its partnership work with women-led organisations across the city centre (LGA 2020).



In November 2020, Newcastle City Council launched a '16 days of activism' initiative to raise awareness around violence against women and girls during the pandemic (Hamilton 2020).



The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has set up a Fairness and Social Justice Advisory Board that acts as an 'independent sounding board, ensuring fairness and social justice are at the heart of the combined authority' (Keaveny 2020).



Salford is the first local authority in England to support Tech She Can, a national initiative set up to increase the number of women working in technology and encourage young girls and women to join the sector (Timan 2021).



As we emerge from this crisis, leaders across the North should build on this work to understand the impact of the crisis and to put in place measures to support a fairer recovery for women.

## 4.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING BACK FAIRER FOR WOMEN

*"The focus on shovel-ready projects, hard hats and hi-vis jackets suggest a focus on jobs that historically have been more likely to be done by men."*

Mary-Ann Stephenson, director of Women's Budget Group (WEC 2020)

We have reached a critical juncture at this point of the pandemic. While there is an understandable sense of urgency about the need for economic recovery, this should not be at the expense of gender inequality. Indeed, putting people and equality at the heart of our recovery has the potential to result in a stronger and more sustainable economic approach for the future, for everyone; a 'fair economy is a strong economy: prosperity and justice can, and must, go hand-in-hand' (Commission on Economic Justice 2018).

To this end, we propose a series of preliminary recommendations based on three themes: income, understanding and representation. These recommendations are not exhaustive, but they intend to reflect a realignment of the priorities in the 'build back better' strategy, to ensure that women can establish good lives as they attempt to recover from the pandemic (HM Treasury 2021).

During the coming months, we hope to further examine the type of policy responses that will support a recovery for both women and local economies.



### INCOME

The pandemic has exacerbated the problem of low income for women. As part of the recovery, decision makers across the North must explore what they can do to tackle low pay, especially for women. For example:

- The government's 'plan for jobs' should consider a target and time-bound action plan to provide specific employment support to disadvantaged women, working alongside women-led organisations that could provide additional support. The 'plan for jobs' should also better recognise caring inequalities faced by women and support childcare and social care sectors with additional funding.
- Targets must be set to reduce the gender pay gap across all major occupational groups, so that the North's pay gap rate matches the national rate. This could be done by building on existing partnerships with businesses – for example, the North of Tyne Good Work Pledge, the Liverpool City Region Fair Employment Charter and the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter – to help support improvements in women's pay and conditions.



## UNDERSTANDING

As part of efforts to 'build back better' from the pandemic, central and local government, local enterprise partnerships, and other policymaking bodies in the North could lead by example by shifting their understanding of the economy. This includes a recognition that traditional economic measures such as GDP/GVA<sup>1</sup> are poor proxies for human welfare and that in future, any improvements in economic prosperity must have benefits for everyone and enable people to live a better life.

- Equality impact assessments should be carried out on all policies related to the response and recovery from Covid-19. This would reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of policies implemented in the past year and establish intersectional policymaking for any forthcoming recovery plans.
- The Government and Equalities Office should consider a more proactive role in mainstreaming gender equality in policy development, by requiring all departments to collect and publish data by gender, protected characteristics, and regions, in a way that facilitates a better understanding of how these inequalities interact and compound disadvantages.



## REPRESENTATION

Representation is crucial in promoting a cross-cutting approach to tackle gender inequalities and the numerous intersectional issues that arise with gender inequality (McNeil et al 2017). It would also aid better democratic participation and trust in local and national decision making, paving the way for an empowered North with empowered women.

- As combined authorities launch and further develop their recovery plans, every plan should have a dedicated strategy that considers how women can be better supported. This can be by establishing gender equality panels and strengthening the ones that exist within combined authorities. These panels should also represent a diverse cohort of women, and those with direct experience of the negative impacts of the pandemic in the past year.
- There should be a gender balance in all regional political infrastructure. By 2030, at least 80 per cent of councils in the North should have achieved a 50:50 gender balance among councillors, and half of candidates for metro mayoral positions should be women.
- The devolution and recovery white paper and any subsequent related bills should require combined authorities to have accountability mechanisms that assess the impact of policies on women. The white paper should also require at least half the people in the room to be women when any future deals on devolution in the North are made.

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<sup>1</sup> Gross domestic product and gross value added – traditionally the main measures of economic growth and productivity.

## 5.

# CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The discussions in this briefing have merely scratched the surface of the compounded effects of gender, economic, regional and racial inequalities, and how women in the North have tried to navigate the challenges of the pandemic to date. The full impacts of the crisis are continuing to emerge, and this paper is a first step in attempting to understand how we can support a fairer recovery which enables women in the North to live a good life.

As the pandemic response and impacts continue to emerge in the coming months, IPPR North will be continuing to work through these questions.

In particular, we will be examining how an intersectional approach to developing policy can be more strategic and effective, and help women live a better life, post pandemic.

We will draw on the three themes identified in this report – income, understanding and representation – to understand how, by working collaboratively, public sector executives, metro mayors, business leaders and civil society champions can use their influence, spending power and leadership to help improve women’s lives across the North.

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