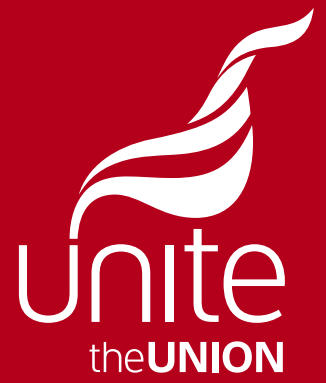


UNITE EQUALITY BRIEFING FOR REPS

COVID-19 - IMPACT ON WOMEN



Unite the union guide to workplace
equality impact assessments



Thank you to all who have contributed and are acknowledged in this guide. 2020



UNITE EQUALITY BRIEFING FOR REPS

COVID-19 - Impact on Women

Unite National Women's Committee would like to thank all our reps for all they are doing to support our members through these difficult times. Women members have been telling us about the particularly acute concerns they have and are dealing with.

This Government is clearly out of touch with the realities of life for women who have borne the brunt of austerity; already working long hours, and longer since their pensions were stolen, have no job security, are often in two or three jobs, are juggling childcare and elder care and rely on universal credit which provides little relief or support.

The Government has not carried out any equality impact assessment on its measures to deal with COVID-19. They have failed women at every turn.

Unite's priorities in this crisis are to protect everyone's safety, jobs and income. In order to meet these priorities, it is essential to ensure a Workplace Equality Impact Assessment is carried out, alongside a Workplace Health and Safety Risk Assessment, redundancy mitigation and protection of fair pay and conditions.

Reps need to use Equality Impact Assessments as an essential tool to negotiate changes to working practices, particularly home-working policies, redundancies, working hours, fair pay and conditions. This is particularly important since the COVID-19 health emergency is a rapidly changing situation.

Unite is campaigning hard to address these issues. This briefing brings together some analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on women, useful advice, information and campaign actions that will help you in the support that you are providing to our women members.

You can access Unite's extensive information about COVID-19 here

<https://unitetheunion.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-advice/>

For Unite Equality Impact Assessment Guide please click on the link below

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3382/action-on-covid-19-equalities-booklet.pdf>

You can also find more information on the impact of COVID-19 in this excellent briefing produced by the Women's Budget Group

<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-Covid-19-briefing.pdf>

Take ACTION

1. As a Unite safety rep use your rights to request from your employer copies of Equality Impact Assessments associated with health and safety policies and procedures when carrying out your inspections and investigations.
2. Write to your MP to let them know about all of the issues that are set out in this briefing and ask them to set out a strategy to support women through COVID-19 and redress the structural inequality that women face in the longer term.

You can find your MP details here. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>

3. Keep in touch. Please let us know if you have any questions or comments or any success stories relating to supporting women through the COVID-19 crisis by emailing equality@unitetheunion.org

Protect Women's Safety, Jobs and Income

PROTECT WOMEN'S SAFETY

- Health & Safety and PPE
- Working from Home and Domestic Violence and Abuse
- Zero Tolerance of Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying

Health & Safety and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

At least 100,000 Unite women members are continuing to work long hours as essential workers across our industrial sectors. Women members are more likely to work in health and social care; education; banks; food retail and manufacturing; transport and logistics. Women workers are often on the frontline, supporting our communities.

There are major challenges in safe working practices and access to PPE. Our women members have significant problems in accessing correct PPE, particularly those working in the health service and social care. They are either unable to access PPE, or if they are, it is in short supply, there is lack of training on its usage, it does not fit properly, it is not the right type, or is out of date.

Safe Working - Employers' Responsibility

S.44 and S.100 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 prohibits workers being subjected to a detriment or dismissed when they leave the workplace in circumstances of danger, which they reasonably believe is imminent and cannot be averted.

Unite solicitors advise that in circumstances where an employer is refusing or failing to operate safely or in accordance with government guidance (including the requirement for proper PPE), then an individual member would be entitled to withdraw from, and refuse to return to a workplace, that is unsafe and in which they believe they are in imminent or serious danger.

This does not mean to sit at home but to remove themselves to a place where harm no longer exists or until such time as that danger is minimised or averted by the use of much publicised safety precautions to limit the spreading of the COVID-19 virus.

Unite Action

Unite is leading the campaign for production, distribution and supply of PPE to frontline workers. Health and safety of workers is our highest priority, it is important to encourage our women members to report where they are concerned about health and safety.



There are many examples where Unite has been able to negotiate safe working practices. Your regional officer will be able to give you examples of best practice including workplace adjustments, travel to work, shorter shifts and moving to working online.

You can access guides for vital information about Health and Safety through the following links:

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3238/job-4538-womens-health-and-safety-jan-2018.pdf>

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3018/007-unitecoronavirusguide-20-04-15-v14b.pdf>

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/2997/201-workplaceinfectioncontrols-20-04-01-v01c.pdf>

Unite has launched a helpline and volunteer care service for its vulnerable members during the coronavirus crisis.

Unite members can call the **helpline number 0330 1072351**. The helpline is fully staffed between 08:00 until 19:00 Monday to Friday with an overflow service at other hours.

A Unite volunteer will then be assigned to assist anyone who needs help with picking up shopping, posting mail, collecting urgent supplies, such as prescriptions, or simply talking to those who are experiencing loneliness. For more information click

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/march/unite-launches-coronavirus-crisis-helpline-for-vulnerable-members/>

Working from Home and Domestic Violence & Abuse

Many women members are working from home but for some, home is not the best option. Many women living in overcrowded conditions, often having sole responsibility for childcare and dealing with particular challenges of home schooling children; there has also been an increased reporting of domestic violence and abuse including financial abuse.

Domestic violence is an increasing concern while many women are working from home. The workplace is often one of many places in which women can access support and information.

The workplace may indeed be the only place women feel safe and during the COVID-19 pandemic it is important that Unite reps:

- Ensure their employers fully support women, find new ways to provide support to women working from home, adapt and/or introduce security plans to work/home settings as well as signpost them to help
- Negotiate a policy with the employer, whether as a stand-alone or as part of other policies
- Support members, where possible, to find a place of safety

There are other issues that will affect women while working from home for example, working longer hours, lone working without supervision, issues around IT, including broadband capacity, specialised display screen equipment needs and the management and coordination of work as well as stress and mental health.

Unite reps need to remind employers of their health & safety responsibilities for those working from home. Employers should ensure home is a safe, secure place of work, taking into account ergonomics, pay for all equipment, ensure normal working hours, maintain any benefits related to usual place of work for example, if lunch or childcare is paid for, steps are taken to address concerns of isolation and loneliness.

Also, Unite reps need to negotiate a working from home policy and if one already exists then make sure you are consulted on any changes.

Unite Action

Unite campaigns for shorter working hours, health and safety of all workers and decent employment rights whether working in a workplace or from home.

Unite is campaigning for stronger legislation covering employment and domestic violence & abuse to support our collective bargaining agenda. This includes a specific legal duty on employers to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying at work including a duty to protect the victims of domestic violence and abuse. Unite is also campaigning for a nationally funded network of support services helping those suffering from domestic violence and abuse.

If a woman member decides to stay in the family home and use legal action to get their partner to leave, then they should go to a solicitor or contact Rights of Women (see below) to discuss the options open to them. Community Legal Services funding may be available for women on low income.

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3238/job-4538-womens-health-and-safety-jan-2018.pdf>

You can access Unite Domestic Violence and Abuse guide here –

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3493/9223-violence-and-abuse-doc-003.pdf>

Unite has produced guidance on COVID-19 and homeworking in the link below

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/2996/101-unitehomeworkingguide-20-04-01-v01b.pdf>

Rights of Women guidance

<https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/family-law/>

Surviving Economic Abuse charity has provided additional guidance and support

<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Economic-abuse-and-the-coronavirus-outbreak-v16.pdf>



Zero Tolerance of Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying

Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying cause untold misery and humiliation to thousands of workers, particularly women, black, Asian & ethnic minorities, disabled, LGBT+, young and older workers every year. All Unite members should be able to turn to the union for advice, support and representation if they are subjected to unwanted and/or offensive attention, exclusion, verbal or physical abuse and undermining of their capabilities.

Unite reps need to be fully aware of harassment, discrimination and bullying in order to deal with it effectively, provide support to members, and ensure workplaces with zero tolerance of all forms of harassment, discrimination and bullying.

Unite Action

Unite is campaigning for a specific legal duty on employers to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying at work

Click on the link below for guidance on tackling and preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying and ensuring workplaces where there is dignity and respect for all.

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/2476/zero-tolerance-guide.pdf>

For regional support, please see contact details inside the back cover.

PROTECT WOMEN'S JOBS

- Job Retention, Maternity and Pregnancy Discrimination
- Migrant Women Workers

Job Retention, Maternity and Pregnancy Discrimination

Women are more likely to work in part-time, casual, or zero-hours contracts and are more likely to have more than one job. These women members have been most at risk of losing their jobs and their income during the Covid-19 crisis. Also, women who are pregnant, or on maternity leave are particularly vulnerable during COVID-19.

Under pressure the government furlough scheme, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, has been extended until December 2020. Under the scheme employees receive 80% of their current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500. Also, flexible furloughing will continue to be allowed in addition to full-time furloughing. The Job Retention Scheme is due to be replaced by the Job Support Scheme in December.

Unite has been at the forefront of campaigning for job protection and you can access information about the Job Retention Scheme using the following link

<https://unitetheunion.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-advice/#Anchor1>

In many cases Unite has been able to negotiate agreements with employers to ensure that workers are provided with job protection during COVID-19. Please see some examples here:

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/april/unite-hails-victory-as-1-500-marriot-hotel-workers-go-on-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme/>

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/april/greenwich-library-coronavirus-furlough-deal-could-act-as-national-template-says-unite/>

Unite is affiliated to Maternity Action who have worked very hard to provide a library of advice and information to support women and union reps. You can access this information below:

<https://maternityaction.org.uk/covidmaternityfaqs/>

Migrant Women Workers

Covid-19 crisis has exposed existing issues faced by migrant workers which was intensified by the hostile environment, a central plank of the Conservative Government. These policies have led to serious impacts on vulnerable migrant women workers during the pandemic including lack of sick pay, pregnancy and maternity protection, leave and pay.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the vital role that migrant workers play in providing essential services has never been more evident. However, employers continue to exploit workers in sectors such as social care and agriculture.

Many migrant women workers are subjected to No Recourse to Public Funds rules that exclude families from benefits, housing support and specialist services. Many are excluded from accessing NHS care including maternity care, and are forced to live in overcrowded accommodation.

Migrant women in insecure employment are at higher risk of workplace sexual harassment with very limited recourse to redress. Their experience is often bound up with racial harassment and/or their immigration status.

These appalling working conditions and immigration rules exposes migrant women and their families even further to the virus.

Migrant domestic workers have also been a casualty of COVID-19 due to lack of policy to protect them as workers. With no recourse to public funds migrant domestic workers who are dismissed or laid off due to the pandemic are left without food, shelter leaving them exposed to the virus.

Unite reps need to ensure migrant workers are organised and involved in the union, enjoy the same terms and conditions as everyone else, and that collective bargaining and agreements include all workers.



Unite Action

Unite will continue to campaign for a stop to the Hostile Environment, separation of employment rights from immigration and resident status, an end to insecure work and sufficient funding of enforcement bodies.

Unite will also continue its campaign for migrant domestic workers to be recognised as workers, the restoration of the rights they had prior to 2012 and the ratification of the ILO Convention 189.

Please sign the petition:

Reinstate the pre-2012 Overseas Domestic Worker visa with a route to settlement

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/326765>

You can access Unite negotiators checklist on organising and supporting migrant workers.

https://unitetheunion.org/media/3534/7752_checkcard_aug2017_1-hyperlink.pdf

For information on some of Unite's campaigns please click on the links below

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/february/unite-statement-on-government-s-immigration-proposals/>

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/may/johnson-s-refusal-to-waive-400-charge-for-nhs-migrant-workers-mean-spirited-says-unite/>

For Unite's new website support tool for workers who speak English as a second language and/or with dyslexia or mild visual impairments please use the link below:

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2019/february/unite-speaks-your-language-with-new-website-support-tool/>

PROTECT WOMEN'S INCOME

- Equal Pay
- Tackling the Debt Crisis

Equal Pay

Covid-19 crisis has further revealed women's unequal pay, particularly in the year we are marking the 50 years since the Equal pay Act 1970.

Low pay and generally, undervaluing women's work has become more visible during the pandemic. Women not only form the majority of key workers but also the majority of key workers paid less than £10 an hour, face limited childcare options and form the majority of part-time workers when part-time jobs fell by 70% in the first 11 weeks of the pandemic. Mothers have been 47% more likely to lose their jobs than fathers and more likely to be furloughed and their hours cut by more than 50%.

In this climate the suspension of gender pay gap reporting so close to its publication deadline interfered with accurately measuring the true impact of COVID-19 on women's jobs and pay and has also removed the benchmark and the momentum.

Unite reps need to keep the gender pay gap and equal pay on the bargaining agenda and ensure the employer makes a commitment to equal pay for equal work and to the action needed to implement this commitment. Unite Reps also need to make sure the employer conducts an equal pay audit and consults and involves them throughout the process.

Unite Action

Unite strongly believes this inequality, a direct result of sex discrimination, must be eliminated and will continue to campaign for stronger equal pay law, mandatory Equal Pay Audits, transparency in pay systems, statutory rights for Union Equality Reps and enhanced maternity/carers rights.

For more information on equal pay and gender pay gap reporting please click on the links below.

PAYUP! campaign – Unite Action Plan

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3241/jn5578-hb-a4-equalities-pay-up-brochure-20.pdf>

Gender pay gap reporting – a TUC guide for trade union activists

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/GPGreportingguide_0.pdf

Equal Pay portal

<http://www.equalpayportal.co.uk/>

Tackling the Debt Crisis

Lack of housing rights, mounting utility bills, demands for rent and dealing with debt are all having a serious impact on women at a time when many have been struggling to get by and survive the impact of austerity. Older women, who are having to work until they are 67 to get a pension they were promised at 60, are particularly vulnerable to poverty in the current crisis. Women are more likely to rely on Universal Credit, and there is a desperate need to increase the amount that is paid and ensure that this is paid to each claimant, rather than to one person in a household.

Unite Action

Unite has set up a dedicated benefits advice line which members can access by calling **0333 202 6563**.

Please note that phones may be busy, but we will do everything we can to respond to all member enquiries as quickly as possible.

If members need advice on a COVID-19 related benefits query, information is available from the DWP online <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/>



For Unite information on universal credit click on the links below:

<http://unitelive.org/universal-credit-chaos-coronavirus-crisis/>

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/2194/stop-universal-credit-how-to-survive-booklet.pdf>

https://unitetheunion.org/media/2631/8869_universal-credit-report_a4_finaldigital.pdf

For campaigns on pensions click on the following links:

<https://www.waspi.co.uk/>

<https://www.npcuk.org/>

<https://www.backto60.com/>

BUILDING OUR COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

It is so important that Unite uses the full force of our collective strength to ensure no worker is left behind and that a decent income is provided during this pandemic. Also, that we have secure, decent jobs in the longer term, sectoral collective bargaining so that everyone is protected and statutory rights for union equality reps.

Women workers are joining Unite and we are reaching out to our new members to get organised and encouraging all Unite women to get involved.

- Stand for election as a union rep, health and safety rep, union equality rep, or branch officer
- Bring work colleagues into membership
- Demand union recognition and collective bargaining for wages and conditions going forward
- Write to your MP to demand an end to the scandal of low pay and the undervaluing of social care workers

LASTING CHANGE

Unite has long challenged the structural sex and race discrimination that exists in our labour markets and called for regulation to tackle occupational segregation, the undervaluing of the work in sectors where women are more likely to be found working, equal pay for women and employment rights for all.

As Government ministers clapped for health and social care workers every Thursday night and proposed producing badges to thank them, we were clear that pay restraint they imposed in the last decade has caused the poverty we are now dealing with.

Unite continues its work to ensure that there is a lasting recognition in pay and equality at work for all workers by:

- Prioritising to protect everyone's safety, jobs and income
- Encouraging women to become health & safety and/or union equality reps
- Campaign for mandatory Workplace Equality Impact Assessments with strong implementation, regular monitoring and acting on recommendations
- Training reps to carry out equality impact assessments
- Campaign to extend the Equality Duty to the private sector
- Press the government to tackle child poverty and address COVID-19 immediate impact through a:
 - o New Redundancy protection for pregnant women and new mothers
 - o National Childcare Strategy
 - o National Funded strategy supporting women facing domestic violence and abuse
 - o Proper social security and an end to Universal Credit
 - o Decent pay rise for public sector workers
 - o National Living Wage increase
 - o Framework for trade union rights



ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP

Trade Union Congress (TUC) - www.tuc.org.uk, 020 7636 4030, info@tuc.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) - <https://www.hse.gov.uk>, 03007 906787

Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) - www.equalityhumanrights.com,
Phone Advice: 0808 800 0082, Textphone Advice: 0808 800 0084

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Maternity Action – www.maternityaction.org.uk, Adviceline: 0808 802 0029 (National),
0808 802 0057 (London)

Working Families - www.workingfamilies.org.uk, 020 7253 7243, office@workingfamilies.org.uk

Shelter – www.shelter.org.uk, Helpline: 0808 800 4444

Step change – provides debt advice online www.stepchange.org

Women's Aid – supports women facing domestic violence and abuse - www.womensaid.org.uk,
helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Scottish Women's Aid - 0800 027 1234

Women's Aid, Republic of Ireland - 1800 341 900

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland - 0808 802 1414 (24 hr)

Welsh Women's Aid - 0808 8010 800

National Domestic Abuse - www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk (run by Refuge), 24-hour Helpline:
0808 2000 247

GALOP - supports LGBT people facing domestic violence and abuse.
<http://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/>, Helpline: 0800 999 5428, help@galop.org.uk

Surviving economic abuse charity – www.survivingeconomicabuse.org

Hestia - supports adults and children including victims of modern slavery, domestic abuse, young care leavers and older people in and around London - www.hestia.org, 020 7378 3100, Voicemail box: 020 3879 3700, secure email path info@hestia.org.cjsm.net

Rape Crisis (England & Wales) - www.rapecrisis.org.uk, Helpline: 0808 802 9999

Victim Support – www.victimsupport.org.uk, 24-hour Supportline: 08 08 16 89 111, Victims' Information Service: 08 08 16 89 293

Southall Black Sisters - supporting BAEM women facing domestic violence and abuse –
www.southallblack sisters.org.uk, 0208 571 9595

Brook - provides free and confidential information for under 25s. www.brook.org.uk

MSI Reproductive Choices - provides abortion services - www.msichoice.org,
Adviceline: 0345 300 8090

Abortion Support Network - provides advice and information www.abortionsupport.org.uk,
info@asn.org.uk

Migrant Voice - develops the skills and confidence of members of migrant communities -
www.migrantvoice.org, 0207 832 5824, info@migrantvoice.org

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at the  of our union

