

Building back a 'gendered' better

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Date

17 June 2020

Briefing Note
from **Policy@Manchester**

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In Summary

1. Long-term and structural gendered patterns form the backdrop to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on productivity.
2. A pattern of occupational segregation is found in all combined authority areas in England.
3. Existing gendered differences in balancing work and care could increase as a result of the UK's response to the pandemic.
4. Combined authorities are key in boosting productivity and will be much more effective if they pay attention to gender.

In Detail

1. The evidence base on gender in combined authority areas

[On Gender](#) was produced by researchers across The University of Manchester to help Greater Manchester and other combined authorities build an evidence base on gender equality across the key policy areas devolved to them.

This collection shows clearly how gender inequality builds over the life cycle, starting with:

- [differing educational and skills-based choices](#) made by young men and women;
- how this leads to [occupation segregation](#);

- women move into part-time work because of the [challenges of combining work and care](#);
- how [gender pay gaps](#) develop and risks of low pay;
- overall leading [to poorer income security in older age](#).

The authors point out that the risks of low pay and of under-employment are not uniformly faced – there are [intersectional risks, felt unevenly by Black, Asian and minority ethnic \(BAME\) women](#) and for women living in different parts of the region.

These **long-term and structural gendered patterns form the backdrop to understanding the impact of the pandemic on productivity** and especially the threat to productivity due to the impact on women's jobs.

2. The gendered impact of the pandemic

Examining the ONS data in the immediate pre-pandemic period, these [charts for all combined authority areas on occupation by gender](#) demonstrate a clear occupational divide.

There are occupations where women are over-represented, such as caring, health and social care; administrative and secretarial roles; leisure, travel and personal service and retail. These are sectors (especially retail and hospitality) which are [particularly badly affected by social distancing, where there is a greater risk of redundancy following furlough](#) and sectors where there are [women-run small businesses so key to the foundational economy](#).

The [charts](#) also show the occupational sectors where men are over-represented like managerial and professional sectors, skilled trades, STEM occupations and construction. These sectors are likely to feature and be keenly promoted in the recovery levelling up agenda and in local industrial strategies; for example, green growth industries or the digital sector. **It will be essential to encourage more women to join these occupations and have a more gender-balanced workforce, which will require well-targeted skills retraining.**

This pattern of [occupational segregation is found in all combined authority areas](#) – but the mix might slightly vary, which is important particularly when it comes to thinking about where to target skills training post-pandemic. For example:

- in the Liverpool City Region there is a very high proportion of women working in leisure, travel and personal service – sectors with risk of redundancy and threat to small businesses run by women;
- and in Cambridge and Peterborough there is a higher than average proportion of women working as Science, Engineering and Technology Associate Professionals – again there has been concern expressed by [early research that the pandemic will have more long-term negative impact for women in STEM than men](#) because they are more likely to be on short-term contracts.

3. Homeworking, childcare and impact on productivity

A second key element of the link between gender and productivity is the need for childcare.

The analysis of [rate of employment for men and women](#) for each combined authority area demonstrates across all the areas that in the child-bearing years women are much more likely to be working part-time because of the difficulty of managing work and care.

Again early evidence from the lockdown period suggests that the **existing gendered differences in balancing work and care could increase and become more entrenched with consequent impact on productivity.**

- The Resolution Foundation suggests [women are more likely to be in a job which can be done from home](#) – with risks to their productivity due to childcare and homeworking duties and the consequent pressures from balancing work and care.
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies shows under lockdown there is an [imbalance in the care and home schooling which mothers and fathers undertake](#).
- In the sectors where recovery plans are likely to be targeted through local industrial strategies, such as the digital industries, combined authorities and local employers will need to consider the pressure on households to manage work and care especially if working from home.
- Without support from employers, the existing [culture and expectation in digital industries](#) is not conducive to attracting and retaining women in these sectors.

4. What can combined authorities do to 'build back (a gendered) better'?

Combined authorities and metro mayors are absolutely key in boosting productivity – and will be much more effective if they pay attention to gender:

- in developing local industrial strategies – looking at sectors they hope to grow and understanding the gender mix there, especially in sectors like digital and green technologies and [low-carbon sectors](#);
- in directing budgets to support skills training and new business development and innovation – they can target specific groups of workers – men and women, and recognising intersectional risks faced by some employees – and build skills in the right sectors;
- in using their soft powers with local employers and businesses to encourage parent and carer friendly working expectations;
- and developing the right transport options so those needing to transition from lost jobs in one sector or place can travel to retrain or take new jobs elsewhere and manage work and care.

Author



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