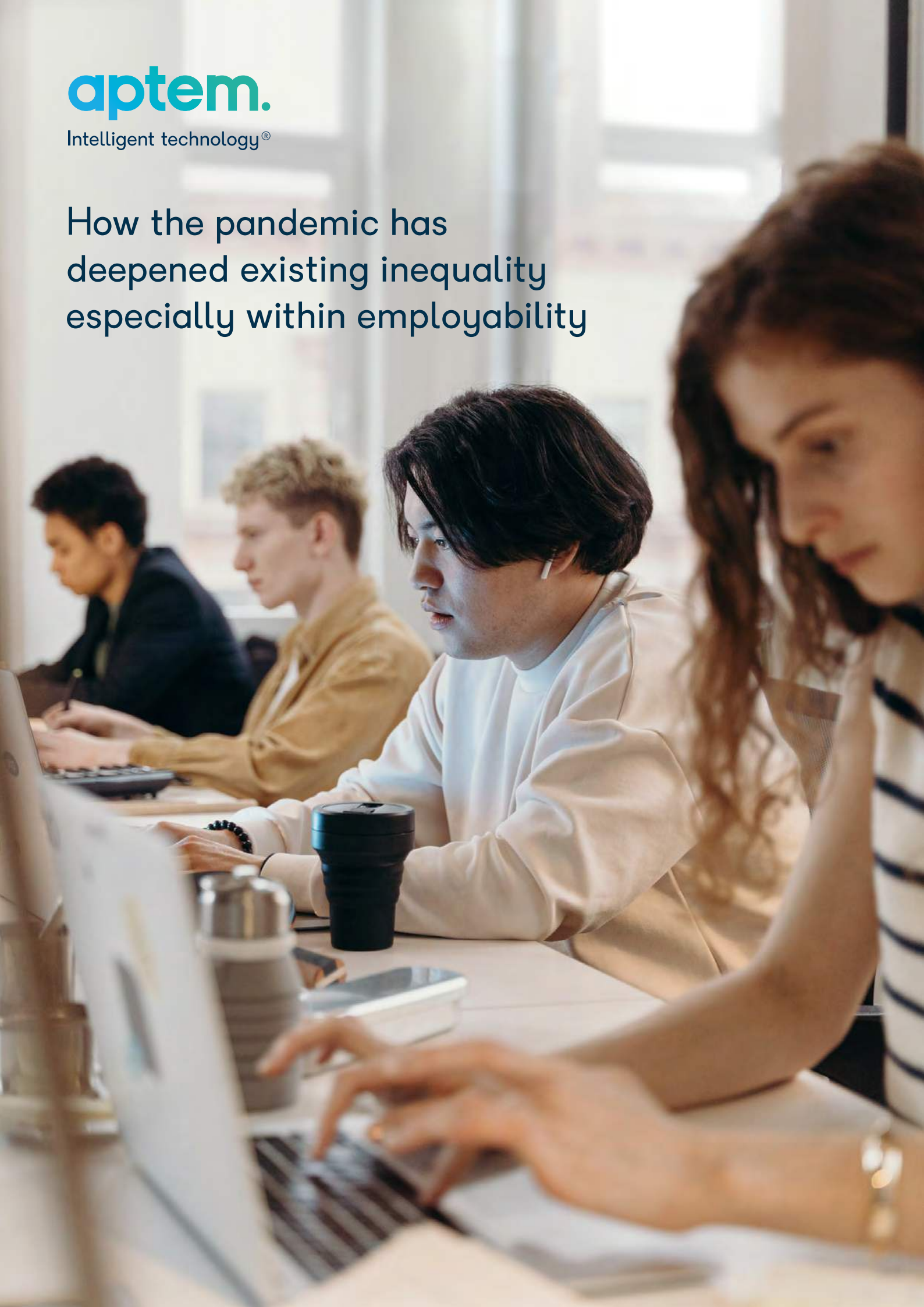


The Aptem logo, featuring the word "aptem." in a lowercase, teal-colored sans-serif font.

Intelligent technology®

How the pandemic has
deepened existing inequality
especially within employability



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Introduction

The advantages of diversity at work are well documented. McKinsey & Company has found¹ that businesses with the most diverse workforces financially outperform those with less diverse employees.

What's more, its research identified a penalty for lagging behind when it comes to diversity: companies in the bottom quartile for both gender and ethnic/cultural diversity were 29% less likely to achieve above-average profitability than all other companies in their dataset. Similarly, [Boston Consulting Group](#)² identified a clear correlation between diversity and innovation, while [a Stanford study](#)³ concluded that diverse companies see an increase in their stock prices. These correlations provide a clear indication that companies who hire more people with diverse experiences and perspectives will be better positioned to create products and services that appeal to the full breadth of its customers. Overcoming adversity equips people with particular skills. For example, problem solving is a feature of daily life for people who live with

disabilities, equipping them with a skill that's invaluable in the workplace. And, for companies wanting to attract and retain top talent, diversity is essential. In [Deloitte's 2018 Millennial Survey](#)⁴, 69% of respondents said diversity was important to them in deciding to join, and remain at, a workplace.

Yet despite clear evidence of the advantages of diversity for productivity and profitability at work, inequalities persist. Inequalities persist. These inequalities can likewise be seen across a broad range of experiences from housing to healthcare. For women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people and those living with a disability, life in general is much harder. The purpose of this white paper is to examine the inequalities that pre-date Covid-19 and to explore how the pandemic has deepened them, with a particular focus on employability.

¹ Delivering through Diversity, McKinsey & Company, 2018

² How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation (bcg.com)

³ Do Investors Really Care About Gender Diversity? | Stanford Graduate School of Business

⁴ Article The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018 Millennials' confidence in business, loyalty to employers deteriorate

Gender discrimination before Covid-19

In order to understand how and why women have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, it is helpful to first explore the nature and scope of inequality that existed before the virus caused such widespread disruption.

In 2019, The Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister for Women and Equalities, wrote in the introduction to the government's [Gender and Equality Roadmap](#)⁵: *"In the UK today women are, on average, more likely to enter the workforce with higher qualifications than men, but earn less per hour. They are more likely to take on unpaid work, three times as likely to be working part-time and likely to save less into their private pensions."*

Studies show that this process starts early. In their [annual survey](#), [Girlguiding](#)⁶ found that 67% of females aged 11 to 21 think that women do not have the same chances as men. In the 2020 survey, it quotes one of the respondents, a girl aged between 7 and 8: *"I want to stop being told I can't do things because I'm a girl."* Furthermore, it reports that almost a quarter (21%) of girls aged 7 to 10 and more than two in five (44%) aged 11 to 21 have been patronised or made to feel stupid because they are female.

Gender has long been the basis for discrimination and inequality, including in the workplace. There are several factors at play that have stacked up against women, making it far harder for them to reach parity in terms of pay, promotions and respect.

⁵ HM Government, Gender Equality Roadmap

⁶ Girls' Attitudes Survey 2020, Girlguiding

Unpaid care work

The International Labour Organization defines unpaid care work (UCW) as encompassing “three categories of activities: domestic services for own use within the household, caregiving services to household members, and community services and help to other households.”

Globally, women perform 75% of UCW⁷, dedicating, on average, four hours and 25 minutes daily to it – more than three times men’s average of one hour and 23 minutes.

The economic contribution of this work has been roughly estimated at \$10 trillion per year, 13% of global GDP, yet it’s not recognised as vital work contributing to economic growth .

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates⁸ the value of unpaid child and adult care is £11 billion per year.

⁷ Women’s unpaid care work has been unmeasured and undervalued for too long, Diva Dhar, Global Institute for Women’s Leadership, Essays on Equality

⁸ Household satellite account, UK, Office for National Statistics

⁹ Young women’s unpaid work worth £140 billion, Young Women’s Trust, Press Release March 2020

The Young Women’s Trust found⁹ that the unpaid work of young women aged between 18 and 30 contributes at least £140 billion to the UK economy. To put this in perspective, the Trust compares it to the contribution of the financial services industry: £132 billion in 2018 .

This shows how caring responsibilities fall on women throughout their lives, regardless of age. In fact, the Girlguiding Girls’ Attitudes Survey¹⁰ found that 57% of girls aged 7 to 10 believe that girls are better at household chores than boys. It is thought that gender conditioning starts from a very young age. However, the cost is not only to our economy. The additional time women spend on unpaid work is time that cannot be spent either on progressing in their career, or tending to their own wellbeing and mental health. It also represents a huge additional pressure to also carry the burden of caring for others, whether your own children, your parents or others.

¹⁰ Girlguiding – Girls’ Attitudes Survey

Women at work: the gender pay gap

The [Global Gender Gap index](#)¹¹, which benchmarks 156 countries, has estimated that the global gender gap in economic participation and opportunity will take another 267.6 years to close. A difficult number to swallow.

Thankfully, in the UK the [ONS](#) has reported that the gender pay gap¹² – the difference between what working men and women are paid – has been declining. Over the last decade, the gap has fallen by approximately a quarter among full-time employees and by just over one-fifth among all employees. In 2020, among all employees, the gap fell to 15.5%, from 17.4% in 2019. And it is important to look at the figure for all employees, rather than full-time employees because women fill a greater percentage of part-time jobs – another consequence of gender discrimination.

While it is encouraging to see that this figure has dropped, the UK government suspended all requirements for businesses to report pay gap statistics in 2019–20, and has just pushed back the deadline for 2020–21 to October, in recognition of the fact that businesses are currently facing challenging times. However, sidelining reporting on issues so fundamental to economic equality could have a harmful effect on progress in this area.

Women at work: the 'broken rung'

The [UK government's Gender and Equality Roadmap](#)¹³ notes that increasing job quality and raising incomes – particularly at the lower end – has the potential to improve average national wellbeing. Yet, despite entering the job market typically with higher qualifications, women start with lower pay, and the division between men and women's pay increases starkly when women have children.

¹¹ Global Gender Gap Report 2021, World Economic Forum

¹² Gender pay gap in the UK, Office for National Statistics

¹³ HM Government, Gender Equality Roadmap



Ultimately, because women earn less over a lifetime, they also save less, and the gender pay gap becomes a gender pension gap.

Starting on low pay is just one of the factors at play here. Women are also confronted with what has been called the 'broken rung'. Unlike the glass ceiling, which prevents women from reaching the highest level of corporate achievement, the broken rung refers to the difference in the percentage of women, compared to men, being promoted to managerial positions. This inequality at the very start of a career has significant knock-on effects. With fewer women present at each level of the corporate hierarchy, there are fewer women

role models, and fewer voices to stand up for, support and encourage other women.

McKinsey & Company, together with LeanIn.org, have been tracking the progress of women in corporate America for the past six years. In 2019 they reported¹⁴ that for every 100 men promoted and hired to manager, only 72 women are promoted and hired. Men hold 62% of manager-level positions, while women hold just 38%. The number of women decreases at every subsequent level. In 2020¹⁵ this percentage improved slightly: for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted.

¹⁴ Women in the Workplace 2019: The State of Women in Corporate America, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org

¹⁵ Women in the Workplace 2020, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org

Women working in STEM

Women are particularly underrepresented in labour markets connected to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The government's roadmap recognised¹⁶ that reducing gender gaps in labour market participation, STEM qualifications and wages, could increase the size of the UK economy by around 2%, or £55 billion, by 2030.

As with all inequalities, women's underrepresentation in STEM subjects has a cost for the economy. Yet, even though girls outperform boys at GCSE level in STEM subjects, boys are almost twice as likely to take maths at A-level, over four times more likely to take physics and over eight times more likely to take computer science. Given that we are currently living through the fourth industrial revolution, career paths related to STEM qualifications are some of the most lucrative, and are liable to continue to grow.

A lack of representation in this field means the future for financial equality between men and women is becoming ever more uncertain.

Women at work: microaggressions and everyday discrimination

The Women in the Workplace reports document the everyday discrimination that women experience in the workplace.

The 2019 study¹⁷ notes that 73% of women report experiencing microaggressions – or everyday discrimination – which is rooted in bias. And that only 32% of women, and 50% of men, believe that disrespectful behaviour toward women is often quickly addressed by their company.

¹⁶ HM Government, Gender Equality Roadmap

¹⁷ Women in the Workplace 2019: The State of Women in Corporate America, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org

However, the picture is not that simple, because women's experiences are not universal. Within these statistics, it's clear that Black women and women with disabilities face more barriers to advancement and get less support than other groups of women. Women with disabilities face far more everyday discrimination such as having their judgment questioned, being interrupted, or having their ideas co-opted. Furthermore, lesbian women, bisexual women, and women with disabilities are far more likely than other women to hear demeaning remarks about themselves or others like them. The broken rung effect is disproportionate too: in 2020, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org reported¹⁸ that for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 58 Black women and 71 Latinas were promoted.



¹⁸ Women in the Workplace 2020, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org

Coronavirus and women at work

[McKinsey and LeanIn.Org's 2020 Women in the Workplace report](#)¹⁹ recognised that women are bearing the brunt of the impact of Covid-19.

They've been furloughed at a greater rate, have taken on the burden of caring responsibilities, and have experienced higher levels of burnout as a result. The consequence is that now, more women than ever are considering leaving the workforce or taking a step back in their careers. It is "a crisis for corporate America", according to the writers, and one that could undo the progress which has been made so far.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that ONS statistics show that at almost every point between March 2020 and February 2021, [women reported significantly higher anxiety](#)²⁰ than men, continuing a

trend that existed pre-pandemic, and that when [Deloitte surveyed 400 working women](#)²¹, they found that nearly 82% have had their lives negatively impacted by the pandemic.

There are several reasons for the increased impact of the pandemic on women.

[Where and how women work](#)

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) highlights that [a high percentage of frontline jobs are held by women](#)²² who are therefore more exposed to the virus and to a greater level of stress and anxiety. Of the 3.2 million workers at highest risk of exposure to Covid-19, 77% are women. Women also comprise 77% of healthcare workers, 83% of the social care workforce, and 70% of those working in education. What's more, 39% of working mothers were key workers before this crisis began, compared to 27% of the working population as a whole. Worryingly, the TUC also highlighted in its open response to the government that

¹⁹ Women in the Workplace 2020, McKinsey and LeanIn.Org

²⁰ Coronavirus (Covid-19) latest insights, Office for National Statistics

²¹ Understanding the Pandemic's Impact on Working Women, Deloitte

²² TUC response to inquiry on Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics

not all female frontline workers are receiving PPE. Those that do, they say, frequently report poorly fitting equipment (equipment that has been designed to fit male proportions) and the necessity to re-use single-use equipment. As Caroline Criado Perez elucidates in her book *Invisible Women*, we are living in a world where everything is designed for and modelled on men.

Not only are women experiencing greater exposure to the virus, they are also likely to be employed in precarious, part-time or zero-hours contracts, and in industries that have been most affected by the pandemic, such as retail, travel and hospitality. PwC reports that globally, 40% of all employed women are employed in hard-hit sectors, compared to 37% of men. And data from the UK's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme suggests that women's jobs are at greater risk than men's²³. Out of the 15.3 million jobs furloughed in the UK between July and October



²³ Women in Work 2021 Index – full report, PwC

2020 for which the worker's gender is known, 52% were held by women, despite women making up only 48% of the workforce. If this data can be seen as indicative of unemployment trends, once the furlough scheme ends many more women will be out of work than men.

Shouldering the burden of caring responsibilities

As we've seen, before the pandemic women were already taking on the lion's share of unpaid care work, a trend that has continued since the spread of coronavirus.

Deloitte reports that of the women it surveyed, 65% now have more responsibility for household chores²⁴, while PwC noted that women now do a second shift²⁵ to manage childcare that amounts to 31.5 hours per week, the equivalent to having a second job.

And, as with the difference in microaggressions experienced in the workplace, women do not have a uniform experience when it comes to unpaid care work.

The TUC reports that: *"Latina and Black mothers are shouldering heavier burdens than white mothers. They are more likely to be their family's sole breadwinner or to have partners working outside the home during Covid-19. They are doing more at home, too: Latina mothers are 1.6 times more likely than white mothers to be responsible for all childcare and housework, and Black mothers are twice as likely to be handling all of this for their families."*

Considering intersectionality is fundamental to tackling inequality. Consequently, this was highlighted by the Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister for Women and Equalities, in her introduction to the government's Gender and Equality Roadmap²⁶.

²⁴ Understanding the Pandemic's Impact on Working Women, Deloitte

²⁵ Women in Work 2021 Index – full report, PwC

²⁶ HM Government, Gender Equality Roadmap

Racial discrimination before Covid-19

Discrimination on the grounds of race is not a new problem. Exploring how and where discrimination against BAME people presented itself before the pandemic is helpful to paint a picture of the environment in which the virus has disproportionately impacted people of colour.

The impact of racial discrimination can be seen across all aspects of life and work. In the US, for example, a new study has found that people of colour are, on average, disproportionately exposed to pollution²⁷ from all emissions sectors, and that this is linked to race, not wealth as is usually assumed. Julian Marshall, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Washington, remarked unambiguously that: “The inequities we report are a result of systemic racism.”

There are no elements of the human experience that are unmarked by racism. Understanding the breadth of discrimination offers insights into how and where attention needs to be focused to create a fairer system and society for all. While we will examine the breadth of experience of BAME people, the focus of this paper is on employment.

Inequality, structural racism and implicit bias

In an open letter sent to Prime Minister Boris Johnson²⁸ in March 2021, shadow equalities minister Marsha de Cordova noted: “*The unemployment rate for Black, Asian and ethnic minority people is now more than double the rate for white people and stands at 9.5% for ethnic minorities and 13.8% for Black people. Just yesterday, it was reported that Black Caribbean children in some parts of the UK are five times more likely to be excluded from school than white children.*”

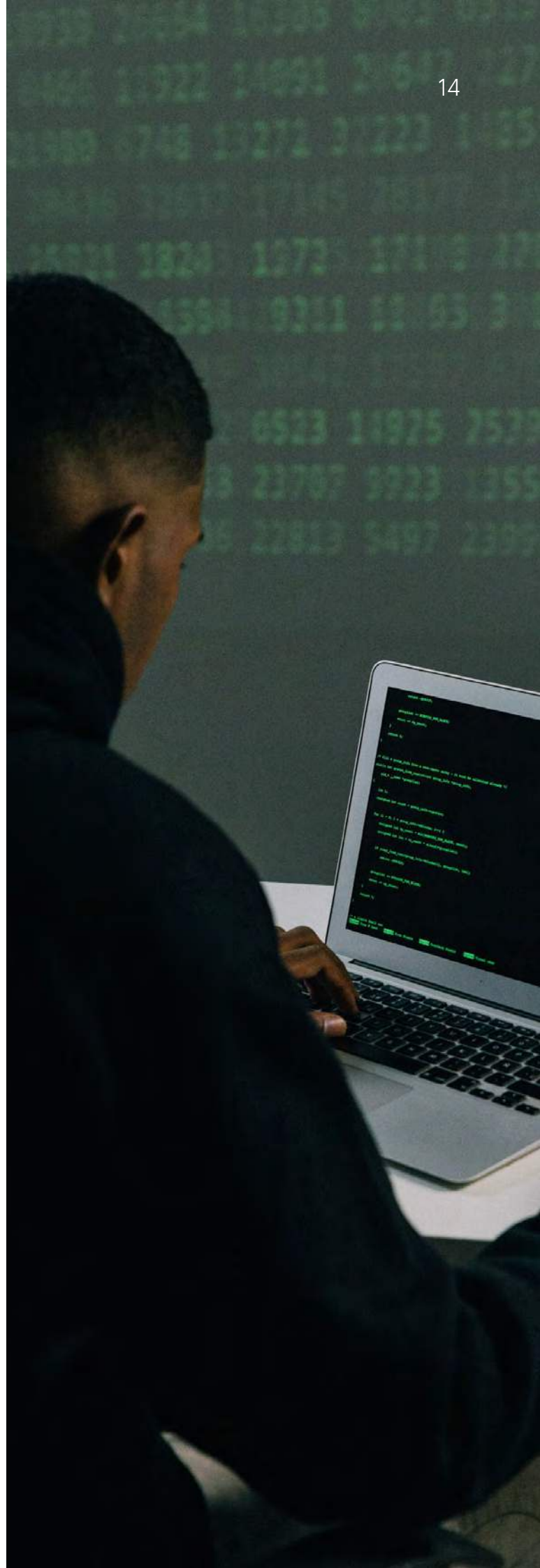
²⁷ New study highlights link between race and pollution exposure, World Economic Forum

²⁸ Government must publish race inequalities report, Marsha de Cordova urges, Independent

An inquiry by the government's own Joint Committee on Human Rights found in November that Black people in the UK were in 'no doubt' the protection of their rights was 'inferior' to those of white people."

The UK's justice system has a history of racial discrimination. Following the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, the public inquiry investigating the policing of the case²⁹ confirmed that: *"There is no doubt but that there were fundamental errors. The investigation was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers."* Attempting to understand the cause for the extent of the failure of the police in the case of Stephen Lawrence, the report explained: *"Unwitting racism can arise because of lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs. It can arise from well-intentioned but patronising words or actions."*

²⁹ A Summary of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Cm 4262-1)
Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny
Presented to Parliament



It can arise from unfamiliarity with the behaviour or cultural traditions of people or families from minority ethnic communities. It can arise from racist stereotyping of black people as potential criminals or troublemakers.” Following publication of the Macpherson report on the police investigation into the killing, it was widely accepted that policing practice in the UK was institutionally racist.

Unfortunately, not much has changed. Statistics for 1997/98 showed that Black people were, on average, five times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white people. Twenty-two years later, the stop-and-search statistics still present a glaring picture of institutional racism.³⁰ between April 2019 and March 2020 there were six stop-and-searches for every 1,000 White people, compared with 54 for every 1,000 Black people. In 2017, the Lammy Review³¹, a report into discrimination in

policing by Labour MP David Lammy, recognised that while progress in diversity was being made in politics, education and class, the justice system is still weighted against minority communities. The report found that: *“Despite making up just 14% of the population, BAME men and women make up 25% of prisoners, while over 40% of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds.”*

The causes for institutional racism documented by the Macpherson report can be applied beyond the justice system. Implicit bias, the unconscious association, belief or attitude towards any social group, has been recognised as a key contributing factor to ongoing structural racism across sectors, for example having a notably negative effect on BAME people’s experiences of employment.

³⁰ Stop and search – GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures

³¹ The Lammy Review – GOV.UK

Discrimination in employment

When it comes to the workplace, BAME people experience discrimination at every stage.

The UK government-commissioned McGregor-Smith review into [race in the workplace](#)³² estimated *“the potential benefit to the UK economy from full representation of BME individuals across the labour market, through improved participation and progression, to be £24 billion a year, which represents 1.3% of GDP.”* The same review also found that:

- In 2015, one in eight of the working-age population were from a BME background, yet BME individuals make up only 10% of the workforce and hold only 6% of top management positions.
- The employment rate for ethnic minorities is only 62.8% compared with an employment rate for White workers of 75.6% – a gap of over 12 percentage points. This gap is even worse for

some ethnic groups: for instance, the employment rate for those from a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background is only 54.9%.

- All BME groups are more likely to be overqualified than White ethnic groups but White employees are more likely to be promoted than all other groups.
- Detailed reports into the experiences of BAME people demonstrate the breadth of the group. While it can be useful to refer collectively to the category as a whole, it's also essential to examine the nuances that separate the experiences of, for example, Black Caribbean people and Chinese or Indian people.

As we saw when examining gender inequality, STEM-related jobs offer some of the best-paid and most secure opportunities, so it is significant that diversity remains an issue in this sector. In the STEM workforce, BAME workers

³² Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith review



are notably underrepresented, indicative of inequality in both education and recruitment. The World Economic Forum has reported³³ that, in the US, “*Black workers make up 9% of the STEM workforce, smaller than their share of all employed US adults (11%). They comprise just 5% of those in engineering and architecture and 6% each in life and physical science jobs.*” And the picture is similarly bleak in the UK³⁴. Just 6.2% of UK domicile students enrolled onto STEM-related subjects at UK universities are black (4.8% Black African, 1.2% Black Caribbean, 0.2% Black Other). Within the top tech firms in the UK, over 70% of boards and

senior executive teams do not have a BAME member at all. Women of BAME backgrounds make up only around 2% of boards and senior executive teams. Similarly, BAME women comprise less than 2% of all engineering professionals.

The lack of diversity in STEM-related industries, and in positions of influence and power more broadly, can be attributed to a wide range of factors including a lack of role models and supportive voices at the top. From education to recruitment, the system is stacked against BAME candidates.

The GEMM (Growth, Equal opportunities, Migration and Markets) project conducted

³³ Does America's STEM workforce have a diversity problem? Here are the facts – World Economic Forum

³⁴ BAME Women in STEM Statistics

research to determine if employers in Britain are discriminating against ethnic minorities³⁵. Their findings prove the presence of unconscious bias in employment in the UK. They found that, on average, nearly one in four applicants from the majority group (24%, White, British) received a positive response (i.e. a callback) from employers. The job-search effort was less successful for ethnic minorities who, despite having identical CVs and cover letters, needed to send 60% more applications in order to receive as many callbacks. Comparing their findings to previous field experiments conducted in Britain, they found no sign of progress for Caribbean people or for South Asians as a whole over the past 50 years.

Discrimination also impacts the type of work³⁶ that BAME people typically do. A TUC report in 2019 showed that black and ethnic minority groups were twice as likely to be in precarious employment, including zero-hour and agency contracts.

The Equality Act of 2010 legally protects people from discrimination at work, in education, as a consumer, when using public services, when buying or renting property, and as a member or guest of a private club or association, which makes it illegal to discriminate against anyone because of age, gender reassignment, marital status, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race (which includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, and sex or sexual orientation. What's more, the Migration Policy Index³⁷ (MIPEX) notes that British integration policies score above the average EU country.

³⁵ Are employers in Britain discriminating against ethnic minorities?, GEMM Project

³⁶ Coronavirus will increase race inequalities, Runnymede Trust

³⁷ MIPEX 2020, United Kingdom

This is important because, *“integration policies emerge as one of the strongest factors shaping not only the public’s willingness to accept and interact with immigrants, but also immigrants’ own attitudes, sense of belonging, participation and even health in their new home country.”*

Public attitudes to migrants can be reflected onto residents who are of a different ethnicity to the dominant one as the distinction between the two groups is not always made.

Despite this favourable analysis, there is clear evidence that BAME people are discriminated against across many, if not all, of the categories the Equality Act is designed to protect.



The pay gap

According to the ONS, the ethnicity pay gap is now at its lowest point³⁸ since 2012. Although across the board men continue to earn more than women, the pay gap between white men and those from ethnic minorities is the largest. As we have already seen, the BAME category is broad and encompasses many different experiences and levels of discrimination across various aspects of life. When it comes to the pay gap, the difference is largest for Bangladeshi and Pakistani employees, who earn 15.3% and 15.5% less respectively than white British workers. In London, the UK region with the highest population of BAME people³⁹, the ethnicity pay gap is at 24%.

The pay gap is an economic representation of the extent of discrimination and institutional racism in the UK. Without access to better schools and to teachers who believe in them, children

from BAME backgrounds – who, following historic discrimination, are less likely to be surrounded by role models with careers they can emulate – face odds that are stacked against their success. And those who persevere enter a workplace where discrimination continues to hamper their progress.

Discrimination in the workplace

The TUC conducted research to determine if racism is present in UK workplaces⁴⁰. Its findings paint a bleak picture.

The study showed that:

- More than a third (37%) of BME workers polled have been bullied, abused or experienced racial discrimination by their employer.
- 19% have experienced discrimination such as being denied training or promotion.
- 15% have experienced verbal abuse, and 16% of BME workers have experienced bullying or harassment at work.

³⁸ Ethnicity pay gaps, Office for National Statistics, 2019

³⁹ Open letter to the Prime Minister to reject 'insulting' report and act on race equality at work, TUC

⁴⁰ Is Racism Real? | TUC

- 43% did not feel able to report their experience of discrimination to their employers.
-
- 38% did not report incidents of bullying and harassment.
-

The picture is similar in the US. Dice has reported that, in the tech sector specifically, 48% of Black respondents have experienced racial discrimination, as well as 30% of Hispanic/Latino(a) respondents, 25% of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents and 23% of Asian Indian respondents.



Disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on ethnic minorities

Given the depth of discrimination and inequality that existed in British society pre-coronavirus, it is hardly surprising that the virus has had a disproportionate effect on BAME communities. A wealth of studies attest to this fact.

Data from the ONS shows that people from ethnic minorities are both more likely to test positive⁴¹ and more likely to die from Covid-19. Its analysis highlights the correlation between BAME people and the types of housing and works more typical among ethnic minority communities, which contribute in part to a higher exposure to the virus. A high proportion of women from BAME backgrounds work in nursing, while BAME men make up a high percentage of people working in transport, security and cleaning, all roles that are associated with a higher death rate from Covid-19.

The Runnymede Trust has collated statistics from several sources that demonstrate BAME communities are among the poorest socio-economic groups⁴², face structural inequalities that place them at a higher risk of severe illness from Covid-19, and they are experiencing harsher economic impacts from government measures to slow the spread of the virus.

Housing and wealth

Housing inequality has caused increased exposure and vulnerability to the virus among BAME communities for several reasons.

The ONS analysed data from 2016-2020⁴³ and found that, before coronavirus, households headed by someone of Black African, Black Caribbean, Other Black, Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnicity were significantly less likely to have assets to cover a total income loss over a three-month

⁴¹ Coronavirus (Covid-19) latest insights, Office for National Statistics, 2021

⁴² Coronavirus will increase race inequalities, Runnymede Trust, 2020

⁴³ ONS: Coronavirus and the social impacts on different ethnic groups in the UK

period than a household headed by someone who was White British. In April 2020, when the impacts of the virus were already being felt, a quarter of people (25%) from Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnic groups reported being behind on bills and 22% reported being less able to keep up with housing payments, with significantly higher proportions reporting struggling in these ways than respondents in other ethnic groups.

Aside from wealth, BAME households are also more likely to include someone over 70 years of age⁴⁴. Mixed-generation households expose elderly people to a higher risk of the virus, and there is also data to suggest that larger households, and more cramped living conditions, result in a higher risk of contracting Covid-19. The Runnymede Trust notes that 30% of Bangladeshi households and 15% of black African households are overcrowded⁴⁵ (where there

are more people than bedrooms), compared to 2% of white British households.

Wellbeing

The data also shows a more profound effect on the mental health and wellbeing of ethnic minority groups, compared to their White British peers.

The ONS has reported that most ethnic groups in the UK experienced a worsening of their self-reported mental health⁴⁶ between 2019 and April 2020.

Glenn Everett, Deputy Director, Sustainability & Inequalities Division of the ONS, commented: *“What today’s research shows us is how the impact on different ethnic groups varies and how people’s circumstances before the pandemic could affect their experience during the first national lockdown. Financial resilience was lower among Black African or Other Black*

⁴⁴ Coronavirus (Covid-19) roundup, 13 to 17 July 2020, Office for National Statistics

⁴⁵ Coronavirus will increase race inequalities, Runnymede Trust

⁴⁶ ONS: Coronavirus and the social impacts on different ethnic groups in the UK

households before the pandemic, for example, which would explain why these groups found it harder to manage financially during lockdown. Perhaps unsurprisingly, mental health deteriorated across most ethnic groups during lockdown but was most marked in the Indian group.”

Covid-19 and government support for employees

The coronavirus support schemes devised by the UK government have not offered equal benefit to everyone⁴⁷. Unfortunately, the wage-support scheme and mortgage-holiday package, among other support, are out of reach for a large number of people including a disproportionate number of ethnic minority people. Statutory sick pay is available only to those who earn over a certain amount, and Universal Credit has a two-child limit. There have also been significant concerns that self-employed people (a group which includes 29% of Pakistani men and

36% of Gypsy, Irish and Traveller groups) will not be adequately compensated for their loss of work.

The worse impact of the virus on BAME people, unless properly resolved, is likely to deepen existing inequality in education, housing, employment and wealth, and set back the progress that had been made by many, many years.

⁴⁷ Coronavirus will increase race inequalities – Runnymede



Living with disability before Covid-19

People living with a disability have experienced greater levels of unemployment and poverty since before the coronavirus. Understanding how and where inequalities have appeared historically is key to unpicking why the pandemic is having a more profound effect on disabled people, and how to build equality into the recovery.

In UK employment law, disability is defined⁴⁸ as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out

normal day-to-day activities. In the EU, approximately one in six⁴⁹ people aged 15 and over lives with a disability. In the UK, there are 14.1 million disabled people⁵⁰: 8% of children are disabled, 19% of working-age adults are disabled, and 46% of pension-age adults are disabled. Inequalities that affect disabled people are impacting a large proportion of our society and damaging our economy.

Disabled people are more likely to live in poverty

The TUC reported⁵¹ that before the crisis, disabled people were already more likely to live in poverty. It cites a report into the disproportionately negative effects of Universal Credit on disabled

⁴⁸ Disability & Employment | Factsheets, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

⁴⁹ Employment and disability in the European Union, European Parliament Briefing Paper, May 2020

⁵⁰ Disability facts and figures | Disability charity Scope UK

⁵¹ Disabled workers in Wales and Covid-19 | TUC

people by the UK Government Public Accounts Committee, which *“accused Ministers of turning a ‘deaf ear’ to disabled people’s concerns.”* Disabled people who are in work have been left worse off financially by Universal Credit because the allowance that was designed to improve incentives for disabled people to work, is only awarded to people assessed as unable to work. [The Disability Benefit Consortium found](#)⁵² that *“changes to the welfare system over the past ten years have left disabled adults four times worse off financially than non-disabled adults.”* The report found that *“while many people who receive welfare support have experienced cuts of an average of £300 as a result of changes to the welfare system, disabled people have typically lost around £1,200 per year”,* and that the complexity of the system has had a devastating impact on the wider health and wellbeing of many disabled people.

[Government statistics](#)⁵³ show that nearly half of all people living in poverty are from a household that includes a disabled person – a level completely disproportionate to the overall percentage of disabled people in the UK. [Scope reports](#)⁵⁴ that, *“after housing costs, the proportion of working-age disabled people living in poverty (26%) is higher than the proportion of working-age non-disabled people (21%).”* No doubt contributing to this is the fact that life costs an average of £583 more per month for people living with a disability.

Historic employment inequality

A multitude of studies highlight the disproportionately negative impact of the 2008-2009 recession on disabled people. [According to Disability At Work](#)⁵⁵, disabled people *“were more likely to experience negative changes to terms and conditions and working practices, such as wage*

⁵² Disabled adults four times worse off financially than non-disabled adults finds new DBC report

⁵³ Households below average income: 1994/95 to 2018/19, GOV.UK

⁵⁴ Disability facts and figures | Disability charity Scope UK

⁵⁵ All in it together? The impact of the recession on disabled people, Disability At Work

freezes, reduced overtime, and the reorganisation of work than non-disabled people during the recession.” It also found that “during upturns disabled people are the last to gain employment, and during downturns they are first to be made unemployed.”

A 2009 study by Leonard Cheshire⁵⁶ found that more disabled people than non-disabled people were likely to be targeted for redundancy during the recession. The ONS, analysing return-to-work data from 2007 to 2020⁵⁷ found that just 7.6% of disabled people who were out of work but had previously had a job returned to employment in the next three months, compared with 26.8% of out-of-work non-disabled people. After controlling for personal characteristics, such as the increased likelihood of disabled people being old, they found that being disabled was one of the biggest impediments to people’s chances of returning to work.

⁵⁶ Tackling the disability employment gap must be a priority after the pandemic, Learning & Work Institute

⁵⁷ Which groups find it hardest to find a job following a period out of work?, ONS



Given these trends, it is fair to infer that the coronavirus has caused rates of unemployment to rise drastically, will have a disproportionate impact on people with disabilities. At a time of stress when reacting with speed is considered essential to recovery, it's likely that the additional considerations and measures that need to be taken to ensure an equitable rebuild will be sidelined in favour of taking immediate action to kickstart the economy. What's more, a [2019 National Audit Office report](#)⁵⁸ noted that the Department for Work and Pensions has very limited evidence of what works in the current context when it comes to supporting disabled people to enter or stay in work, making building a better system a more complex process, with success even harder to achieve.

The disability employment gap

Historic employment inequality exists despite layers of policy at national, European and global levels that are designed to ensure the rights of people living with disabilities⁵⁹ are protected. In 2010 the EU signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a legally binding international treaty that protects work and employment as a fundamental right. The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights are two further measures that stress the importance of and provide an impetus to, ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market. In the UK, the rights of people with disabilities to access employment are enshrined in the 2010 Equality Act.

⁵⁸ Supporting disabled people to work, National Audit Office, 2019

⁵⁹ Employment and disability in the European Union, European Parliament Briefing, May 2020

Despite this, there are significant gaps between the number of people employed with and without disabilities⁶⁰. At the European level, only 50.6% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 74.8% of people without disabilities. And women with disabilities, young disabled people and those with high support needs are more likely both to be discriminated against, and to be excluded from the employment market.

In the UK, the disability employment gap⁶¹ stands at nearly 30%. According to the ONS, disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed⁶² as non-disabled people. Unconscious bias – as we saw with race – has a role to play. Disability charity Scope has found that one in three people see disabled people as being less productive⁶³ than non-disabled people. To redress the employment imbalance, public perceptions of what it means to be disabled and

how that does and does not impact what someone can do, need to be addressed.

As we have seen when exploring gender discrimination and the inequalities faced by BAME people, intersectionality has an inescapable impact on the level of discrimination people experience. To combat the inequalities faced by millions of UK citizens every day, a holistic view must be taken that incorporates measures to address discrimination across every characteristic that is supposedly already protected by law.

⁶⁰ Employment and disability in the European Union, European Parliament Briefing, May 2020

⁶¹ TUC response to inquiry on Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics

⁶² Dataset: A08: Labour market status of disabled people, ONS

⁶³ Disability facts and figures | Disability charity Scope UK

Coronavirus has deepened disability inequality

Before the coronavirus, disabled people were more likely to be poor and more likely to be unemployed. The pandemic has compounded these existing inequalities and has had a pronounced effect on the lives of people living with disabilities.

Rehabilitation charity [Black Stork](#) notes⁶⁴ that six out of ten people who have died due to Covid-19 were disabled. Of course, in many cases people living with disabilities were more vulnerable to the disease. But that is not the whole picture. The lack of access to ongoing care and rehabilitation during the pandemic has also played a part in the disproportionately high death rate.

Furthermore, another unanticipated consequence of the greater risk disabled people have faced from coronavirus is that the need to

shield may result in an increased stigmatisation of disabled workers. Being seen as vulnerable is likely to have a negative impact on the hiring rates for people living with disabilities.

Covid-19, employment and disability

A report from Leonard Cheshire has found that 71% of disabled people in employment in March 2020 were negatively affected by the pandemic⁶⁵. This statistic includes those who were put on furlough, made redundant and experienced a loss of income. For disabled people aged 18–24, the figure increases to 84%. Young people are bearing the brunt of the economic fall-out from the pandemic, a worrying trend which, given the scarring effects of long-term youth unemployment⁶⁶, could have significant effects far into the future.

Parliament's analysis of the ONS's Labour Force Survey shows that workers in the sectors most impacted – and shut down – by the

⁶⁴ Closing the Disability Employment Gap in the Time of Covid, Black Stork

⁶⁵ Disability & Employment | Factsheets, CIPD

⁶⁶ Mitigating the scarring effects of youth unemployment caused by Covid-19, Aptem

pandemic are primarily comprised of people already facing significant inequality:

- 15% are from BAME backgrounds, compared to a workforce average of 12%.
- 57% are women, compared to a workforce average of 48%.
- 41% are part-time workers, compared to a 26% workforce average.
- 15% are disabled (as defined by the Equality Act 2010), compared to a workforce average of 14%.
- Nearly 50% are under 35.

Black Stork highlights that by the end of 2020, disabled people were almost twice as likely to be long-term unemployed than non-disabled people. Spending time out of work has well-documented scarring effects⁶⁷. For disabled people, a prolonged job search could have detrimental effects

on confidence levels, which will increase the difficulties they have finding work. In February 2021, a larger proportion of disabled people (78%) than non-disabled people (69%), said they were worried (very or somewhat) about the effect that the coronavirus (Covid-19) was having⁶⁸ on their life. Estimates also suggest that during 2020 the disabled pay gap has increased.

Citizens Advice polled 6,000 people⁶⁹ and found that over a quarter (27%) of people with a disability were facing redundancy. For those whose disability has a large impact on day-to-day life, the figure rose to 37%, while one in two people classed as clinically vulnerable are facing redundancy. Comparatively, just 17% of the working-age population are currently facing redundancy. This is a clear demonstration of the greater impact the economic downturn is having on the more vulnerable members of our society.

⁶⁷ Unemployment scarring – Economic and Social Research Council

⁶⁸ Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain, ONS, February 2021

⁶⁹ An unequal crisis, Citizens Advice, August 2020

Remote employment: reasonable adjustments and working from home

For employed disabled people, the sudden shift to remote working has been both a blessing and a curse.

A survey by Unison⁷⁰ found that nearly three-quarters of disabled staff felt they were more productive or as productive working from home compared to their pre-lockdown place of work. Respondents explained that they were able to manage their condition better and so were taking fewer sick days. Removing the – often exhausting, stressful or painful – commute and enabling people to work in an environment specifically designed to cater to their needs, and to take proper rest breaks when needed, has been very beneficial for many disabled people. However, while Unison found that 54% of respondents felt they would benefit from working from home on a more long-term basis, 37% did not believe their employers would allow it.

For those who have not been able to be more productive working at home, this was because their employer had not allowed them to make the reasonable adjustments – enshrined in the Equality Act of 2010 – that they needed to perform their work from home. More than 50% of Unison's survey respondents had not received any reasonable adjustments from their employer.

The pandemic has had a disproportionately negative effect on disabled people. However, it has also highlighted where changes can be made – often at little or no cost to employers – to increase inclusion in their workforce. As we've seen, the participation of diverse people in the labour market is essential to innovation and growth. To move forward and 'build back better', we need to embrace the skills and perspectives of people living with a disability.

⁷⁰ Give disabled people the right to work from home after Covid-19, says UNISON | News, Press release | News



Solving inequality through technology

To combat discrimination in all of its complexity, solutions should be explored from the broadest possible perspective. Those that combat multiple types or instances of discrimination should be implemented in combination with localised and highly targeted approaches.

Technological advances provide many means by which we can limit or eliminate discrimination from life and work. The new [Technology and Innovation report](#)⁷¹ from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) identifies an opportunity in Covid-19 recovery efforts for governments and the international community to reduce the inequalities that have been brought into sharper focus by the pandemic, by harnessing new and emerging technologies.

⁷¹ Emerging technologies can foster an inclusive Covid-19 recovery, UNCTAD, February 2021

Here, we explore technological solutions to inequality and how they can be used to support the creation of a more equitable society.

Technology and education

During the pandemic there was a huge increase in the number of adults participating in online learning. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) such as those accessed via Coursera or FutureLearn, as well as popular apps like Duolingo, offered people much-needed distraction and a sense of purpose throughout lockdowns. And in the current hiring climate, which is incredibly competitive, the additional skills gained from participating in these informal learning activities give jobseekers an edge over the competition.

Theoretically, these types of learning make gaining useful skills and knowledge more accessible, as courses delivered online are often free or offered at a much reduced

rate. Similarly, courses that are self-directed enable people with other responsibilities, such as caring (which typically falls to women), to fit learning around their lives.

However, a [study from the Learning and Work Institute](#)⁷² has found that while over two in five people in the UK had participated in some form of learning during lockdown, those who were most likely to benefit were also the least likely to take part. They found that:

- Just one in five (20%) adults who left school at the first opportunity took part in lockdown learning, compared to three in five (57%) adults who stayed in education until 21.
- Adults in lower socio-economic groups (29%) were half as likely to take part in lockdown learning compared to adults in higher socio-economic groups (57%).

⁷² Learning and Work report: Learning through lockdown

- Just one in three (34%) adults who were out of work took part in lockdown learning, compared to over half (52%) of those who were in employment.

So, while remote learning provides an opportunity to tackle issues of access to education and skills training, and ultimately to diversify the workforce, this is currently being underutilised. Work needs to be carried out to address the gap and ensure that more people who can benefit from online learning take part.

Accessing technology

It should be noted that access to digital technology is not equal. According to the ONS⁷³, “In 2018, 12% of those aged between 11 and 18 years (700,000) reported having no internet access at home from a computer or tablet, while a further 60,000 reported having no home internet access at all. Of those in this age group, 68% who did have home internet access reported that they would find it difficult to complete school work without it, suggesting that there may be educational implications for those without internet access.” This has been a challenge that schools have had to surmount during Covid-19, to ensure that the 9% of the public nationwide without access to a laptop⁷⁴ could still continue to learn. Now classed as vulnerable, children without access to the technology they needed to attend lessons and study at home were allowed to continue to go into school. While this worked as a short-term

⁷³ ONS Exploring the UK's digital divide

⁷⁴ Pupils without laptops can still go to school in England lockdown, The Guardian

stop-gap, digital exclusion will continue to perpetuate existing inequalities unless it's resolved. As we have seen earlier in this report, households headed by a BAME person or that include someone with disabilities are disproportionately low-income, and therefore these vulnerable children are more likely to be facing other inequalities alongside digital exclusion and poverty.

Digital tools to support jobseekers

Digital services that can be accessed from anywhere and at any time offer many benefits to jobseekers, particularly to those who are underrepresented in the workforce.

For example, for those with caring responsibilities, a group that disproportionately includes women and BAME people, being able to schedule job-search and employability-skills training around existing responsibilities gives them a much greater opportunity for success.



For people living in poverty, again a group that disproportionately includes BAME people and people with disabilities, not having to take transport to reach Jobcentre appointments, for example, removes a significant expense and the associated stress. Travel for some people living with a disability can also mean pain and exhaustion; removing these elements of the job-searching process can support diverse people to succeed in securing the job they want.

Job-search technology also enables work coaches to track the progress of a larger caseload and to offer additional support to those who need it most, again a group that often includes disproportionate numbers of BAME and disabled people. [The Learning and Work Institute](#)⁷⁵ identified, in its 2019 research into strategies that are effective in closing the disability employment gap, that tailoring job support services to the needs and aspirations of the individual

contributed significantly to their success. Harnessing technology allows support to be tailored and targeted in this way.

Making hiring more equitable

Studies have shown that implicit bias impacts the way recruiters assess applications they receive. For example, [a study in the US](#)⁷⁶ found that people with typically White-sounding names receive 30% more callbacks than people with names perceived to be African-American.

One challenge with using algorithms is that they can perpetuate existing inequalities, since they learn from old datasets and apply the logic and patterns found in that data. If a company has historically had little diversity among its workforce, using artificial intelligence (AI) to hire new talent would not enable them to change that pattern. Until now.

⁷⁵ Tackling the disability employment gap must be a priority after the pandemic, Learning and Work Institute

⁷⁶ Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination lockdown, The Guardian

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researchers have developed⁷⁷ a new approach to using algorithms to identify good job candidates.

The MIT researchers applied an 'exploration bias' to their algorithm which, when ranking candidates, assigned more points to those who were 'rare' in terms of the original dataset, meaning diverse candidates were well represented in the pool who made it through the AI application assessment. What's more, the researchers found that hiring results were much higher when their exploration-based algorithm was used, compared to a learning-based algorithm, meaning this approach has potential to both increase workforce diversity and save recruiters time.

Algorithmic accountability and technological bias

Ensuring that new technologies are created by diverse teams and therefore offer solutions that work for everyone is a particular challenge. The rapid move to remote working at the start of the pandemic quickly exposed the racism embedded in technologies like Zoom⁷⁸. Using backgrounds on Zoom to disguise whichever space in their home someone was working from revealed that the facial recognition technology had been designed to detect white faces, and that for black people it simply did not work. A similar racial bias was then detected in Twitter's facial-recognition technology, which prioritised white faces.

Algorithmic bias has no single root cause⁷⁹. The reasons for it can be down to how the human creating the algorithm has framed a particular problem, or to the fact that the source dataset is itself biased. One study has even shown

⁷⁷ Exploration-based algorithms can improve hiring quality and diversity, MIT Sloane

⁷⁸ Twitter's photo algorithm prioritises white faces over black ones, The Independent

⁷⁹ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez says AI can be biased. She's right. Vox



that teaching an algorithm to read what has already been written and put on the internet results in biases against black people and women. Checking against bias is also a tricky process, since the checks must be performed across all protected characteristics, and the inherent biases held by the humans responsible for the checks need to be accounted for. And as we have seen, there is a problem with representation in the tech sector.

LinkedIn's 2018 global hiring report⁸⁰ found that recruiters and hiring managers, globally, believe AI is a bold disrupter and is helping them save time (67%), remove human bias (43%) and deliver the best candidate

matches (31%). Respondents also said that AI is most helpful when sourcing (58%), screening (56%) and nurturing candidates (55%). Yet a lot of controversy surrounds using AI in hiring processes. On the one hand, using algorithms to scan databases and identify ideal candidates – which is how the widely used LinkedIn Recruiter⁸¹ works – can save HR professionals a lot of time and effort. Other AI methods used during hiring include artificially assessed video interviews, such as those offered by HireVue, an AI recruitment tool used by international conglomerates including Unilever, Sodexo and Dow Jones. They market their product as offering a

⁸⁰ LinkedIn 2018 Report Highlights Top Global Trends in Recruiting

⁸¹ AI Behind LinkedIn Recruiter Search and Recommendation Systems

faster, friendlier and fairer hiring process, and use a combination of keywords, facial expressions and tone to assess candidates. Algorithms, though, are only as fair as the datasets on which they are trained. Given the inequalities that exist across industry that prevent women, BAME people and those with disabilities from accessing the same opportunities as others, the existing data about ideal candidates is not going to encourage AI tools to select more diverse candidates. This was the problem that faced Amazon in 2018 when they had to scrap an AI recruitment tool⁸² they'd built, because it was found to prioritise job applications submitted by men.

What this highlights is the need to build better datasets in order to teach the algorithms of the future to recognise and apply patterns that will result in a better, more equitable society.

Meanwhile, solutions to combat the problem of bias are under way. Amazon has included a test in their anti-bias toolkit⁸³ that was created by Oxford academics to align with how European Courts apply non-discrimination law. The test *"helps users look for bias in their AI systems and is particularly relevant for those seeking help in detecting unintuitive and unintended biases as well as heterogenous, minority-based and intersectional discrimination."*

And there are other ways to use artificial intelligence during recruitment that are not as problematic. Augmented writing, for example, supports recruiters and companies to make sure that job applications use open and accessible language to attract the widest variety of suitable candidates.

Data from LinkedIn⁸⁴ that shows how language is perceived differently by women and men supports this approach.

⁸² Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women, Reuters

⁸³ OII | AI modelling tool developed by Oxford academics incorporated into Amazon anti-bias software

⁸⁴ Language Matters: How Words Impact, LinkedIn

They found that one in four women would be discouraged from applying for a job described as demanding. Tools like Textio, whose clients include eBay, Ericsson, the World Bank and McDonald's, adapt the language used by companies to attract the best talent⁸⁵. After adopting Textio, Procter & Gamble found a 30% increase in qualified candidates. The data-driven approach to hiring they've been able to adopt by using Textio is what will enable them to achieve greater diversity in their workforce, according to P&G Associate Human Resources Manager, Brad Miller. The company explains: *"Textio uses data science to reveal the hidden gender bias in your writing and suggests alternatives so you can recruit from the widest possible pool of qualified candidates."*

Technology is not the only answer

We cannot rely solely on technology to solve inequality. Placing too much emphasis on these solutions could risk

inadequate importance being given to trickier instances of discrimination to solve, such as deeply ingrained unconscious biases. Tackling those requires a different approach.

In the UK, for example, Stylist magazine has just launched a new⁸⁶ appeal calling for the government to start a communications campaign combat violence against women. It cites the remarkable success of previous campaigns such as the THINK! road safety campaign, which correlated with a 46% drop in UK road deaths between 2000 and 2010, and mass media campaigns between 2002 and 2009 which have been recognised as the cause of 13.5% of the decline in smoking during that time. The power of the media has similarly been recognised by respondents to the Girlguiding survey:⁸⁷ 95% of girls and women aged 11 to 21 said that the advertising industry should make sure adverts show more positive, diverse representations of girls and women.

⁸⁵ Procter & Gamble looks to the future with augmented writing, Textio

⁸⁶ A Fearless Future: campaign to end male violence against women

⁸⁷ Girlguiding's Girls' Attitudes Survey

Conclusion: putting diversity centre stage in employability

Inequalities in employment and beyond that pre-date Covid-19 across race, gender and ethnicity, have been deepened by the pandemic.

To move forwards and create a more equitable society, solutions need to be implemented that acknowledge the complexity and intersectionality of structural and social discrimination. Broad categories like BAME need to be broken down to understand the breadth of experiences of people contained within that definition. The different experiences of people who cross these categories, for example, women with disabilities or Black women, need to be acknowledged and provided for.

There are, however, significant opportunities following the coronavirus to rebuild and to correct the inequalities experienced by so many people.



Technological advances can enable companies to diversify their workforce, but to do so algorithms need to be trained on datasets that represent an ideal workforce, not the existing one. The move to remote working offers many marginalised people a way to find and thrive in their ideal jobs, but can leave some workers unrepresented in the physical office if steps aren't taken to ensure all voices are heard equally. Removing the daily confrontation by microaggressions, the need to undertake a stressful and time-consuming commute, enabling people to work around their existing needs and responsibilities means a greater number of workers can access the best opportunities. Remote working also extends the catchment area for jobs; it is no longer essential to live within a commutable distance to an office, enabling jobseekers to expand their search beyond geographic limitations that may be defined by wealth.

Care needs to be taken to address each of the setbacks caused by the pandemic.⁸⁸ For example, women's ability to progress in work or to gain additional skills has been limited by the demand of childcare on their time. Gaps or moments of unemployment on a CV are often seen as red flags by hiring companies. To redress this, investment will need to be made in training, to offset these losses in skills. Similarly, for the many children living in poverty or from less-educated homes whose education has been impacted by the crisis, their future opportunities will be severely affected if efforts are not made to offer remedial education, and to relax the standards that mark the transitions between stages of education, such as from GCSE to post-16 courses. Furthermore, government funding for technology for schools would allow all pupils equally to harness the benefits of technology.

⁸⁸ Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, Institute for Fiscal Studies

This would ensure that children from less fortunate backgrounds grow up learning the essential digital skills that are required to succeed in their careers.

The [Learning & Work Institute](#) and [World Skills UK](#)⁸⁹ have just published a report outlining that, while the demand for digital skills continues to grow, participation in digital skills training has declined. This disparity needs to be addressed.

However, there are [some positives among the overall startling statistics](#)⁹⁰. While the majority of women have taken on the main responsibilities of household chores and childcare during the pandemic, the evidence shows that the share of these responsibilities taken on by men has also increased. The longer-term effect of this increased contribution from men could lead to women having more time to build their careers, access more opportunities and ultimately boost the labour market.

Evidence has shown that Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on inequalities in our systems, perceptions and experiences – areas that were already being highlighted and raised in recent years in the wider society and the workplace.

Following patterns that have been highlighted and addressed in this whitepaper, it is clear that working towards incorporating new solutions such as the use of AI and similar technological advancements in, for example, the recruitment market has created positive moves towards closing the gaps of inequality whilst bringing balance and growth opportunities for all. In addition, the evidence has shown that these gaps have deepened further during the pandemic period and may continue to do so. By identifying this problem now, a new opportunity to build a better, more equal society with equity and opportunity for all at its heart has been created.

⁸⁹ New research highlights UK digital skills gap, World Skills UK and Learning & Work Institute, March 2021

⁹⁰ Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to Covid-19 than others? Institute for Fiscal Studies

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