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**in**  
**10** LONDON  
CHILDREN  
LIVE IN POVERTY

**ON THE EDGE:**  
**LIFE FOR YOUNG WOMEN**  
**ON LOW INCOMES IN LONDON**

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4in10: London's Child Poverty Network is a campaigning network of organisations working to improve the lives of the 4in10 children living in poverty across the capital [www.4in10.org.uk](http://www.4in10.org.uk)

Young Women's Trust is a feminist organisation working to achieve economic justice [www.youngwomenstrust.org](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org)

## Thanks

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**4in10, London's Child Poverty Network**  
**Disabled Children's Partnership**  
**Office for National Statistics**  
**The Young Foundation**  
**TUC**  
**Young Women's Trust**

Above all we would like to thank all the young women who shared their views and experiences so powerfully and eloquently for this report.

October 2020

# FOREWORD

**We are writing this because we hope to stop struggling. As young women in London who are unemployed or surviving on low pay, we don't want a generation of young women in London to struggle. To be in a constant state of anxiety, wondering where the next cheque is coming from, who will look after our family members, or if we can find somewhere to live where we feel safe. We were struggling before coronavirus hit, and we're right on the cliff edge now.**

We've experienced times of unemployment, not because we didn't try hard in school, or because we don't work hard. We are educated, hard-working young women, who haven't had the support we need to get into, or stay in, sustainable jobs that pay a decent wage. What we need, which would be better for the whole economy, are jobs that the country needs people to do, in supportive workplaces, where we can build a long-term career and not fall back into the same precariousness.

What with low paid jobs, temporary work and zero hours contracts, caring responsibilities, and discrimination in the workplace, life is hard for young women in London anyway. **So when lockdown hit, we were the ones that were hit again.** We are the ones who are back on the same benefits and we'll be pushed back through the same schemes that lead to the same dead ends. We've got to end the cycle. We've got to find something that can lead to a better place: an actual career, where we can use our interests and our education to contribute to society.

Ultimately, our hope is that all young women receive the support they need – be that for work, education, housing or childcare. Because we believe that when you are receiving the right support, you don't have any limits: you can do whatever you set your mind to. Giving young women the support they need when things get tough, like they are right now – allowing them to contribute and achieve - is beneficial for everybody.

**By Christina, Dionne, Tayah, and Terri – young women who shaped this report**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**We are all facing unprecedented challenges in 2020 as coronavirus takes its toll on our health, global economies, and the very fabric of society. But if you are young, a woman, and living in London right now, you face a triple threat of disadvantage, as the research in this report sets out.**

You are more likely to have lost your job<sup>1</sup>, to be shouldering increased unpaid work at home<sup>2</sup>, and to be experiencing mental ill health<sup>3</sup>. Many of the young women<sup>4</sup> we spoke to were also 'trapped' in unsuitable housing where they felt unsafe or insecure.

Our research found five specific challenges for young women on low incomes in London in 2020:

- More young women are losing their jobs and job vacancies are down
- The pressures of unpaid work have increased
- Many young women are trapped in unsuitable housing
- A 'perfect storm' of pressures has exacerbated the existing mental health crisis
- Young women facing discrimination and disadvantage pre-pandemic have been the hardest hit.

We also found a significant data gap in terms of the gender and protected characteristics of those most affected by job losses. This means the government doesn't have the information needed to plan an effective recovery.

We make recommendations in this report about action we can take now to mitigate immediate hardship for young women, and to ensure a stronger and fairer recovery for London. These include **reskilling programmes**, improved **access to childcare**, recognition of **unpaid work**, **protection from eviction**, an urgent **response to the mental health crisis**, targeted **support for hardest hit groups** and better data on job losses so we can divert resources to where they are needed most.

Above all, we urge decision makers to **listen to young women** and engage their talents in rebuilding a more equal economy. Before the pandemic, young women, especially those struggling on low or no pay, felt ignored, undervalued and underpaid<sup>5</sup>.

This an opportunity to fix a system that wasn't working anyway. Over the last year, many things thought to be impossible, such as home working, have become a daily reality. Now is the time to start making fair-paid, rewarding careers in supportive workplaces possible for this generation of young women in London, and all those to come, by delivering our key recommendations. We must also take urgent action to protect the young women driven to crisis point by the many compounding factors we set out in this report, before it's too late.

## METHODOLOGY

**This briefing is based on a range of existing research, and new statistical analysis, as outlined in the references. It is supplemented by discussions from a focus group with four young women living on low incomes in London, carried out on 25 September 2020, organised by the Young Women's Trust. We thank all the young women who shared their experiences with us to inform this report.**

<sup>1</sup> The Times, May 2020 (For full references and links see 'References' section).

<sup>2</sup> ONS, July 2020

<sup>3</sup> Young Women's Trust, May 2020

<sup>4</sup> By 'young women' we mean those aged 18-30, except where a different age range is specified.

<sup>5</sup> Young Women's Trust, May 2020

# KEY FINDINGS: WHAT'S LIFE LIKE FOR YOUNG WOMEN ON LOW INCOMES IN LONDON IN 2020?

## More young women are losing their jobs and job vacancies are down

Young women in London are facing an unemployment crisis. Before the coronavirus pandemic, young people in London were more likely to be in insecure, low-paid and low-skilled work than any previous generation of young people<sup>6</sup>. During the pandemic, young people and women have faced the highest job losses<sup>7</sup>. Since June, London has seen a higher increase in job losses and a slower increase in job vacancies than the rest of the UK<sup>8</sup>.

If you are young, a woman, and you live in London, you face a triple threat of unemployment challenges. The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the systemic fragility of the employment status of young women, particularly those living on low incomes in the capital.

Here, we set out:

- The pre-existing financial pressures on young women in London
- The disproportionate effect of coronavirus, the economic crisis and the end of the furlough scheme on their employment prospects
- The barriers young women face to learning the new skills they need to gain employment
- The frustrations young women feel for a job centre service that doesn't work for them
- How childcare availability and cost prevents young mums from accessing sustainable work
- Opportunities to improve employment support services and equality within workplaces.

Before the pandemic, young women aged 18-30 in London were more likely than their male peers to skip meals to make their cash last until the end of the month (12% compared to 8%), to be in debt all of the time (19% compared to 16%), and to be worried for the future (56% compared to 42%)<sup>9</sup>. Following the pandemic, 32% of young women in England and Wales were struggling to afford basics like food<sup>10</sup>.

Since the start of the pandemic, young people aged 16 - 24 have suffered the biggest drop in employment of all age groups<sup>11</sup>. In May 2020 Young Women's Trust reported that more than 78 per cent of those who had lost their jobs since the crisis began were women, and two thirds were aged between 18 and 34<sup>12</sup>.

London is experiencing a slower economic recovery than the rest of the UK. Job vacancies are down by nearly a half in London (49%) compared to average reductions of a third nationally (34%)<sup>13</sup>.

6 4in10 and Partnership for Young London, 2018

7 The Times, May 2020

8 Peabody Trust, 2020

9 Young Women's Trust, June-July 2019

10 Young Women's Trust, May 2020

11 ONS, Sept 2020

12 The Times, May 2020

13 Peabody Trust, 2020

## KEY FINDINGS

These bleak statistics are brought to life by the experiences of the young women we spoke to.

*Just before lockdown I was in the process of applying for jobs and starting to get interviews, then most of them froze recruitment and I don't know when they'll start again... Now I'm facing a lot of competition for jobs. I've just been getting rejection after rejection after rejection, even though I'm more than qualified for some of these jobs.*

*Dionne*

As the government's Job Retention Scheme ends on 31 October 2020, further mass redundancies are expected across the capital<sup>14</sup>. With women more likely to be employed in the sectors hit hardest by coronavirus, such as retail, hospitality, travel and tourism<sup>15</sup>, it is likely that women will again bear the brunt of these redundancies.

The high and increasing number of young people now on Universal Credit will create extreme competition for scarce jobs. We fear that those who were already struggling before the pandemic will have support further restricted, and find access to employment even harder as they get pushed out by better-qualified peers.

Many young women are eager to retrain in order to find sustainable work, but restrictions on training schemes - for example, having to be under 25, or having to have no previous qualifications - create barriers to this.

*I can't afford to go back into education, and now there's so much competition out there it does feel like an impossible challenge to get a job... I feel a lot of fear and uncertainty about the future.*

*Christina*

Current vacancies in London are concentrated in high skilled sectors such as IT, teaching, accounting, finance and healthcare. As recent research from The Peabody Trust notes, 'Given the mismatch between sectors showing job losses and vacancies, there is a pressing need for effective reskilling programmes to help our residents face the challenging post-lockdown economy.'<sup>16</sup>

Young women who have already faced multiple periods of unemployment have serious concerns about the ability of job centre services to support people into sustainable work.

<sup>14</sup> The Job Retention Scheme is now being followed by the Job Support Scheme. Initial responses suggest this is not likely to save jobs in the hardest hit sectors.

<sup>15</sup> 36% of young women, compared to 25% of young men, work in the sectors most affected: retail, hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism. (Young Women's Trust, May 2020)

<sup>16</sup> The Peabody Trust, 2020

*The support out there is just to get you into any job, but then beyond that, when you need to progress into earning more money, or having longer term careers, I don't think the help is there. What we need is a more targeted way of helping people get into the jobs that actually need to be filled, for example roles in tech, but there's not much support or guidance to get into those roles. It has to be the kind of support that is going to stop people falling back into that place over and over again, because that's just soul-destroying, to feel like you were progressing and then end up back where you were a few years ago.*

*Terri*

Young women using Jobcentre Plus consistently ranked their experiences as humiliating (52%), stressful (56%) and stated that they felt ashamed to go to the jobcentre (53%). In 2018, 43% of male jobcentre users attributed Jobcentre Plus to helping them find work compared to 23% of female jobcentre users<sup>17</sup>.

*The problem with job coaching is that there's too much focus on temp and contract jobs and obviously they have a shelf life, and what happens is, every time I find a temp or contract job I end up unemployed again.*

*Dionne*

In interviews in 2018, Work Coaches shared a view that young people should take any job offered to them, with little acknowledgement that they may be hesitant to take the types of jobs that are often insecure with little chance of career progression<sup>18</sup>. For inner-London youth, growing up in areas so close to affluence, thinking they are not able to take part in the opportunities that big-business brings is demoralising and segregating.

We need a clear and updated vision of employment support, in which young people are treated respectfully, up-skilled and provided with realistic, long-term career goals and aspirations.

The lack of affordable childcare in the capital, combined with inflexible working patterns, provides additional barriers to young mums looking to progress their careers<sup>19</sup>. This has a knock-on effect on children in these households, who may face financial hardship and grow up with limited or negative views about their own career prospects.

*I've stayed in a job that I hate, because it's the only one I can find that is flexible around the childcare... I work 9 hours a week... I've contacted the school for extra childcare support but I don't work enough hours to get extra support, and if I do then I lose some of the money I receive for my daughter, so I feel like I'm in a lose-lose situation.*

*Tayah*

Demonstrating the multiple factors behind unemployment, one young woman spoke of discriminatory cultures within workplaces that had led to her period of unemployment. She felt that the current changes to workplaces due to coronavirus might offer some hope for more positive and equal working environments in the future.

<sup>17</sup> 4in10 and Young Women's Trust, 2018

<sup>18</sup> 4in10 and Young Women's Trust, 2018

<sup>19</sup> 4in10 and Partnership for Young London, April 2018

## KEY FINDINGS

*I've yet to find a workplace that wasn't toxic or damaging to my mental health. They were never sustainable to me... Because things are changing so much this is a good time to reassess the work place and change (it) in a positive way. A lot of jobs I've had they say 'yeah we support working from home', but when you actually get there they say 'we don't want you to work regularly from home'. But for someone with mental health challenges it would be really beneficial to work from home once a week.*

*Christina*

To compound these issues, when women do find paid work, they are paid less than men. The national gender pay gap reporting figures for 2018/19, the last year when reporting was required, stood at 8.9%, with 78% of reporting employers stating that median hourly pay was higher for men than for women in their organisation<sup>20</sup>.

With the Chancellor urging businesses to focus on saving 'viable jobs' we must work together urgently on a plan for those young women disproportionately likely to have been working in jobs that are no longer considered 'viable'.

### **To improve young women's access to paid employment, we call for:**

- A coordinated reskilling programme to support young women in London to build sustainable careers, focusing on those not covered by the Kickstart Scheme and sectors where job losses are high, such as hospitality and retail
- Measures to ensure the Kickstart Scheme targets those most in need of support and those facing multiple disadvantages, such as young people who have experienced longer-term unemployed or insecure work
- Success measures for Work Coaches to include long-term outcome indicators such as improved employment outcomes, or reduction of homelessness, rather than target numbers in jobs
- An end to sanctions for people who are unemployed
- Delivery of the recommendations from the Youth Employment Group to secure a place for young people in the nation's economic recovery: <https://impetus.org.uk/youth-employment-group>

### **The pressures of unpaid work have increased**

Research earlier this year based on ONS data estimated that young women contributed £140 billion to the economy through unpaid work including caring, more than the financial services industry contributed to the economy<sup>21</sup>. We know that shouldering this burden of unpaid care has a negative impact on young women's mental health, relationships and economic freedom<sup>22</sup>. Caring responsibilities from several generations often fall on the young women in the household.

*I have a 3 year old daughter... and I help my mum out, she's ill and she's disabled, and I take my brother and sister to and from school as well.*

*Tayah*

During lockdown, the amount of unpaid care required sky-rocketed. Schools and nurseries were closed, and domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning increased. In July 2020, the ONS found that during lockdown, women were carrying out on average two-thirds more of the childcare duties than men. In households with a child aged under 5 years, women did on average 78% more childcare than men. This included washing, feeding, dressing and supervising of children. Women carried out more of the unpaid care both when they were in paid work and when they were not<sup>23</sup>. This created significant pressures for working mothers.

<sup>20</sup> Young Women's Trust, August 2020

<sup>21</sup> Young Women's Trust, Sept 2020

<sup>22</sup> Young Women's Trust, March 2020

<sup>23</sup> ONS, July 2020

*Having to home school/parent 24/7 while working is really hard. I feel like ultimately something will give and women in general are going to have to take steps back from their careers, as we're expected to be the care givers. Women tend to be the ones who have to give when push comes to shove, be that because we're the lower earners so it makes sense. I really worry about my ability to thrive in my career... I'm worried I'll be passed over for someone with less commitments who is freely available.*

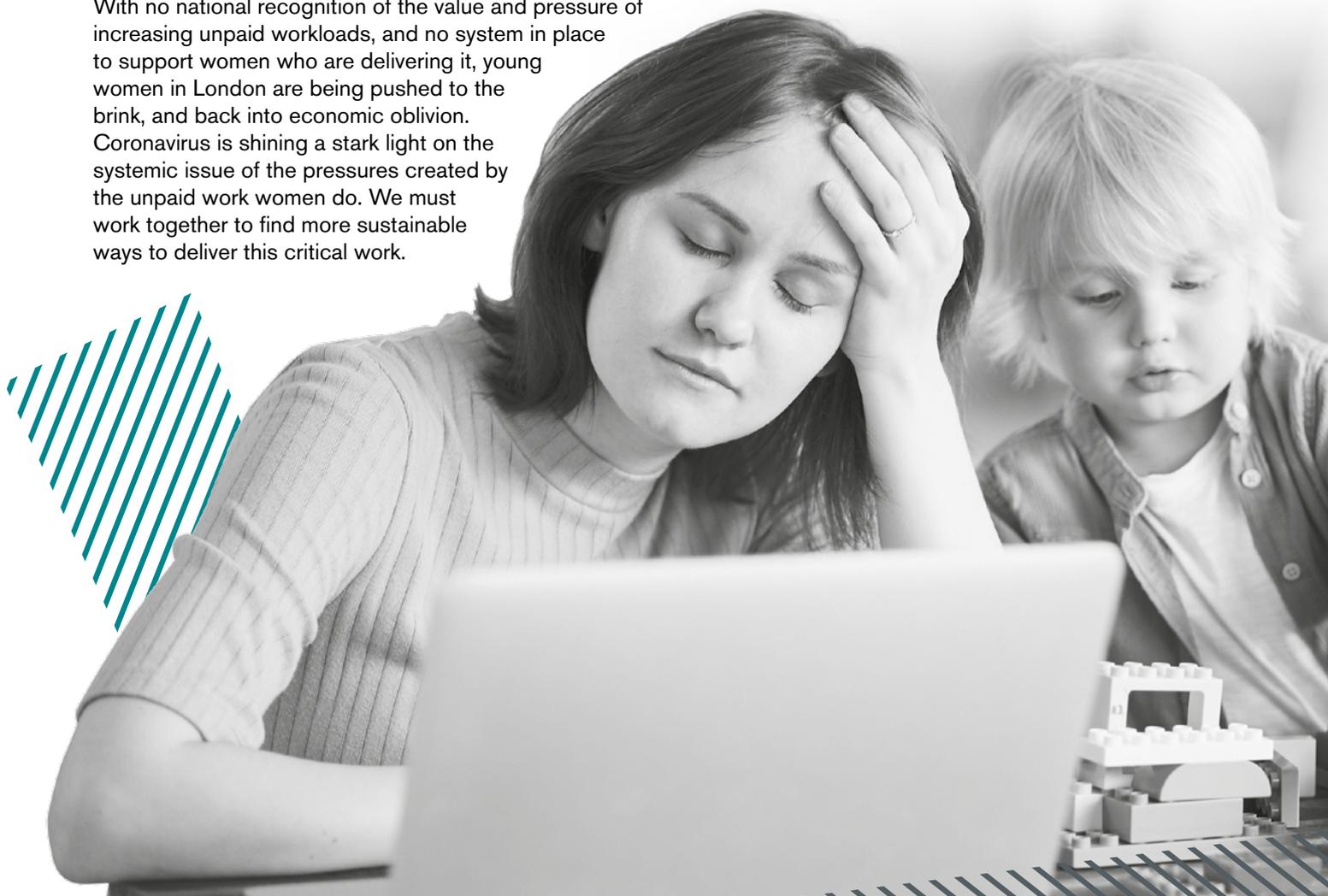
*Response to Young Women's Trust survey, Aug 2020*

While some employers have responded with understanding to these increased pressures, others have not. This has placed young women in positions of risk and extreme stress.

*My mum got really ill at the beginning of lockdown, so my caring responsibilities increased, so eventually the whole house-hold ended up getting ill and we had to self-isolate, but my employer was still making me come into work. So even though I had to call the ambulance for my mum, and they advised me to self-isolate, I was still forced to come into work. That took a toll on me.*

*Tayah*

With no national recognition of the value and pressure of increasing unpaid workloads, and no system in place to support women who are delivering it, young women in London are being pushed to the brink, and back into economic oblivion. Coronavirus is shining a stark light on the systemic issue of the pressures created by the unpaid work women do. We must work together to find more sustainable ways to deliver this critical work.



# KEY FINDINGS

## To value and mitigate the increasing pressures of unpaid work, we call for:

- Policy and guidance on coronavirus to acknowledge the increased unpaid caring and domestic work that restrictions such as school and childcare closures place on women
- Actions to mitigate the impact of increased unpaid workload, such as protection from employer sanctions for working parents unable to access childcare, and financial support for those losing paid work due to increasing unpaid workloads
- Equal investment in care as in construction – pound for pound – so society understands care is as important as roads and railways
- Access to childcare for everyone, extending childcare support to all no matter what stage of work or learning they are in.

## Many young women are trapped in unsuitable housing

London was facing a severe housing crisis before the pandemic hit. Research from 2018 showed that 7 out of 10 homeless households in England were in London, and 80% of those households contained children. Rents in the lowest quartile in the capital are 115% higher than anywhere else in England. This means that for some young Londoners, over 60% of their income goes on rent<sup>24</sup>.

The young women we spoke to, who were already in unsuitable and insecure housing, were trapped there when the country went into lockdown. No house moves or viewings were allowed, and there was no housing support service.

*I'm still in a studio flat and I've got a 3 year old daughter. The housing office closed and so I was left on my own basically to deal with looking for housing, contacting the landlords. But then there's no viewing, because of coronavirus. So then I was faced with a situation where my lease was coming to an end, and the landlord was contacting me, and I had to ask him for more time. He was saying he's already given me an extension to get out because of coronavirus, but he can't keep on doing that.*

**Tayah**

24 4in10 and Partnership for Young London, 2018



The lack of suitable and affordable housing for women with young children has an impact on the whole family. Children in insecure housing are likely to face more risks, and more moves that disrupt their sense of continuity and their social development. We also heard about a lack of social housing where single young women felt safe.

*I was looking to move just before the lockdown and then I had to stop because it was illegal to move. I'm starting to look again but it's very difficult. The courts have ruled it unlawful to refuse someone housing because they're on universal credit, but I am constantly searching for a room for about 9 months and I'm still finding 'no DSS' adverts. I feel with this pandemic that will only get worse. It's making me really nervous because I've heard there might be a local lockdown in London. I really can't imagine myself being in this place for another 6 months, especially being the only female in the house that I'm in. There's not enough female only housing.*

*Dionne*

The window for house moves opened briefly, but the young women we spoke to now feel it is now closing again. The threat of evictions looms large. At the time of writing, the eviction ban has ended, and extended notice periods are now coming to an end. But as restrictions are reintroduced, it is a very challenging environment in which to find new accommodation that is suitable and affordable.

#### **To protect young women trapped in unsuitable housing we call for:**

- Protection from eviction for those that are unable to find alternative accommodation before the end of their notice period, until at least April 2021
- Exceptions to limits on moving house for those that are in unsafe accommodation during further or local lockdowns, and access to support from housing services
- Priority development of more child-friendly and female-only social housing in London.

## **A 'perfect storm' has exacerbated the existing mental health crisis**

Young women are already the highest risk group in the population for mental ill health, with 51 per cent of young women worried about their mental health<sup>25</sup>. The vast majority of young women report that the coronavirus crisis has caused them increased stress and anxiety.

A 'perfect storm' of compounding factors has increased mental health concerns during 2020:

- Low pay, furlough, contract and temp job losses and redundancies are dramatically reducing income
- Challenges claiming notice pay, redundancy pay, and risk of exploitation at work are compounding financial hardship, debt and stress
- Difficulties getting refunds for goods and services not fulfilled due to the pandemic,
- Increasing competition for falling job vacancies is leading to repetitive rejections and long-term unemployment
- Unpaid caring responsibilities have risen, both for those in work and out of work
- Many young women are trapped in unsuitable housing, and
- Access to mental health services is reduced, and is often only possible after a crisis has occurred.

<sup>25</sup> Young Women's Trust, May 2020

## KEY FINDINGS

Some of the young women we spoke to illustrated the multi-faceted challenges they faced very powerfully.

*I've been applying for jobs for over a year because the job I was in was quite low paid, so it was financially a struggle anyway. To then be on furlough with a lower wage, and then lose my job has been financially a massive hit. My old employer has been nasty in how they've treated us, they haven't paid us our full notice pay, or our full redundancy pay, so that's a lot of stress. On top of that I live at my mum's home, with my siblings, and I don't have my own room. I'm literally 28 and still in a bunk-bed, and there's no space to navigate or be alone, and that's starting to cause me a lot of anxiety... I've been trying to get to a place where I can afford to move out for years now and there's always a setback. This will be my third stint of unemployment. I've always tried to educate myself and do what I can to be more employable. I find it very hard to get a well-paid job. I've been looking to elevate myself and I feel like I really have to now start from scratch again.*

*Terri*

The impact of lockdown on pre-existing mental health issues was raised time and again, as were the benefits of talking therapies, and the challenges of having to 'hit crisis' before mental health services could be accessed.

*I've had anxiety on and off for the past few years but it's started creeping up again. Lockdown made it worse, and I wasn't sleeping. I managed to get CBT but had to go on anti-depressants to help me sleep.*

*Dionne*

*Long-term issue with my mental health in terms of severe depression, and more recently, severe anxiety. This situation just sort of exaggerates all the mental health issues you might have pre-existing... I had to quit my work at the beginning of this year for mental health reasons... I had to be at the point where I was really really bad and not able to work. So much of what I've learnt now though therapy – if I'd have had access to that 5 years ago I could have just got on with my life. So I'm frustrated for everyone that you can't really get the support you need until it's almost too late.*

*Christina*

The length of waiting lists for support services were noted by a number of young women. The participants in our focus group discussed how the 'wrong help' can do more damage than good, and stressed the importance of professionals really listening to what young women are asking for, and being honest and up-front about what they can provide.

*One of the organisations I contacted was for some domestic abuse counselling. I explained to my GP the issues I was facing, and instead of her getting me that kind of counselling they sent me for CBT. Although I was grateful because it was somebody to listen to my problems, it wasn't what I needed. And I put my heart on my sleeve, I told her everything, the worse parts of my life which I haven't even shared with my own family and I felt like I wasn't listened to. I was just passed on to the next person, and that really took a toll on me.*

*Tayah*

Many people have struggled to get funds back from businesses where goods or services were purchased before the pandemic and were unfulfilled. But for those on low incomes, who may have quickly seen their earnings drop as the pandemic took hold, claiming back these funds was essential in order to cover basic costs like food and utilities. The difficulty in getting this money back has added further stress to those already suffering.

*Getting my money back from people has been really tough. It's been months and months of back and forth, and it has a real impact on whether people can afford to live, and an impact on mental health in terms of the stress it's caused me, to get back what was mine.*

*Terri*

**To address the combination of pressures adding to an escalating mental health crisis for young women we call for:**

- Greater recognition of the impact that financial pressures and discrimination have on the mental health of young women, and the importance of investment in prevention
- An urgent response to the worsening mental health crisis for young women, prioritising timely therapeutic approaches, support for domestic abuse survivors and early intervention
- More action against those not fulfilling legal obligations to staff around their notice and redundancy pay, and
- More action to uphold consumer rights where unreturned funds are leading to hardship, anxiety and debt.



## Young women facing discrimination and disadvantage pre-pandemic have been the hardest hit

In the 2008 economic crisis we talked about ‘those with the broadest shoulders bearing the greatest burden’. In 2020, it is those that were already facing discrimination and disadvantage pre-pandemic who have been hit the hardest.

Since 2010, the cumulative impact of welfare and tax reforms have had the worst effect on young people, Black and Asian women and women from minority ethnic groups, lone parents and those with disabilities<sup>26</sup>. At the time of writing, we are not aware that any support measures have been announced for these groups in response to the additional challenges presented by the pandemic, beyond the Kickstart Scheme for young people aged 16-24.

Here we set out some of the evidence of the disproportionate impact of the challenges of 2020 on particular groups of young women or Londoners.

As the TUC pointed out in May ‘the impact of coronavirus on BME people has laid bare multiple areas of systemic disadvantage and discrimination... BME people are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, have poorer health outcomes and be concentrated in insecure work where they have access to far fewer employment rights.’<sup>27</sup> The coronavirus crisis has underlined that systemic inequality not only limits the life chances of Black and Asian people and those from minority ethnic groups, but also contributes to prematurely ending their lives.

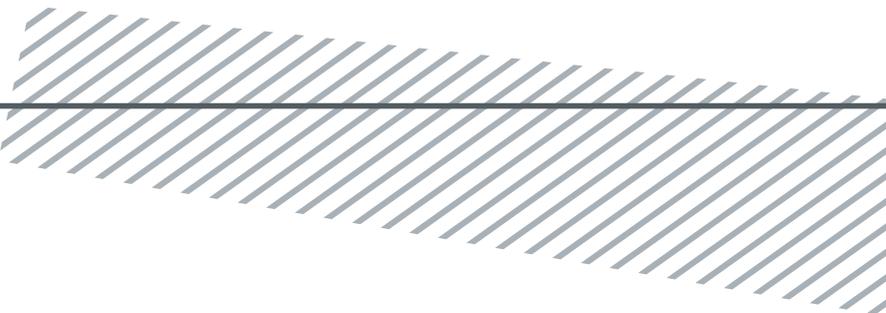
Research by the Peabody Trust found a disproportionate economic impact of the coronavirus crisis on minority ethnic groups in London. ‘Our survey shows that those of African and Caribbean descent were less likely to be furloughed but were then 56% more likely to have lost their job compared with those of European descent. This may be due to higher representation of minority groups in affected sectors.’<sup>28</sup>

Our previous research on the additional challenges faced by young parents and lone parents suggests that the precariousness of their economic situation is likely to place them in the hardest hit group. The impact on children should not be underestimated. The compounding pressures outlined in this report are likely to be felt by children in low income households, whose parents may face a battle to meet their children’s emotional needs whilst managing the multiple stresses in their lives.

<sup>26</sup> 4in10 and Partnership for Young London, 2018

<sup>27</sup> TUC, 2020

<sup>28</sup> Peabody, Sept 2020



We found strong evidence that parents of disabled children in the capital were facing additional struggles. Recent research from the Disabled Children's Partnership<sup>29</sup> found that 74% of mothers with disabled children in London on low incomes have been providing 'a lot more' care during lockdown. Of mums who were receiving support to care for their disabled child, 78% say all support has stopped. More than a third say their household income has dropped as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. It has compounded the challenges many mothers of disabled children already faced, and added new ones as respite, therapies, and support in school have largely stopped and usual routines are disrupted.

Overall, mothers with disabled children talk about extreme exhaustion, stress and sleepless nights. There is an overwhelming feeling of 'being abandoned by society and government', to deal with often complex care, challenging behaviour and medical procedures on their own. 35% think they will go into debt due to the pandemic, and 12% have used a food bank.<sup>30</sup>

*'It's unbelievable that other benefits have been increased due to Covid except carers allowance and child disability payments. It's so difficult for a single mum to find part-time work that fits around caring and hospital appointments. And there is no childcare for disabled children.'*

*Parent of a disabled child in London*

We don't yet have specific evidence of the impact of the coronavirus crisis on young women in London who are migrant workers, or those who have no recourse to public funds. We urge the Greater London Authority to look into impact of coronavirus on women who have no recourse to public funds. The TUC found that migrant workers were disproportionately likely to be in higher risk jobs such as doctors, nurses, care work, cleaning, food production or goods distribution. The TUC report also sets out the additional challenges for disabled people<sup>31</sup>. We support their recommendations for urgent action to assess and meet the particular needs of those with protected characteristics or additional vulnerabilities.

### **To provide protection and level the playing field for the hardest hit, we call for:**

- The government to set out a plan to mitigate the health, housing and economic challenges faced by the 'hardest hit' groups as part of its coronavirus response
- The 'levelling up' agenda to address inequalities within cities, and for those with protected characteristics, as well as across regions.

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<sup>29</sup> Disabled Children's Partnership, 2020

<sup>30</sup> Disabled Children's Partnership, 2020

<sup>31</sup> TUC, May 2020

# UNKNOWN: A SIGNIFICANT DATA GAP MEANS WE ARE PLANNING THE RECOVERY WITH OUR EYES CLOSED

The government doesn't know enough about the detail beneath the top-line labour market statistics to plan effectively for immediate support or for long-term economic recovery. There needs to be greater transparency on the growing economic impact on young women to ensure fairness and to improve policymaking.

Despite strong evidence suggesting that young women are being hit especially hard by the economic fallout of the coronavirus crisis, there remain shortcomings in the official data that is being collected. Although employers are required by law to notify the Government of a proposal to make 20 or more employees redundant there is no requirement as part of this to provide any information about who these people are – for example how many are women, whether they are disabled or their race<sup>32</sup>.

As noted in Young Women's Trust's recent report on the women's data gap, 'We know from previous research on apprenticeships that young women were paid less than young men, less likely to receive training and less likely to progress into employment – in large part because they were not supported to go into higher paid male-dominated sectors such as IT, engineering and construction. It is essential that the Kickstart scheme does not replicate these inequalities. The scheme must be accompanied by guidance on how employers can use positive action measures to mitigate against this.'<sup>33</sup> For example, all placements should be available on a part-time or flexible basis and data should be published across different industries on take up and employment outcomes by sex.

With an unprecedented wave of job losses, we must ensure there is accurate real time information on what is happening in the labour market, and which groups are being most negatively affected by hiring and firing decisions.

For all the reasons set out in this report, young women in London are vulnerable to economic hardship in multiple ways. The better the data we have, the better placed we will be to take swift, targeted and effective action to improve the economic outlook for young women, and build a stronger, fairer recovery.

## **To ensure we have the data to plan for a strong and fair recovery we call for:**

- Requirements for employers to publish redundancy data, including by sex, age and race
- Data on the take up of the Kickstart Scheme and future employment schemes to be published, and broken down by industry, including by sex, age, race, and previous employment status
- The reinstatement of gender pay gap reporting for 2020/21
- Equality impact assessments of economic policy to be published.

<sup>32</sup> Young Women's Trust, Sept 2020

<sup>33</sup> Young Women's Trust, Sept 2020

# CALL TO ACTION: WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?

We have set out a number of practical actions in this report that we can take now and in the coming months to protect young women facing crisis right now in London, and deliver a stronger, fairer economic recovery.

Coronavirus has exposed the widespread gender inequalities in our society, from economic insecurity to unpaid care. Decision makers now have a choice: to consciously plan a stronger and fairer recovery, or to continue with 'business as usual' and deepen the gender divide.

## Our priority actions are:

- A coordinated **reskilling programme** to support young women to build sustainable careers, focusing on those not covered by the Kickstart Scheme and sectors where job losses are concentrated, such as hospitality and retail
- **Access to childcare** for everyone, extending childcare support to all no matter what stage of work or learning they are in
- Policy and guidance on coronavirus to acknowledge the increased **unpaid caring** and domestic work that restrictions place on women
- **Protection from eviction** for those that are unable to find alternative accommodation before the end of their notice period, until April 2021
- An urgent response to the worsening **mental health** crisis for young women, prioritising timely therapeutic approaches, support for domestic abuse survivors and early intervention
- The government to set out a plan to mitigate the health, housing and economic challenges faced by the **'hardest hit' groups** as part of its coronavirus response
- Requirements for employers to publish **redundancy data**, including by sex, age and race.

Above all, we call for decision-makers in London to **listen to young women**. As their powerful words in this report show, they have the knowledge, ideas and drive to contribute to society and succeed. They just need to be heard, to be seen and to have the opportunities to build their own bright futures. As the young women who shaped this report note in the Foreword: when they can thrive and succeed, the whole of society benefits.



## On that note, the final words go to young women themselves:

*Our economy needs to be flexible and adaptable. We need to have schemes available that allow people to get into the jobs that are needed. Like an adult apprenticeship – something for people who already have degrees, but that pays a decent wage. Maybe the government could pay half the wage. A lot of apprenticeships, you have to have never had a degree, or you have to commit to living off a really low wage. It's just impossible to do, especially if you have kids.*

**Terri**

*My hope is to find a job where I can actually use my education and my interests, and not be a burden on society. I am an educated, hard-working person, but it seems like no one will give me a chance. I want long term and full-time employment, just like everyone else has the right to.*

**Dionne**

*I hope that our mental health support can improve. I really hope for equal workplaces in the future.*

*It feels impossible now, but I really hope for it.*

**Christina**

*Just having somebody there to support you when things get tough is beneficial for everybody.*

*My wish is for everybody to get the help that they need to do well.*

**Tayah**

*I hope that people realise that we can't skimp on supporting women and giving them the opportunities they work so hard for. I hope that we get to a point where people value our low paid workers like teachers, nursery staff etc who 'just did childcare'. These people are invaluable and should be paid and supported as such, not just in empty words. I hope that women can use this period of transition to push for things we've been fighting for, for a while.*

*Response to Young Women's Trust survey, August 2020*

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