

All In It Together? The Unequal Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis



Executive Council Statement
to the 2021 ADM



Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

Foreword by Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary



Since the Coronavirus crisis began at the end of 2019, our lives have changed in ways we would never have believed possible prior to the pandemic. Some of our members lost their lives to the virus. Many more are grieving the loss of loved ones and will be for some time yet to come. All of us have faced restrictions on the ways in which we have lived and worked and we have all felt challenged and at times afraid.

2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the worst years many of us will have lived through in a very long time but as well as reminding us about what we most treasure and value – our families, our wellbeing and our way of life – the crisis has also shown us that together we are stronger. The last 12 months have taught many more people what we in the Trade Union Movement have always known – that collectivism and solidarity are not just slogans but are in fact the very things that are helping us pull through the crisis. We have all made sacrifices for the good of people more vulnerable than we might be – people we may never meet and will never know. But our willingness to take these actions has shown that collective action is a powerful force for change.

The crisis has also shown that the workers who have kept the country running through the Coronavirus crisis – many of them Usdaw members – are too often underpaid, invisible and undervalued by society. Of course we have always known this. But for many thousands of people 2020 was the year in which they saw perhaps for the first time that society and indeed our very survival, rests not on the shoulders of hedge fund managers or internet entrepreneurs but instead lies with nurses, care home workers, shop workers, delivery drivers and many more low paid undervalued key workers. The nation came outside every Thursday evening during the first national lockdown to show our appreciation for the hard work and dedication of millions of key workers.

Right from the outset trade unions were calling for the efforts of key workers to be recognised not just with warm words and gestures but with meaningful action, access to the correct PPE, a meaningful pay rise particularly focused on raising the minimum wage which would immediately improve the pay of two million key workers and an end to insecure work.

The Coronavirus has dramatically exposed the structural inequalities in our society. Where there is poverty, prejudice and discrimination, the virus has left a trail of broken lives in its wake and we will not rest until those divides have been closed.

It is women, many of them young women, Black workers, disabled and LGBT workers who have borne the biggest health and economic risks from the crisis.

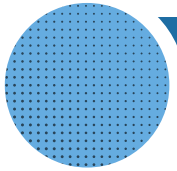
I am pleased on behalf of the Executive Council to present this statement on the unequal impact of the Coronavirus pandemic to reps and members and I hope you will find it to be a practical tool for organising around the issues it discusses. It is clear that the Coronavirus crisis has intensified the pressures the retail sector was already facing and it is imperative as we move into 2021 and beyond that low paid workers do not pay the price not only for the pandemic but also for the wider structural changes taking place in how we shop and how work is organised.

Trade unions are going to be vital to rebuilding our economy so that it works for working people and in particular for key workers and their families. We support the calls made by the TUC and others for a National Recovery Council to provide support to sectors such as retail bringing the experience and expertise of trade unions from the shop floor into the highest levels of decision making to influence the long-term rebuilding of our economy.

This Executive Council Statement sets out why this work is so vital and I urge you to consider it and to act upon it in your workplace and your community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Paddy Lillis'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Paddy Lillis
General Secretary



Contents

	Page
Section 1	Inequality Prior to Covid-19 4
Section 2	Women and the Coronavirus Crisis 6
Section 3	Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Workers and the Coronavirus Crisis 10
Section 4	LGBT Workers and the Coronavirus Crisis 14
Section 5	Disabled Workers and the Coronavirus Crisis 18
Section 6	Coronavirus and the Trade Union Response 20
Appendix	Maternity Suspension 22

1 Inequality Prior to Covid-19

The Coronavirus pandemic is a global public health crisis on a scale never before experienced.

People in the UK and around the world continue to mourn and also to care for loved ones affected by the virus. But as well as posing an unprecedented physical health crisis, it became clear very early on in the pandemic that Coronavirus was also triggering a devastating social and economic crisis. Inequalities that already existed in the UK and beyond, but that were at times hard for many people to see, suddenly came into much sharper focus. The virus does not discriminate, but its impact does – exposing deep weaknesses in the way our society and the world of work are structured.

Prior to the start of the current crisis inequality in the UK was going from bad to worse. During the crisis, Usdaw has campaigned to tackle this inequality through the campaign for a New Deal for Workers.

The Coronavirus pandemic struck the UK after 10 years of austerity and cuts to public services. Research by the TUC shows that the richest people in the country did not shoulder any of the burdens during a decade of austerity; at the beginning of 2020 the very wealthiest households owned five times more than the bottom 50%. Or to put another way, those at the top owned 45% of the total wealth of the country, while the bottom 50% of households owned just 9%.

Throughout the last 10 years working people particularly low paid workers and their families often struggled to make ends meet due to the longest pay squeeze in two centuries and the impact of austerity on their earnings. This meant that working people and particularly the lowest paid were less well able to deal with the economic and social shocks that the pandemic brought.

Women workers have been particularly hard hit due in part to the fact that inequality between women and men at work was already steadily and at times sharply increasing.

Women were disproportionately more likely to be in low paid and in insecure employment. At the start of 2020 women were, and still are, the majority of low paid workers making up nearly seven out of ten of all low wage earners. Over half of all zero-hours workers were women and nearly six out of ten self-employed workers.

Poverty in the UK at the point at which the crisis struck was highly feminised and women continue to be the majority of people living in poverty; female-headed households are more likely to be poor and prior to Covid-19 women were more likely to struggle with debt and bills.

On average, women carried out 60% more unpaid work than men. Women in the UK earn less and own less and women are more likely to experience domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

The Coronavirus crisis exposed the deep structural inequalities that exist in our society not just in terms of gender equality but also in relation to race and the position of Black workers in the UK labour market. The review by Baroness Doreen Lawrence into why the crisis has had such a severe impact on Black workers in the UK found that Black and minority ethnic people (BME for short) had been ‘overexposed, under protected, stigmatised and overlooked.’ Baroness Lawrence said:

“This has been generations in the making. The impact of Covid-19 is not random, but foreseeable and inevitable – the consequence of decades of structural injustice, inequality and discrimination that blights our society. We are in the middle of an avoidable crisis”.

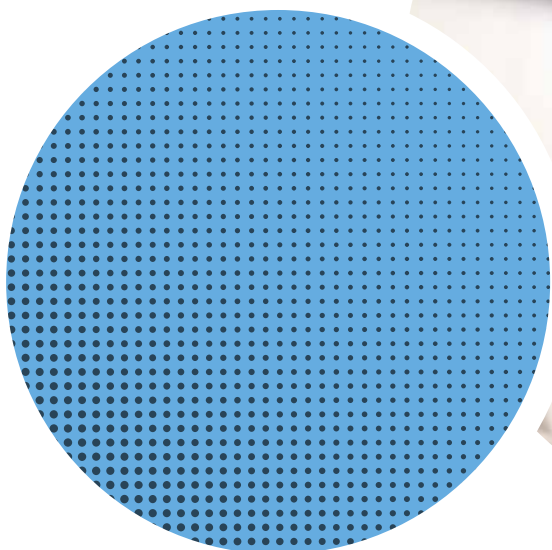
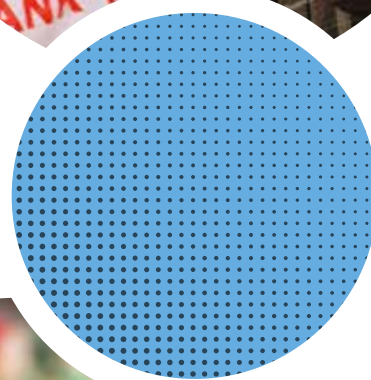
No discussion about inequality in the UK prior to 2020 can leave out the position of disabled workers who are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled workers. As the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) say in their 2019 report ‘Being Disabled in Britain – a Journey Less Equal’ – in many respects the UK has failed to make progress in tackling disability inequality and in many areas things have gone backwards. The EHRC report says:

“Disabled people are being left behind in comparison with others in society; some groups of disabled people – in particular those with mental health conditions and learning disabilities – experience even greater barriers. More families that include a disabled person live in poverty; access to mental health care is inadequate; and housing and transport fail to support disabled people to live independently and fulfil their potential and aspirations. The conclusion we must draw from the evidence is that disabled people are still being treated as second-class citizens.”

When we think about inequality in the UK prior to the onset of the Coronavirus crisis we need also to address the prejudice and discrimination experienced by so many LGBT workers. Whilst legal equality for LGBT workers may have been in large part achieved, attitudes have been very slow to follow suit and for many LGBT workers in Usdaw their experience of the world of work continues to be marred by hostility, stigma and unfair treatment. More than a third of LGBT workers still feel they have to hide that they are LGBT at work for fear of discrimination. Almost one in five LGBT workers have been the target of negative comments or conduct from work colleagues because they are LGBT and one in eight Trans people have been physically attacked by customers or colleagues in the last year.

All of this matters because the crisis that began in 2020 with the arrival of the Coronavirus into the UK and around the world has not clearly affected everyone equally. The Government may have been fond of telling us that we are all in it together but it is clear that some groups in society are far more 'in it' than others.

In the next sections we go on to look at the particular impacts of the crisis on women, Black workers, disabled and LGBT workers.



Key Facts

Women are the majority of health and care workers. 77% of healthcare workers are women as are 83% of the social care workforce.

The majority of the retail workforce are women. The British Retail Consortium warn that of those retail workers most at risk of job losses right now due to the changes hitting the industry, 70% of them are women.

This means women are the majority of workers with the highest exposure to Covid-19. Of the 3,200,000 workers in 'high risk' roles 77% are women.

Over a million of these workers are paid below 60% median wages and 98% of those workers are women.

Key Issues

Parents and Carers

The Coronavirus crisis has posed huge challenges to working parents and carers, the majority of whom are women. Disruption to the labour market caused by the impact of Covid-19 has had a huge impact on working families' lives, particularly the lives of working parents.

A big challenge for Usdaw members who are working mothers, before as well as during the Coronavirus crisis, has been how to balance paid work with caring responsibilities. These difficulties have intensified since the crisis began and have undoubtedly damaged women's equal access to employment.

Not having enough childcare for working parents risks reversing decades of progress women have made in the labour market and increasing the gender pay gap, as well as having a damaging impact on our national economic productivity.

Earlier on in the crisis necessary measures such as the mass and prolonged closure of schools and childcare settings and social isolation restrictions that prevented friends and family providing informal childcare support has meant working parents became full-time carers for their children.

Due to the unequal division of care in households this created new, additional demands and burdens on working women. Several studies showed that it was women who were bearing the brunt of extra childcare and housework and who were losing jobs in greater numbers than men.

As employers made decisions about job losses and cuts to hours in response to the economic slowdown it was women with caring responsibilities who, as so often happens at times of recession and downturn, were very often given the push. The Institute for Fiscal Studies and the UCL Institute of Education have found that mothers were 47% more likely to have permanently lost their job or quit as a result of the crisis.

This has led leading gender equality campaigners to talk about a crisis in women's employment that could set their workplace equality back decades. The Fawcett Society have talked about the prospect of a two-tier workplace where men continue working full-time and women cut their hours or even have to give up work as a result of school closures, lack of childcare and other caring commitments.

"It's taken us 20 years to get this far on female participation in the workforce, but it could take only months to unravel."

Udaw officers have worked incredibly hard to try to get employers to financially support staff who cannot work because either they or a member of their household are self-isolating or because of prolonged school closures.

Low paid parents are facing real problems when it comes to dealing with what can often be multiple periods of absence from work because their children are unable to attend school or nursery as the crisis continues. In some instances it has been possible to get employers to pay parents unable to attend work but in the vast majority of cases this has not been the case.

The Government needs to do more. The statutory self-isolation payment of £500 called the 'track and trace support payment', paid to low paid workers in England (similar schemes operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) who have to self-isolate and cannot go to work, cannot currently be claimed by parents who cannot work because their child is self-isolating.

The track and trace support payment can be claimed by anyone in receipt of Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit who is employed, self-employed and unable to work from home. To be eligible you must also have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either if you have tested positive for Coronavirus or you have been in close contact of a positive case. Many parents, particularly those in low paid work, have not been allowed to adapt their way of working to keep their job through the current crisis.

Working parents have faced intense pressure over the last 10 months. School closures, periods of self-isolation and a lack of reliance on the usual informal childcare networks have meant unpaid leave, worries about money and the threat of having to give up work altogether.

Parents are facing job losses and financial hardship as they try to juggle employment and childcare responsibilities while caring for children who are unable to attend school or nursery.

Domestic Violence

It comes as no surprise to read that the Covid-19 crisis has led to a sharp escalation in domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

We know now that essential lockdown measures and the economic fallout of the pandemic have intensified violence in the home for millions of women and children around the world. Women have borne the brunt of this and emergency calls to helplines and online searches for help have risen by as much as 300%.

The crisis has led to higher numbers of domestic homicides too.

Because of their unequal position in society, women are often to be at a disadvantage during crises, epidemics and now this pandemic and as a result domestic violence tends to increase. For instance, following the 2010 Canterbury earthquake in New Zealand there was a 53% rise in domestic violence.

Steps to control the spread of Coronavirus mean that many people were isolated at home with an abuser. There may also have been additional tensions in the home such as increased money worries. Although of course these can never be an excuse for abuse.

Isolation, social distancing and the fear generated by the virus offered new opportunities for abusers to intimidate and control partners. These factors made it more difficult for survivors to access safety and support networks.

Lockdown was challenging and difficult for everyone and many of our members were still going out to work but were otherwise confined at home. Families were under pressure like never before.

Many of our members will not have been able to reach out for help for fear of being overheard at home.

The head of the United Nations Women's Agency has talked about another kind of pandemic – that of violence against women which, she said *“pre-dates the virus and will outlive it.”*

Last year alone worldwide 243 million women and girls experienced sexual or physical violence from their partner. The crisis has intensified and also shone a light on the issue like never before.



Women and the Coronavirus Crisis

Pregnancy and Maternity Rights

The rise in discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace over the last decade is well documented. The crisis has, in many ways, reinforced the inequality pregnant women workers experience in the labour market. At the outset of the pandemic crisis, Usdaw recognised that immediate action must be taken in order to protect the health, safety and pay of pregnant women.

We already knew prior to the crisis that most pregnant women members encounter problems enforcing their legal right to a suitable and appropriate risk assessment. There is widespread lack of awareness amongst employers of the significant protections the law affords to pregnant women workers. It soon became evident in the early weeks of the pandemic that most employers were unaware of the steps they had to take to properly protect the health, safety and pay of women workers during pregnancy.

Whilst many employers then acted to put in place measures to protect the health and safety of their workforce, there was (and still is) a great deal of confusion as to the specific rights pregnant women have to be offered suitable alternative work where their job duties or the workplace put them at risk.

Almost all pregnant women members in Usdaw workplaces are doing jobs that heightened their risk of exposure to Coronavirus. Of course the vast majority of members were unable to work from home and so pregnant women who could not be given safe, suitable, alternative roles were sent home. So far, so good, given that Government guidance was for pregnant women to shield away from the workplace and stay at home wherever possible.

But most employers then got it wrong. Pregnant women were only paid the equivalent of Statutory Sick Pay or just their contractual earnings and not their 'normal' pay. Almost without exception employers appeared unaware of the right pregnant women have to be suspended on full pay where suitable and safe alternative job roles do not exist.

This meant significant numbers of our members were at risk of missing out on pay both at the time they were shielding and also in terms of whether or not they would qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay.

The Government's failure to send a strong message to employers about their legal duties to protect the health and safety of pregnant women and in particular the right of women in certain circumstances to 'maternity suspension' allowed confusion to flourish and meant many pregnant women being treated unfavourably. You can find a summary of the rights of pregnant women members in relation to maternity suspension in the Appendix on page 22.

The fact that employers were paying pregnant women only the equivalent of SSP or their contractual earnings not only reduced the pay women and their families received at the time but also meant many of the Union's women members were at risk of not qualifying for Statutory Maternity Pay.

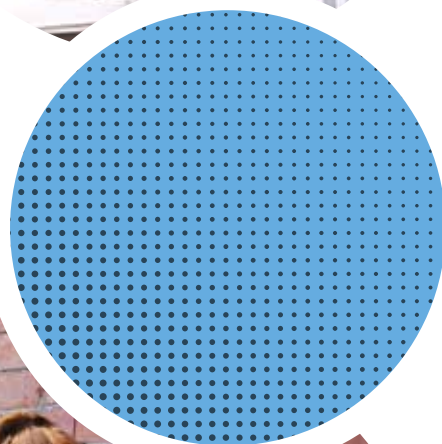


Redundancy

Redundancy has been another major area of concern for pregnant women and new mothers during the crisis. Evidence soon emerged that, unlike in the economic recession that followed the 2008 financial crash, it was women – and especially working mothers – whose jobs were at greatest risk as Government Covid-19 support schemes wound down and the UK economy contracted.

As far back as January 2017 the Government accepted the case for strengthening existing legal protections against unfair redundancy for new mothers but at the time of writing has still not done so. As pregnant women and new mothers continue to face a new wave of discrimination and unfair redundancies, urgent action is needed if we are not to see a reversal of years of progress on the gender pay gap and other inequalities.

Usdaw along with other major trade unions has supported a private members bill by Maria Miller, MP which would replace the existing, wholly inadequate legal protection against redundancy for new mothers with a new framework. This would mean that both pregnant women and new mothers can be made redundant only in very limited circumstances.



Key Facts

It is well documented that Black and minority ethnic workers and communities have been disproportionately affected by Coronavirus, with the most devastating impact being the high number of deaths, especially among key workers delivering essential services. We go on to consider why this might be later in this section but first let us establish the facts.

Between 15% and 17% of Usdaw's members are BME – that is between 60,000 and almost 70,000 members.

Some key factors which have placed BME workers at greater risk are:

- Levels of in work poverty are disproportionately higher in BME communities, as racial discrimination traps BME workers in low-waged occupations and some of the most insecure and exploitative jobs.
- There are around 3.9 million BME working people in the UK who are far more likely to be in precarious jobs than white workers.
- BME workers are more likely to be on zero-hours contracts – one in 24 BME workers are on zero-hours contracts compared to one in 42 white workers.
- BME employees are over-represented in the lowest paid occupations and under-represented in the highest paid occupations.
- An ONS study on ethnicity pay gaps showed that, on average, BME employees earn 3.8% less than white employees. This varies by region, rising as high as 21.7% in London.
- BME workers are disproportionately working in the frontline jobs that are keeping our communities going during this crisis like retail, warehousing and distribution.

Key Issues

BME Workers at Higher Risk of Exposure to the Virus

In May 2020 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) published an analysis of the number of Black and minority ethnic (BME) workers that had died because of Covid-19.

The analysis shows that when taking into account age, Black men and Black women are 4.2 and 4.3 times more likely than white men and women to die from Coronavirus.

Similarly, men in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic group were 1.8 times more likely to have a Coronavirus-related death than white men.

In the early days BME workers' voices were missing from the debate and so theories like BME workers are less likely to wear a face covering or are more likely to ignore social distancing emerged as reasons.

It was also suggested that something about being Black or Asian, something about a person's ethnic origins and their genetics puts them at greater risk.

What these factors have in common is that they all placed the blame on BME workers and their communities.

Instead the real reasons are to do with race discrimination in the labour market, in society and in the workplace as the facts above and the experience of Usdaw's BME members opposite bear out.

The Experience of Usdaw's BME Members

In early April Usdaw conducted a survey of over 7,000 of our members to better understand their experiences of working through the current crisis.

We also organised a gathering of Black and minority ethnic (BME) members via Zoom last October to give them the opportunity to share their experiences of living and working through the pandemic with the Union.

In several respects there are striking differences between the experiences of BME and white members which reflect many of the wider social and economic inequalities underlying the disproportionate health impact of Covid-19.

Job Roles

A far higher proportion of BME respondents told us they worked in sectors other than those where the Union is well organised including the fast food sector, cleaning and security roles.

One fifth of BME members compared to only 1.5% of white members worked in sectors and roles far less likely to be highly unionised. They are therefore far less likely to be benefiting from the work done by Usdaw officials to negotiate safe working practices, pay protection and job security during the crisis.

Verbal Abuse

We asked our members to tell us if they had experienced verbal abuse in the workplace since the start of the pandemic.

Our BME members were more likely to report being threatened – 28.3% of BME members compared to 17.3% of white members.

This difference is significant (more than a quarter of BME members compared to less than a fifth of white members) and is, we believe, accounted for by the following factors:

- The roles performed by BME members are those that are more likely to bring them into conflict with the public, ie acting as marshals/security policing entry into stores and social distancing in store.
- Again, this demonstrates that BME workers are in higher risk roles both in terms of exposure to risk and to abuse at work. The erosion of social distancing in shops means BME workers are being exposed to even greater risk and abuse as they try to enforce this.
- BME members are almost twice more likely to have experienced physical violence than white members, 16.3% of BME members experiencing violence compared to 8.7% since the 'outbreak'.

Time off Sick or to Self-Isolate

Higher numbers of BME members have taken time off sick or self-isolated than white members, more than a third compared to just over a quarter but there are very significant differences in terms of financial security whilst away from work.

More than half (53.8%) or one in two BME members reported that they did not know what they would be paid during a period of sickness or self-isolation compared to just over a quarter (or one in four) of white members.

This is strongly suggestive of an economy where BME workers are in less secure work and less well organised workplaces or feel less able to ask their employer about what they are entitled to.

More than twice as many Usdaw BME members report not receiving any pay during this period than white members.

Casualisation and the lack of employment rights that goes with it have undoubtedly had a disproportionate impact on BME workers.

As far back as 2014 TUC research found that temporary working increased by 25% amongst Black workers and only by 10% amongst white workers over the previous four year period. In 2014, one in ten Black workers were in temporary employment compared to just 6% of white workers.



Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Workers and the Coronavirus Crisis

In our survey BME members were also less likely to receive both full average pay and full contractual pay whilst away from work with less than 2% of BME members in receipt of full contractual pay during sickness absence. This compares to more than a fifth (22.6%) of white members, more than twenty times less likely.

BME members were also:

- Three times as likely not to know what they were supposed to be being paid.
- Less likely than white members to receive full pay during furlough.

Racism in the labour market means BME workers are far more likely to be employed in lower paid roles and several studies show that employers are more likely to top-up the wages of those in the middle/higher end of grading structures as they are perceived to be of greater value to the business.

Having a Voice at Work

Similar numbers of BME and white members had raised concerns with their employer – over two-thirds which clearly reflects the high levels of concern that workers have about whether they are safe at work during the crisis.

However, BME members are significantly less likely to be satisfied with their employer's response (just over a third reported being completely or mostly satisfied compared to almost half of white members) than white members. This suggests that concerns raised by BME workers are not addressed as rigorously as those raised by white members.

Because so many BME workers are on precarious contracts in unorganised sectors they often feel far less able to raise concerns or where they do these are more likely to be ignored.

Usdaw recently represented one such member on a zero-hours contract who after raising concerns about poor social distancing at work found his hours cut from an average of 40 a week down to eight.

Rise in Racist Attacks

Another impact of the Coronavirus on BME workers has been the increase in racist attacks and abuse.

Chinese people and those wrongly perceived to be Chinese have been specifically targeted.

The number of offences reported in the first three months of 2020 almost tripled compared to the same period for 2018 and 2019 and rose again by a third since the lockdown was eased in May, with figures significantly higher than previous years.

The harassment ranges from abuse on public transport and Chinese owned take-away businesses, racist graffiti on shop windows and in the workplace online as well as physical violence at work, on the streets or around international student hostels.

Deputy Chief Constable, Mark Hamilton, the national policing lead for hate crime, has made it clear *"no one is responsible for the outbreak and everyone has a right to be protected from targeted abuse."*

What the statistics do not tell us is what it feels like to be the victim of racist abuse. Those who experience hate crime say it has a devastating effect on their lives making them feel anxious, frightened, depressed and angry.

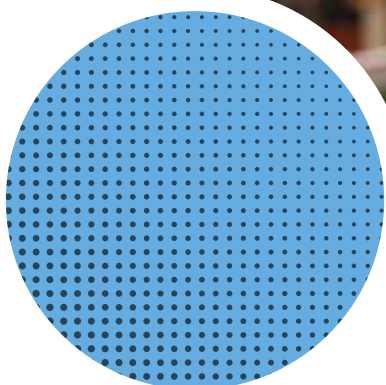
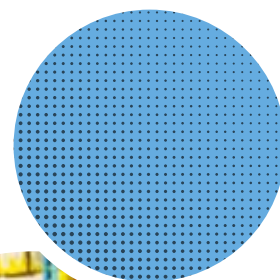
The 'Monitoring Group' a leading anti-racist charity that monitors racist abuse, harassment and violence and supports those that have experienced it have shared the following experiences that help to illustrate the long lasting and serious harm racism causes:

- A young student from Singapore was spat at on the underground by a member of the public. She stated nobody came to her assistance although she was shouting for help. Now she is terrified and will not go outside without her flat mate.
- In another call to their helpline a woman cried as she talked about her experience of being racially abused when she was outside. A man swore at her, blocked her path and called her a 'monkey'. Since then she has not felt able to go out as she is so scared of a repeat. The daily exercise helped with her health symptoms and now she feels this option is not available to her for fear of attack.

What Action Does Usdaw Believe is Needed?

We need robust and urgent action to tackle racism in the labour market and the casualisation through which it finds expression. The root causes rather than the outcomes of poverty and decades of systemic discrimination must be considered and addressed.

Visit Usdaw's 'Together Against Hate' Campaign page to find out more about what hate crime is, how to report it and to download campaign leaflets and a poster that you can display in your workplace.
www.usdaw.org.uk/Campaigns/Together-Against-Hate



Whilst life changed for us all when the Coronavirus crisis was triggered in Spring 2020 its impact and more specifically the measures the Government introduced to control the spread of the virus has affected LGBT people in a unique way. This Executive Council Statement makes clear, that whilst the virus might not discriminate, the way in which the UK economy and society is structured does. The facts below explain why social distancing and the requirement to remain 'at home' during periods of lockdown pose particular problems for LGBT people and communities.

Key Facts

What if it is not safe to stay at home?

- Almost one in five LGBT people (18%) have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.
- Almost a quarter of young people at risk of homelessness are LGBT, usually because their families reject them.
- More than one in ten LGBT people have faced domestic abuse from a partner, rising to 19% for Trans people.

What if you cannot be yourself at home or in your community?

- Only half of lesbian, gay and bi people (46%) and Trans people (47%) feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity to everyone in their family.
- Three in ten bi men (30%) and almost one in ten bi women (8%), say they cannot be open about their sexual orientation with any of their friends, compared to 2% of gay men and 1% of lesbians.
- Half of Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people (51%) have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from others in their local LGBT community because of their ethnicity.

What if you have had to flee your home?

- LGBT asylum seekers and refugees are staying in cramped rooms with strangers, putting their lives at risk. They already face intrusive questions about their faith, race and LGBT identity when seeking safety in the UK.

What if you do not feel safe leaving home?

- One in five LGBT people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months.
- Two in five Trans people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in the last 12 months.
- The number of LGBT people who have experienced a hate crime or incident in the last year because of their sexual orientation has risen by 78% since 2013.

Access to Healthcare

- Already, two in five Trans people experience a lack of understanding of their specific health needs when accessing general healthcare services. Now they face delays or cancellations on essential gender-affirming treatment which many have been waiting years to access.
- One in seven LGBT people (14%) have avoided treatment for fear of discrimination because they are LGBT.

Key Issues

Invisibility

There cannot be any doubt that the Coronavirus crisis has highlighted and deepened the stark inequalities that exist for particular groups of people in UK society. However, the impact that the crisis is having on lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans (LGBT) communities has been absent from much of the narrative so far.

LGBT communities already face a wide range of inequalities throughout their lives borne out by the facts above. Therefore, it will come as no surprise that they are disproportionately affected by the crisis but the ways in which they have been disadvantaged has to a large extent remained hidden from public view.

This can, in part, be explained by the lack of routine sexual orientation and Trans status monitoring by the Government and service providers. For example, neither questions are asked in the national census. This means that many of the issues that affect LGBT people are invisible giving meaning to the phrase – *“what can’t be measured doesn’t exist.”*

Social Isolation

Isolation is a key concern for many LGBT people and although older LGBT people are more likely to feel isolated it does not exclusively affect them.

A survey into the impact of the pandemic on LGBT people’s lives and communities by the national campaigning and support organisation ‘The LGBT Foundation’ found that:

- 27% of all respondents said that increased isolation was one of their top three concerns related to the crisis.
- 25% said that they would like some support to reduce their isolation such as a befriending service.

In their report the LGBT Foundation make clear that although social distancing measures mean that many of us feel more isolated than ever this is of particular concern to LGBT people for the following reasons:

- LGBT people are more likely to have a ‘chosen family’, which describes people viewing their close friends as their family, often due to family rejection.
- People may be less likely to live with their chosen family compared to their biological family so may have been and continue to be separated from those closest to them during the crisis.

Additionally, something that many LGBT people are finding difficult is being isolated away from others in LGBT communities and being unable to access LGBT specific spaces, compounded by the fact that Pride festivals and events could only go ahead digitally last year.

Access to Support

Many LGBT people rely on LGBT communities and spaces for vital support, understanding and friendship. Therefore, a lack of access to LGBT specific spaces and a reduction in people’s ability to socialise with other LGBT people is heightening isolation in these communities and making people feel that their LGBT identity is becoming invisible.

For many LGBT people having to rely on support from others can cause anxiety as those providing support may not be accepting of LGBT identities. This is particularly concerning for older LGBT people who have grown up in a world hostile to their identities. This can and does prevent a significant number of LGBT people from accessing the support they need and are entitled to.

Health and Mental Health

The pandemic is having a profound impact on many people’s mental health and wellbeing, with the World Health Organisation warning that this impact is likely to be far reaching and long lasting. LGBT people may be particularly affected, as they are more likely to experience poor mental health than the general population because of their experience of stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

A study of LGBTQ people’s experience during the pandemic by University College London (UCL) and Sussex University found 69% of respondents suffered depressive symptoms rising to about 90% of those who had experienced homophobia or transphobia.

The co-chair of the helpline Switchboard reported that the volume of calls during the first period of national lockdown was a third higher than the same period last year. *“There were 44% more conversations where people were struggling and 57% more conversations talking about isolation.”*

The LGBT Foundation, whose helpline received 25% more calls about suicidal thoughts during lockdown, has since said that demand for support had continued to rise despite pandemic restrictions easing. The charity said mental health crisis calls had increased by 123% in July 2020, calls about abuse by 86%, those about domestic violence by 65% and substance misuse by 50%.

LGBT Workers and the Coronavirus Crisis

International Issues

Many LGBT campaigning organisations and trade unions are concerned that the Coronavirus crisis has enabled Governments across the world to halt progress or roll back rights for LGBT people.

Even before the onset of the pandemic many organisations monitoring LGBT rights across the world expressed serious concerns that rights were being eroded.

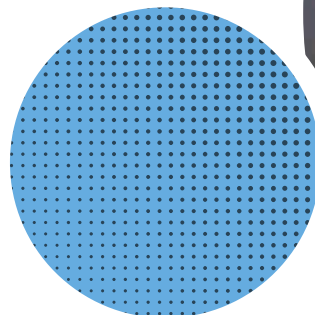
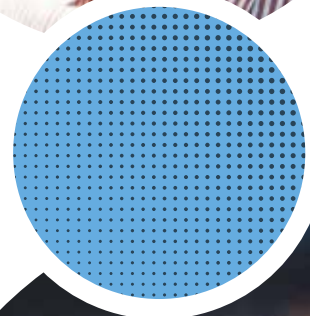
For example in their 2019 Annual Rainbow Europe Map and Index Report, ILGA (the international LGBTQ rights group) found that European countries have backslid on several fronts when it comes to LGBTQ rights for the first time in a 10 year period.

These backward steps, according to ILGA-Europe's report, include the Bulgarian Government's removal of procedures for people to change their name and gender on legal documents and the failure of Hungary and Turkey 'to uphold fundamental civil and political rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of association and protection of human rights defenders over the past year.'

ILGA-Europe Executive Director Evelyne Paradis said in a statement at the time of the report's publication:

"Last year, we warned about the dangers of thinking that the work was done. Sadly, this year, we see concrete evidence of rollback at political and legislative levels in a growing number of countries. There is no more time to waste."

There are many who are legitimately concerned that attacks on LGBT rights may be accelerated and disguised by the ongoing Coronavirus crisis.





Key Facts

Statistics published by the Office for National Statistics in September 2020 make it clear that the Coronavirus crisis is disproportionately affecting disabled people and their families.

A particular issue for disabled people is the impact on their health among those who were not receiving the same level of medical care as they had before the pandemic. This is a different picture from the experience of non-disabled people during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Equally social isolation and loneliness is having a greater impact on the mental health of disabled people than non-disabled people.

- Over eight in ten (83%) disabled people compared with around seven in ten (71%) non-disabled people said they were “*very worried*” or “*somewhat worried*” about the effect that the Coronavirus pandemic was having on their life in September 2020.
- All wellbeing ratings of disabled people remained poorer in September 2020 compared with a similar period prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. Almost half (47%) of disabled people reported high anxiety (a score of six out of ten or higher) in September 2020 compared with less than a third (29%) of non-disabled people.
- Disabled people reported more frequently than non-disabled people in September 2020 that the Coronavirus pandemic is affecting their wellbeing because it makes their mental health worse (41% for disabled people and 20% for non-disabled people), they are feeling lonely (45% and 32%), they spend too much time alone (40% and 29%), they feel like a burden on others (24% and 8%) or have no-one to talk to about their worries (24% and 12%).

Key Issues

Money Worries

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions tend to have lower real incomes and higher costs than the general population. Even before the Covid-19 crisis benefit cuts and austerity hit disabled people the hardest.

Changes to the social security system over the past 10 years have left disabled adults four times worse off financially than non-disabled adults according to research commissioned by the Disability Benefit Consortium. Nearly half of those living in poverty, 6.9 million people, are from families which include a disabled person. Disabled members have voiced concerns the pandemic will push them and their families into poverty.

Delays in benefit assessments and the re-imposition of sanctions and deductions from benefits to repay loans borrowed from the Department of Work and Pensions whilst they wait for their award to be paid have made the situation even worse.

At Greater Risk of Unemployment and Redundancy

Research into the impact of the 2008-2009 recession shows that disabled employees were more likely to experience negative changes to terms and conditions and working practices, such as wage freezes, reduced overtime and the re-organisation of work than non-disabled people during the recession.

Economic downturns also have a disproportionate negative impact on the employment of disabled people, with research finding that during upturns disabled people are the last to gain employment and during downturns they are first to be made unemployed.

Disabled people are justifiably concerned that this experience may be repeated in the expected economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 crisis. Disabled people already face significant barriers in getting and keeping jobs, as evidenced by the disability employment gap which stands at almost 30%. The disability employment gap remains at a high rate despite the Government's 2015 manifesto pledge to halve it. Although no time frame was set for this, at the time of the pledge the employment gap was 34% meaning that, far from halving, it has only shrunk by around 1% a year since the Government outlined its ambitions.

Difficulties Negotiating and/or Holding on to Reasonable Adjustments

At the best of times disabled members tell us they find it difficult to get and keep in place the reasonable adjustments they need to do their job. They tell us there are many reasons why their adjustments are hard to get, for example when their employers do not understand their legal obligations and are hard to keep in place particularly when their line manager or job role changes. The Coronavirus crisis has undoubtedly made an already difficult situation for disabled workers worse as members who have fought long and hard for reasonable adjustments are finding those adjustments under threat at the present time as employers main focus is on social distancing.

Furthermore, the crisis has highlighted the appallingly low rate of Statutory Sick Pay. The present situation poses particular challenges for disabled members who are going into work. For example, a member with a visual impairment working in a warehouse who cannot observe social distancing or someone with health anxiety who cannot cope with going into work. Assuming the disadvantages each of these members face cannot be removed or reduced by reasonable adjustments, they have little option but to approach their doctor for a fit note meaning their income will drop to SSP.

Mental Health

The experience of working on the 'frontline' in critical industries throughout the pandemic has undoubtedly been traumatic for thousands of Usdaw members and many will need time and support to process and come to terms with their experiences.

The situation for disabled workers is even more grave as many with pre-existing mental health conditions are finding it difficult, sometimes impossible, to access appropriate support. Others have developed a new mental health problem as the Coronavirus crisis has increased levels of anxiety, confusion and fear for many disabled people. There are several reasons for this including their experience of social isolation and a lack of access to mental health support services in the community. Disabled people have also talked about feeling abandoned by the Government and expressed fears of being denied life-saving health care. Other factors include the daily emotional toll of juggling care, families and securing food deliveries.

Difficulties Social Distancing and Problems Caused By Face Coverings

Social distancing is a challenge for everyone but for the millions of people who live with a hidden disability such as sight loss, dementia or autism it can be particularly difficult. Research by the RNIB (Royal National Institute for Blind People) found that of the disabled people they surveyed, almost two-thirds said that maintaining a two metre distance presents them with problems and this causes them to worry about compromising their own safety and the safety of others.

Udaw has lent its support to a campaign launched last Autumn by RNIB and the Hidden Disability Sunflower Scheme that enables anyone who finds social distancing difficult to let others know by wearing a badge or a lanyard or carrying a card with the tag line 'Please give me space'. This lets members of the public know that they need other people to give them space so that they can maintain their distance.

No-one can deny that wearing a mask/face covering is uncomfortable but for a number of people with a health condition or disability that makes wearing a face mask impossible, they have had added pressure.

Online and public abuse of people unable to wear a mask has become a particular problem for many disabled members and it is making them fearful of going out in public, going to work or using public transport.

Despite the fact that there is no need at all to provide evidence of an exemption (disabled people and others who cannot wear a face mask can self-certify and always have been able to since it became mandatory) disabled members have told us that they find they are repeatedly having to explain to colleagues, customers and managers why they cannot wear a face mask and in some instances are being incorrectly disciplined or harassed. This feeling of having to justify their actions over and over again is causing disabled members to experience high levels of anxiety and stress.

Usdaw reps have played an absolutely vital role during the Coronavirus crisis in supporting members under the most difficult and challenging of circumstances.

Battling for the right PPE, ensuring parents did not lose pay whilst their children were self-isolating protecting members from customer abuse, Usdaw reps have been nothing short of extraordinary and all at the same time as dealing with their own anxieties and challenges. For so many Usdaw reps 2020 was a difficult and stressful period of time and Usdaw is absolutely clear that without the contribution of reps many more members would have been unsafe at work. It is no exaggeration to say that the efforts of our reps will in some cases have saved lives. Union membership does not just protect workers livelihoods it can, as the crisis has shown also protect their lives.

We have always known that trade unions make a difference but in 2020 many more people were able to see the benefits of union organisation and influence. Trade unions have played a fundamental role in protecting workers during the Covid-19 crisis. Both in the UK and internationally we have won for workers during the crisis in a whole host of ways.

Workplace safety became an issue like never before and people were able to see for themselves the difference trade unions make. The Coronavirus crisis put health and safety in the workplace firmly at the forefront of public conscience. For trade unions, it has always been a top priority to protect workers from hazards in the workplace, whether that is protection from dangerous chemicals and other physical risks, to raising the profile of work-related stress and poor mental health resulting from workplace pressures.

National polls showed high levels of support for key aspects of the trade union agenda with almost eight out of ten people saying they supported a rise in the minimum wage and an end to zero-hour contracts.

Trade union victories in getting the Government to introduce and then extend the furlough scheme enabled thousands more working people to see the value of trade unions. Trade unions helped to negotiate the job retention scheme that saved millions of jobs and negotiated with employers so that they made use of it instead of making redundancies.

Then in October with a second lockdown looming, the Government announced that they would top up the wages of workers whose firms could not employ them on their full hours. Again this change only came about because of the pressure trade unions and others put on the Government to do the right thing.

Usdaw along with other trade unions made a significant difference to how pregnant women at work in our sectors were treated during the crisis. Without the trade union's intervention the vast majority of our members in this situation would have lost out on pay both now and during their maternity leave. The fact that so many employers sent women home from work on furlough or SSP was shocking and Usdaw not only addressed this with employers but lobbied the Government to promote and raise awareness of pregnant women's rights to be sent home on full pay during the crisis if their employer could not offer safe working conditions.

As we begin to think about coming out of the crisis and building back our economic and social health and wellbeing our challenge is to ensure that working people do not pay the price for the crisis.

After a decade of failed austerity, working people cannot pay the price for recovery again. This time we need to build back better.

The Coronavirus pandemic and the measures taken to tackle it have exposed serious flaws in how the UK economy works.

This crisis has shown who really keeps the country going and also just how poorly paid many key workers including our members are.

It has also revealed the scale and depth of **existing inequality in this country** with women, disabled people and BME workers more likely to be affected because they are disproportionately stuck in insecure jobs on low pay.

Over the last few months it has become increasingly clear that it is working people who create the goods and services people need, not billionaires and bankers.

Usdaw believes it is time to reassess what jobs we value most and to recognise how dependent our economy and society is on them.

Building back better means addressing the discrimination and insecurity that runs through the heart of the UK workforce.

We need fair employment practices that move our economy away from its reliance on low paid, insecure jobs.

Since it is now clear how important workers are to the economy, it is only right that they are properly represented in decisions about how work and our economic system is organised.

That is why we need new rules to support collective bargaining so that all workers have a voice at work.

The Government must also continue to work constructively with trade unions and employers to secure a sustainable recovery for everyone.

Give Unions a Voice

This crisis proved what can be achieved when trade unions have a voice at the table.

Now trade unions need to have a say in the recovery too. That is why Usdaw supports the TUC's call for a national economic recovery council consisting of trade unions, the Government and businesses to create a greener and fairer economy.

The Challenges Ahead

Government interventions during this crisis showed what can be done when the situation demands it. That same commitment and urgency must now be applied to addressing the threat of climate change.

The 'Everyone In' programme that brought homeless people off the streets in days shows us that social problems are not intractable but can be solved through political will.

The UK is entering the deepest recession for decades. Without urgent Government action, unemployment will rise to levels not seen for 30 years.

Already there are some calling for a return to austerity but the lesson of the last decade is that austerity failed on its own terms.

It did not deliver economic growth, nor did it reduce our national debt. Instead, it created a vicious circle of cuts, lower growth, lower incomes, lower tax revenues and rising private debt, all of which contributed to rising poverty and hardship.

This time working people cannot pay the price for recovery. This time we need to build back better.



Appendix: Maternity Suspension

Women's Equality

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality

Maternity Suspension

The following information is included to support members in raising awareness of the little known right that pregnant women have to what is called maternity suspension.

This is a vital health and safety protection available to all pregnant women and during the Coronavirus pandemic, it has become clear that very few employers are aware of it.

These rights do not just apply at times of a major health crisis like Coronavirus, but exist all the time and yet are often not enforced.



The steps an employer must take to safeguard the health and safety of pregnant women at work

Employers are under a legal duty to identify and assess workplace risks including risks to pregnant women and new mothers. If there are workplace risks they must take reasonable action to remove them or reduce them to a safe level. Exposure to Coronavirus travelling to and from work and whilst at work constitutes a risk.

Pregnant women, new and breastfeeding mothers have specific health and safety protections in law. Once a woman has informed her employer of her pregnancy in writing her employer should take the following steps:

Step 1

Conduct a risk assessment. The regulations require all employers to assess the workplace risks for pregnant employees and their unborn children, and breastfeeding mothers. Employers must keep these risks under review as circumstances change and as the woman's pregnancy progresses.

Where a risk is identified, including the risk of exposure to Coronavirus, employers must take reasonable action such as altering working conditions or hours of work if this will avoid exposure to the risk or reduce it to an 'acceptable' level.

Step 2

If it is not reasonable to alter working conditions or hours of work, or if it would not avoid the risk (ie, the risk of exposure to Coronavirus) a woman is entitled to be offered suitable alternative work. It must be both suitable and appropriate for the woman concerned and it must be on similar terms and conditions. Any alternative role must take into account her use of public transport and social distancing guidance on minimising social contact and maintaining a distance of two metres.

Step 3

If a suitable, safe alternative role cannot be found then the employer is required to suspend her from work on full pay for as long as is necessary to avoid the risk. This provision is set out in the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Stock image posed by model.

To find out more about the work of Usdaw's Divisional Equalities Forums, contact your Usdaw rep, call Usdaw on **0800 030 80 30** or visit **www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities**

web: **www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities** email: **equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk**

Usdaw
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Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

