

GM4WOMEN2028: EMPLOYMENT GROUP BRIEF

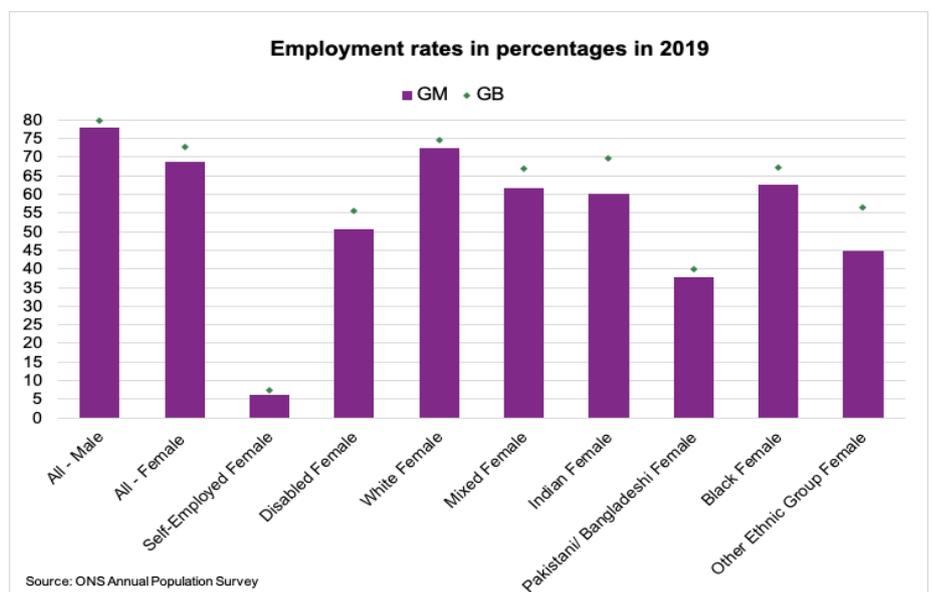
This briefing note produced by the GM4Women’s Employment Action Group comes at a time when the COVID pandemic has created major problems for women’s employment; they have been at the forefront of supporting people in their roles as health and social care workers; they have taken on the major burden of home schooling; and they are facing uncertain employment futures due to the COVID impact on key sectors for women’s employment such as hospitality and retail.

This briefing starts by considering how women have fared in the labour market of Greater Manchester (GM) in 2019/20. Available data mostly tracks changes before the pandemic kicked in (due to lags in data availability and difficulties in disentangling what is happening- for example, those on furlough are included among the employed). We then turn to key issues for women under COVID looking at how women have been supported, how the care workers who keep the elderly in GM safe are being rewarded and how the schools closure has been affecting women in GM.

Women in GM need more access to paid work

Women improved their access to paid work in GM over the year 2019/20. The share of women in employment rose from 66.8% to 68.7%. This still means that men’s employment rate in GM is 9.1% higher than women’s but the gap narrowed from the 11% found in 2018/19.

Worryingly, **the employment rate for women in GM is still 3.9% below that for women in Great Britain (GB) as a whole**, and when we look at data for different groups of women, we find that there is a shortfall compared to the GB average for all groups.



The solid bars in Figure 1 indicate the employment rate for women in GM for each group while the small diamond, which falls above the bar in all cases, represents the rate for women in GB as a whole. The bigger gap for all women than for all men compared to GB as a whole is clear and the share of women in self-employment is also below that for women in GB as a whole.

Figure 1. Employment rates for women in GM and GB across groups.



Disabled women face particular disadvantages in the labour market and these are even greater in GM where the employment rate is only 50.7% compared to the already low rate of 55.5% for GB as a whole. National estimates also show that disabled women earn 36% less than non-disabled men, compared to a 15.5% gap for all women.

Similarly, **women likely to experience racial inequalities** in GM also tend to fare worse, not only compared to white women in GM but also compared to the average for their groups in GB as a whole. In fact, white women's rate of employment in GM at 72.4% is only 2 percentage points lower than the average rate in GB for white women but the GM Indian women's employment rate is only 60.3%, nearly 10 percentage points below the rate of 69.7% for Indian women in GB as a whole. Perhaps even more shocking is the 37.9% employment rate for women from Pakistan and Bangladeshi residents in GM, below the already very low rate for GB of 40%. **So there is a general problem of low employment for women in GM but this is even greater for more disadvantaged groups.**

The Gender Pay Gap in GM is well below that for GB as a whole but it is not all good news

At first glance the data on the gender pay gap in GM looks more promising. By April 2020 the gender pay gap in GM had shrunk to 9.1% compared to 12.9% in 2019 and compared to 16.3% for GB as a whole. However, further investigation reveals that this is more due to men's low earnings in GM (9.1% below the male median pay in GB) than to women's high earnings in GM which still fell 1.2% below the median for all women in GB. Even this may be an overstatement of how well women in GM are faring. It turns out that the low employment rate for women in GM is mainly due to fewer women having part-time jobs and it is these jobs that tend to be paid close to the minimum wage. This shortage of low paid jobs boosts the average pay for women in GM, but the cause is the higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity among women in GM.

Likewise, although nearly a quarter of women in GM earn below the real living wage, over 7% more than the share for men (see Figure 2), the proportion is now slightly below that for women in GB. This again reflects the lower share of women in GM in low paid part-time employment.

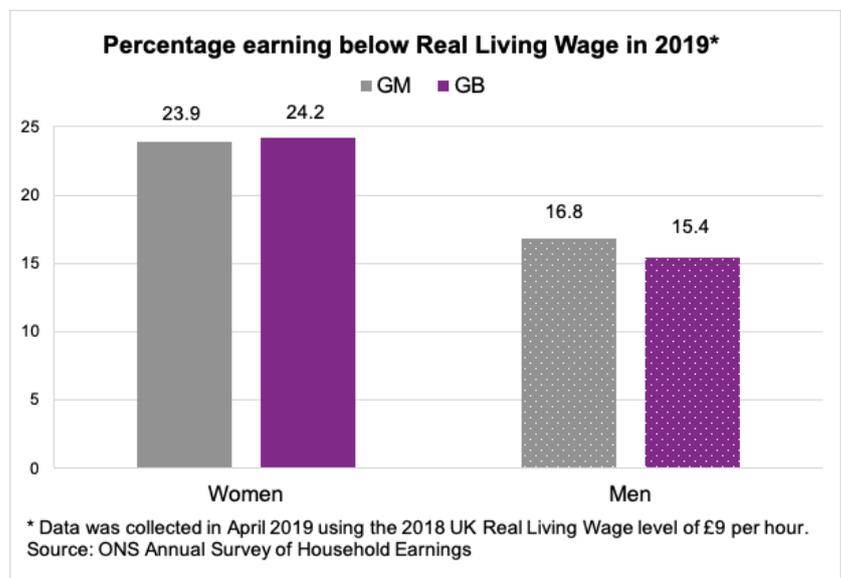


Figure 2. Percentage earning below Real Living Wage in 2019.



Women’s employment in GM and the COVID pandemic

Women faced a range of significant challenges under COVID. Not only were they more likely to be in the frontline of key services such as health and social care but also more at risk of redundancy and long term furlough due to their concentration in retail and hospitality. In the first lockdown women had fairly equal access with men to furlough schemes but self-employed women were more likely than men to be excluded from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and were also less likely to feel comfortable with taking a Bounce Back Loan or to have premises which made them less eligible for most business grants and reliefs. There was also no specific paid parental leave scheme for those who had to support home schooling, unlike in the majority of EU member states (Rubery and Tavora 2021). This posed particular problems for self-employed women but even employees could only request to be furloughed due to parental responsibilities, but the decision was taken by the employer.

Parents and Childcare issues

In September, the national picture prompted childcare concerns as **2 in 5 working mums (with children under 10) can’t get enough childcare to allow them to work the hours they need** (TUC, 2020). Because of this, 1 in 6 (mostly in low-paid jobs) reported that they have had no choice but to reduce their working hours (or leave the workplace altogether) to balance new care demands arising from the COVID pandemic (TUC, 2020).

“I’m in that position now where my youngest has to self-isolate, she can’t go anywhere, I can’t send her to the childminders, she can’t go to any family members but it’s only the contact that has to self-isolate, which is great and I get that, but the rest of us still have to go to work, still go about our daily life, and she is 6 years old. So, what do I do with her? She’s got to isolate from everybody for two weeks. So, I have to be off with her... but that doesn’t help me as a single parent. You know, I can’t keep using my holidays, I can’t afford to be down a week’s pay. So, I don’t think enough has been done...”

A single-mother and supermarket worker in GM

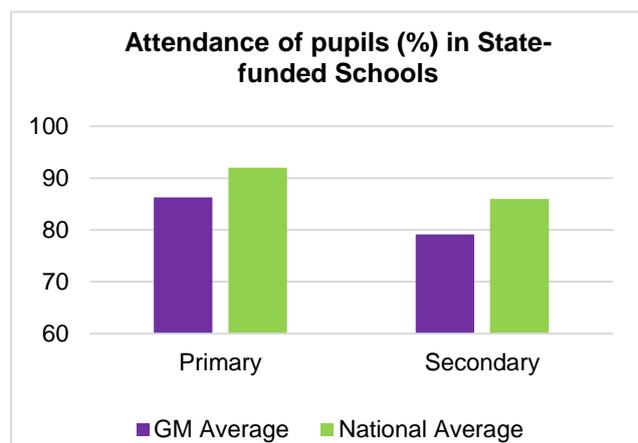


Figure 4. Attendance of pupils in state-funded schools in Oct 2020. Source: UK Parliament, 2020.

These problems are particularly acute in GM, where school attendance has been well below the national average (see Figure 4), mainly due to COVID-related problems. Parents in GM have been more at risk,

even before the January school closure, of being **trapped in having to take unpaid parental leave for childcare**.

In the UK **little to no protection has been provided who need to take time off work to look after children who are self-isolating**. Women are likely to be disproportionately impacted by this lack of support as they still bear a greater amount



of the childcare load, with single parents likely to be most severely impacted. Taking two-weeks unpaid leave exacerbates the already precarious financial situation which many working families within GM due to the existing problems associated with high instances of in-work poverty.

Care workers, sick pay and the real living wage

Social care is highly reliant on women's work, with women accounting for 71% of the workforce (ONS, 2020). Throughout the pandemic these workers were crucial with only 7% being furloughed, lower than most other industries. Social care workers were twice as likely to contract COVID-19 than most other occupations (Mutambudzi et al 2020). However, pay for social care workers across GM is low with the majority of private sector employers paying below the RLW. **Low pay meant workers had no financial safety net**

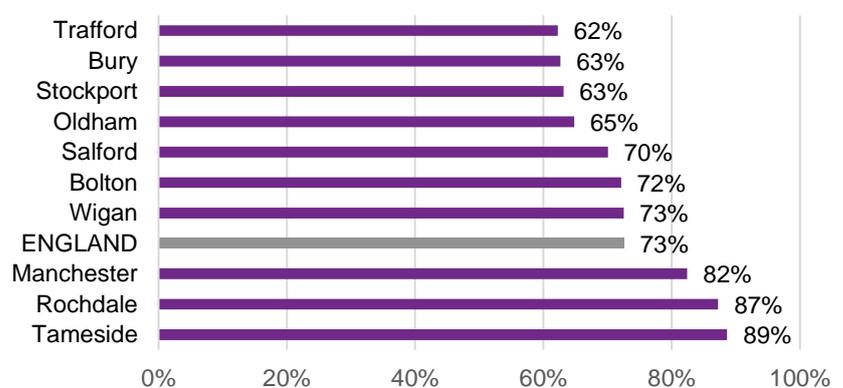
"When I did take the time off [for COVID 19] and I thought well [...] I'm going to struggle and if I struggle financially, I'm going to lose my house [...] My isolation letter finished after a week [off work]. I could have renewed it. I didn't. I came back in [...] I was worrying financially. [...] I knew straight away I'd come back too soon. [...] I was literally gasping for breath and I just kept saying to people I can't breathe, I can't breathe."

Social Care Worker in GM

and this was particularly problematic if they had to be off with COVID-19. Workers reported returning prematurely. There has been some headway with 9 out of 10 GM Local Authorities signing up to the Unison Care vs COVID campaign, which guarantees workers sick pay at the rate of normal wages.

Paying the RLW would be beneficial for workers, but funding provided by local authorities for social care is below what is needed for employers to do this, making this is a hard ask. This situation is unlikely to change without more national government support as the Local Government Association has noted that COVID-19 has added a further £10bn to local authority costs (LPC 2020).

% Care worker jobs paid below RLW, in adult social care (independent sector only), by local authority: 2019/20 *



* Data: Percentage of care worker jobs paid below the 2019 RFL of £9.30 per hour. Source: Skills for Care's administrative workforce dataset (ASC-WDS).

Figure 3. Percentage of care worker jobs paid below the 2019 RFL of £9.30 per hour.



The GMCA (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) and Salford, Oldham, and Manchester City Councils are accredited Living Wage Employers which means they have a commitment to their directly employed staff and to those employed by organisations providing a service to these authorities organisations to pay or be working towards paying the RLW.



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GM4Women welcomes Andy Burnham's pledge to make GM becoming a Living Wage Place as a whole. However, for this to become a reality for the social care workers included in the weekly clap in the first lockdown funding for all care providers needs to be sufficient to make this a realistic goal.

Support for women's employment is more important than ever

As we look forward to 2021 and the prospect at least of a recovery from the pandemic, support for women's employment – both access to employment and quality of work- is more important than ever. **It is vital that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority continues to promote its Good Employment Charter designed to ensure that there is a decent minimum standard of employment within Greater Manchester.** We also need action to support women's access to employment and that means developing and rebuilding childcare provision and paying more attention to problems of inequalities of access experienced by specific groups of women – by ethnicity, age, location and disability and health. The changing patterns of employment post COVID also mean that we need to develop new opportunities to retraining and skills development enabling women to move out of sectors that may never fully recover from COVID. Finally, but by no means least we need support for women in self-employment. The Women's Enterprise Policy Group (WEPG), led by GM4Women member Prof Julia Rouse, has developed a detailed COVID action plan that is calling on Greater Manchester's Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership to develop a new generation of women-focused business support.

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