

Connected via Zoom, Ann-Maree Morrison presented the particularities internationally but particularly what is happening in Britain, and in Scotland.



[Ann-Maree Morrison](#) is Co-Chair of the W20 UK Delegation. [W20 UK](#) can be followed via the link. The W20 consists of 20 national delegations and was established by the G20 to advise on gender issues to G20 leaders. Each year we write a Communiqué or report to the G20 ministers which can be used by them to actively make long term changes to allow women to equally contribute in all aspects of life with men at the same level of pay and seniority, as leaders, as role models and as drivers of change. We cover women in all areas of life, from charities to care givers to corporate leaders and entrepreneurs. W20 advisory group is independent of governments. This year W20 was chaired by W20 Italy and also addressed post pandemic recovery and climate, on top of the usual Finance, Digital, Labour Market and Entrepreneurship sections.

In the UK the Government has used the furlough and loan scheme to support businesses during the Pandemic which has definitely helped for the past 2 years but not the informal economy. Ecommerce businesses, particularly Amazon, have survived more easily than those on the high street as everyone went online.

The informal economy and women in work

Women have more likely than men become economically inactive dropping out of the labour market.

- According to [McKinsey](#) one in four women are considering leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers versus one in five men due to care responsibilities.
- Globally according to the 42% of all employed women work in hard hit sectors.
- That's why the W20 this year asked the G20 leaders to regulate the informal economy and ensure decent work and wages and conditions of employment.
- [The UK Government was discussing a new employment bill pre pandemic](#) including more predictable and stable contracts, extended protection for pregnant employees to 6 months after return to work and regulating the informal sector. W20 UK are pushing the Government to include flexible working within the contract negotiations rather than after employment.

Home working and care

Home working during the pandemic has disproportionately affected women balancing caring and home schooling duties with work. They have taken on a greater burden of unpaid care work and home schooling and are at increased risk of losing their livelihood and financial insecurity.

Getting more women into DECENT equally paid work means we need better policies, action and investment in the care economy and social infrastructure, creating jobs and increasing support for unpaid caregivers.

- According to the [ILO women are responsible for 76.2%](#) of all hours of unpaid care work, more than triple that of men. 78.4% of single parent households are headed by women.
- A report by the [UK Women's Budget Group for the International Trade Union Confederation \(ITUC\)](#) shows that investing public funds in childcare and elder care services would boost employment, earnings, economic growth and gender equality. We need to create the right conditions and support to get more women into employment and not being forced to choose between being a mother or a career.
- Addressing financing childcare, parental leave, parental payments and training is critical for a sustainable recovery and this is something that the UK and Scottish governments, are looking to do. The Carers Scotland new report in Scotland found 78 per cent of carers, who are mainly women, had to give up work.
 - In the UK up to [1.5 million jobs could be created if 2% of GDP](#) were invested in care industries, compared to 750,000 for an equivalent investment in construction.
 - Women's employment rate would increase by more than 5 points and the gender employment gap would reduce by 25%.

Technology transformation and ecommerce

As an ecommerce entrepreneur I see technological transformation as a chance for positive changes. Change can be positive if women are involved in the design and build and not negatively impacted but positively involved in the new world of work. This means reskilling and upskilling from primary school, and life long learning.

- And Ecommerce is a fantastic vehicle for change if the infrastructure is in place and the right skills are taught by the right people throughout the journey. W20 is also pushing for educational upskilling of women and the Scottish government is investing in Women's centres for training entrepreneurs replicating success in the US and Canada, as an example.
- Engaging [women in STEAM education and employment](#) by providing funding and incentives to public and private sectors for training and career development of women in stem industries is particularly important.
- [Increasing women and girl's access to digital technology, especially in remote rural areas](#) by urgently investing in infrastructure and training to improve skills enables women to be fully involved building communities and resolving local issues.

- Technology institutions and companies must [include women in the research, design and development of digital technologies](#) to ensure women's lived experiences and needs are met.

Education

The importance of education must not be underestimated. Education is the foundation stone for every young person's future.

- [The World Bank](#) suggests that investments in school age girls have the highest returns in advancing gender equality. However still many girls are prevented from getting an education and across the world girls' education has been adversely and disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with lockdowns and school closures.
- In addition to school closures, the poorest and most marginalised girls face increased unpaid care responsibilities caused by the pandemic as well as a growing risk of early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancy and consequently extreme poverty, all of which impede their access to education.
- The Malala Fund [estimates 20 million secondary school-aged girls](#) worldwide may never return to their classrooms. The UK government has highlighted girls' education as a priority which is welcome, but it has to be life-long learning.
- At the [G20 Equality Conference](#) it was argued it was all down to the "Black Hole in Maths" and the need to change the way we teach maths. Education is key to everything primary school onwards.
- Access to financial literacy is fundamental for women in the work-place. Economics comes from financial literacy and Economists hold the purse strings to the G20 budgets too. We need more female Economists and women in finance, like Christine Lagarde, who is a fabulous high profile and proactive example.

Cultural Change and gender Stereotyping

There is an urgent need for cultural change to address gender stereotyping from primary school to the workforce with new female role models and mentors and the role of successful women highlighted in educational texts. Countering sexism begins in childhood, boys and girls learning together and maturing to respect equality of opportunity.

Women in Leadership

We cannot ignore the issue of female leadership. No guesses who the most successful leaders were during the COVID-19 Pandemic? They were women! Women have leadership skills needed in the future of work and the future of our planet to help address climate change: being democratic, consultative, empathetic, motivational and encouraging team work.

- Leadership is not just about high level business and political roles. It happens in many different spaces and levels - families, communities, public services, schools, and

academia. Visible women's leadership is very important for girls and [young women to have role models](#) and contributes to the normalisation of women in leadership roles so I encourage you all to be inclusive and meaningful leaders.

- In the UK there have been voluntary targets for 10 years which have helped improve the number of more women on boards and in senior management but this has now slowed. A new 5 year review of Women on Boards has been committed to by the UK government. Perhaps it's time for quotas?

On other matters in the UK like Erasmus funding post Brexit it is unknown how the UK Government plans to replace the funding but they have announced that there will be a shared prosperity fund. Areas still not announced but on the agenda to be replaced include how to fund women NGOs that fund refugees and other schemes.

Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace also remains a significant issue despite increasing awareness. We believe the Government as matter of urgency must bring forward the proposed legislation to introduce measures employers must take to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace including making this a mandatory responsibility of employers.

Non-Disclosure Agreements are often used unfairly to silence victims of sexual violence which is not acceptable. The Government we hope will legislate on NDA's requiring employers to, among other things, ensuring that a confidentiality clause cannot prevent an individual from making a disclosure.

Conclusion

The way ahead must give women and girls' concrete choices to enter whatever field they wish to grow their careers in with equality of care, education, pay, leave, pensions, and leadership positions. Essential changes are needed in education, care, infrastructure, cultural beliefs, workforce and employment methods, investment in women owned and led businesses and in making violence against women a punishable crime.

Best Regards,

Ann-Maree Morrison