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The Path Forward to a Feminist Recovery:

Twelve steps NYC must take to
advance gender equity in
the wake of the pandemic

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Since the moment COVID-19 arrived in New York City, the burden of the pandemic's many challenges have fallen heaviest on women, especially women of color. The majority of frontline workers—the New Yorkers whose labor kept critical services available, often at great risk to their own health—were women. Women comprise the majority of New York City's health care and social services industries,¹ and as businesses shut down and schools transitioned to remote learning in response to the public health crisis, it was women assuming a disproportionate share of the added caregiving and household demands.²

Although two years have passed since the first COVID-19 lockdowns went into effect in New York City, relatively little has been written about the gendered impacts of the pandemic and

ensuing recession locally, even less about how those impacts further differ across lines of race and ethnicity, language, immigration status, disability, and geography – and what must be done to ensure the city’s recovery is shared equally. Such an examination is critical to ensuring that the policy decisions and investments we make now not only center the most vulnerable New Yorkers but also that they do not reproduce or deepen gender inequities - disparities that long predated the pandemic but were exacerbated by it.

The data laid out in this brief clarify the ways in which the pandemic has disparately impacted women across the city – particularly women of color. But it also adds up to a thorough critique of our economy, highlighting the ways in which systemic sexism, racism, and de facto discrimination have for decades limited economic opportunity for the city and everyone in it. Acknowledging the scope of the problem lays the necessary groundwork for us to imagine what it would take to achieve a truly feminist recovery and economy.

This policy brief, jointly authored by the offices of Comptroller Brad Lander, Council Member Shahana Hanif, and Council Member Tiffany Cabán, aims to advance this conversation by offering new data and perspective on the crisis. Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data shows that between the first and second quarters of 2020, nearly 220,000 women in the city had dropped out of the labor force. While women’s labor force participation in New York City has, as of the last quarter of 2021, returned to pre-pandemic levels, unemployment remains high, particularly among Black women. In total, over 50,000 more women were unemployed during the last quarter of 2021 than the first quarter of 2020, prior to COVID-19’s arrival.

Yet too often the job opportunities awaiting those women seeking work offer uneven access to the good wages and job protections necessary to sustain themselves and their families, while limited child care accessibility makes it difficult to look for work altogether. For those frontline workers who never left, the pandemic took a disproportionate toll on their health, and wages have not kept up with rising costs. Meanwhile, the pandemic has pushed the limits of an already fragile and fragmented safety net, leaving women most at the margins – low-income, undocumented, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, women with disabilities, and women-headed households with children – without sustained or sufficient resources to navigate the resulting economic and social dislocation.

Following an overview of how women were faring on a number of economic measures prior to the pandemic, this brief highlights some ways in which COVID-19 changed the material conditions for many of them, drawing on new analysis of U.S. Census data. The remainder of the policy brief lays out an actionable path forward to increase economic justice, health, and safety for women. While these action steps will not entirely solve for the systemic and structural inequalities evidenced by the data, nor are they inclusive of every step the City can or should take, these twelve recommendations are critical to realizing an inclusive and gender-responsive recovery.

Twelve steps NYC must take to advance gender equity in the wake of the pandemic:

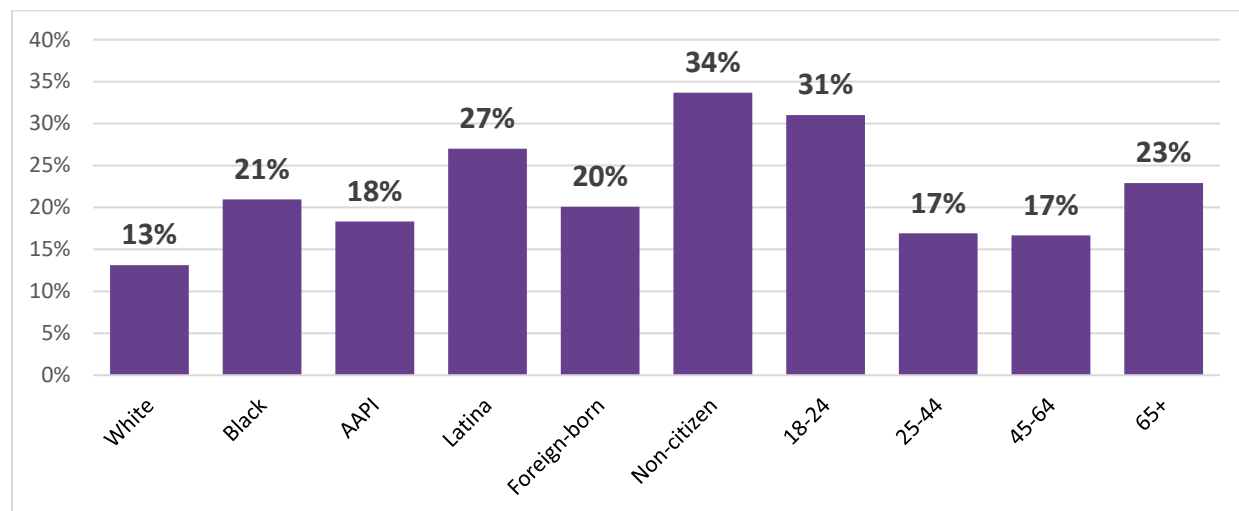
- 1. Expand Access to Affordable Child Care**
- 2. Support Flexible Scheduling Policies**
- 3. Invest in Quality Elder and Disability Care**
- 4. Establish Universal Just Cause Protections**
- 5. Support Workers in the Gig, Freelance, and Contingent Economy**
- 6. Expand Opportunities for Worker Ownership and Employment in the Trades**
- 7. Lift the Wage Floor and Support Human Services Workers**
- 8. Increase Access to Safe, Affordable Housing for Survivors**
- 9. Invest in Community Safety Strategies**
- 10. Prevent and Respond to Rising Violence Against AAPI Women**
- 11. Increase Access to Reproductive Health Care and Sexual Health Education**
- 12. Expand Health Care Coverage and Increase Language Access**

The pandemic exposed gender inequities that are longstanding and deeply rooted, with gender linked to higher rates of poverty across the city.

In order to understand the full impact of the pandemic on women, their health and their livelihoods, and the extent of the public investments needed to ensure women come out of this public health crisis stronger and more economically secure than they entered it, it is important first to acknowledge the ways in which material conditions for New Yorkers have long differed based on gender.

Overall, prior to the pandemic, one in five (20%) women in New York City were living at or below the federal poverty line, compared to 15% of men, with women of color comprising a disproportionate share of all women in poverty. Comparing rates of poverty among women of different racial and ethnic groups reveals particularly high rates among Latina women, who are more than twice as likely as white women to experience poverty (Chart 1) and comprise 37 percent of all women in poverty in the city. Citizenship status, like race and ethnicity, is also connected to poverty, with more than one in three (33%) women without citizenship living at or below the poverty line. Younger women and women ages 65 and older are also more likely to experience poverty, primarily due to a more limited connection to the paid workforce.

Chart 1: Share of women at or below poverty line in NYC

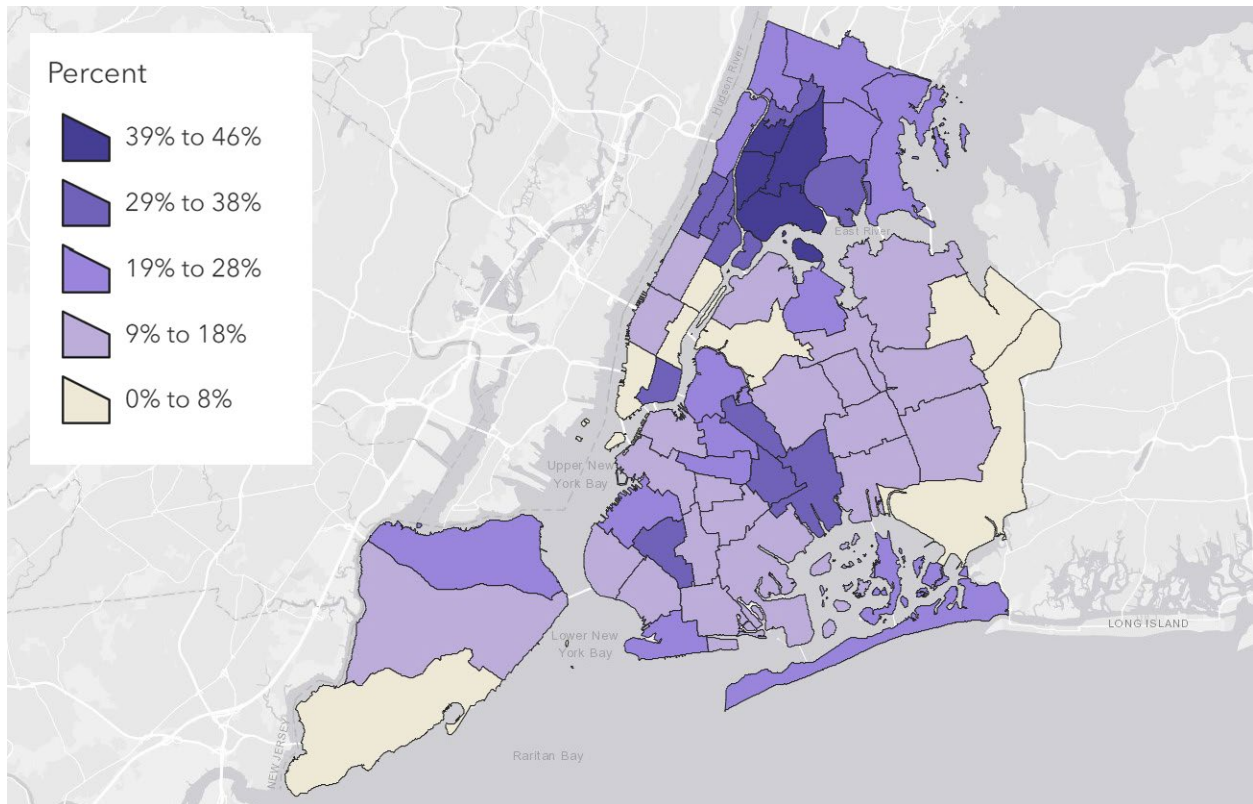


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019 5-Year Estimates.

Women-headed households, particularly those with children, have long been among the most economically precarious households in the city, and the shifts and interruptions to school and child care during the pandemic revealed how fragile the city's existing care infrastructure was.

Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data shows that 42 percent of women-headed households across the five boroughs are caring for at least one child. Of those households, more than one in five (22%) are experiencing poverty, with rates closer to one in three (31%) among families with children under the age of five.

Share of Women-Headed Households with Children in NYC at or below Poverty Line

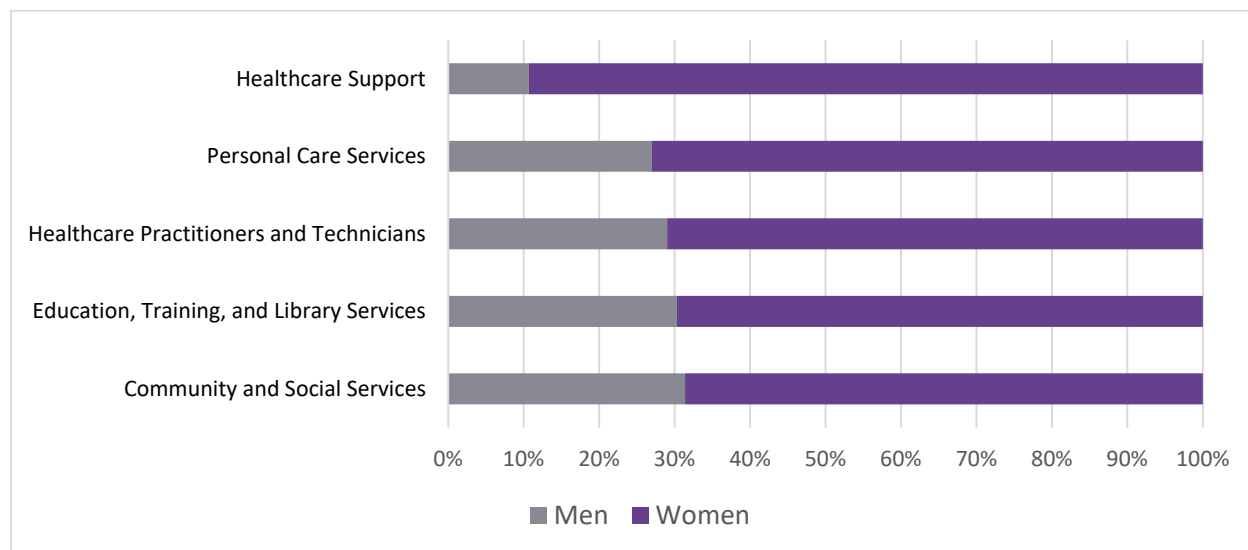


Women's labor force participation in NYC has largely rebounded, but unemployment rates remain high and racial and ethnic disparities persist.

As is the case across the country, women in New York City, and women of color in particular, are overrepresented in lower-paying industries, many of which were hit hard by the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. Occupational segregation remains a key driver of pay disparities across gender as well as race and ethnicity. Prior to the pandemic, the occupational groups in which women employed in New York City were most concentrated, based on their share of the workforce, included healthcare support and healthcare practitioners, personal care services jobs,

education, and community and social services – all fields that experienced significant change and disruption as a result of the public health crisis (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Top 5 occupational groups in which NYC women are concentrated



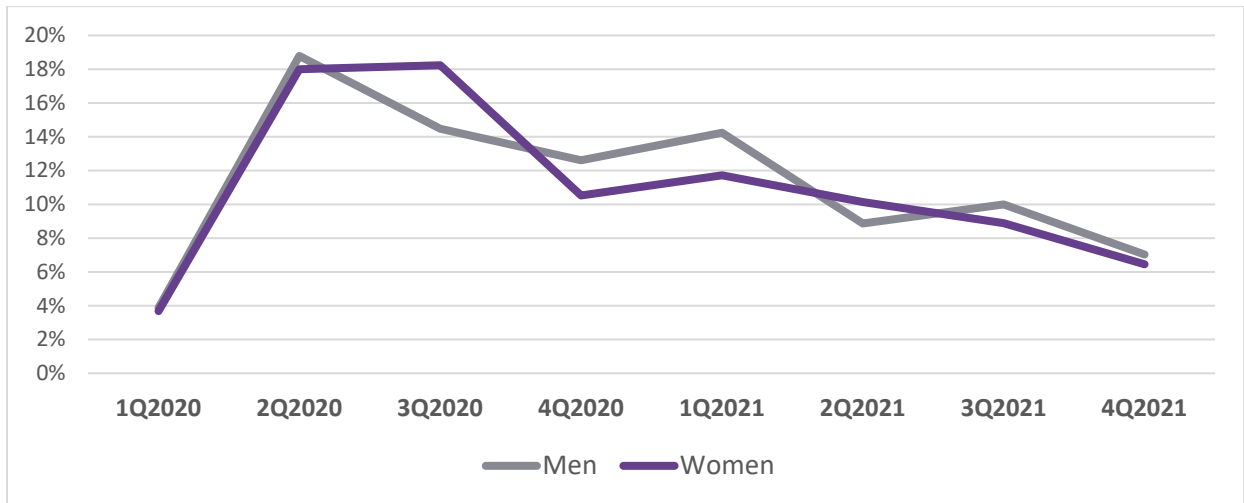
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019 5-Year Estimates. Data represent women ages 18 and older.

Prior to the pandemic, women’s labor force participation rate hovered around 55%, about 13 percentage points lower than among men in the city. Between the first and second quarters of 2020, when the pandemic descended upon NYC, analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data shows nearly 220,000 women dropped out of the labor force, and the labor force participation rate fell to 49%. Between those first two quarters, the labor force participation rate among women decreased by 11%, compared to 7% among men – a much steeper drop than among all women statewide. Further analysis of the data by race and ethnicity shows that the actual number of women in the labor force decreased across all groups except for Latina women, who also experienced the smallest drop in their labor force participation rate.

As of the fourth quarter of 2021, the most recent quarterly data available, the overall labor force participation rate among women had returned to pre-pandemic levels. Despite the fact that white women disproportionately account for the relative decrease in women’s total labor force participation, prior to the pandemic and since, white women’s labor force participation rate has remained higher than rates among Asian, Black, and Latina women.

However, unemployment rates at the end of 2021 remained well above pre-pandemic levels. Shortly after the onset of the pandemic, the unemployment rate among women climbed above 18% (Chart 3). By the fourth quarter of 2021, unemployment among women had dropped significantly to 6.4%, but still up from 3.7% in the first quarter of 2020 with over 50,000 more women unemployed than at the start of the pandemic.

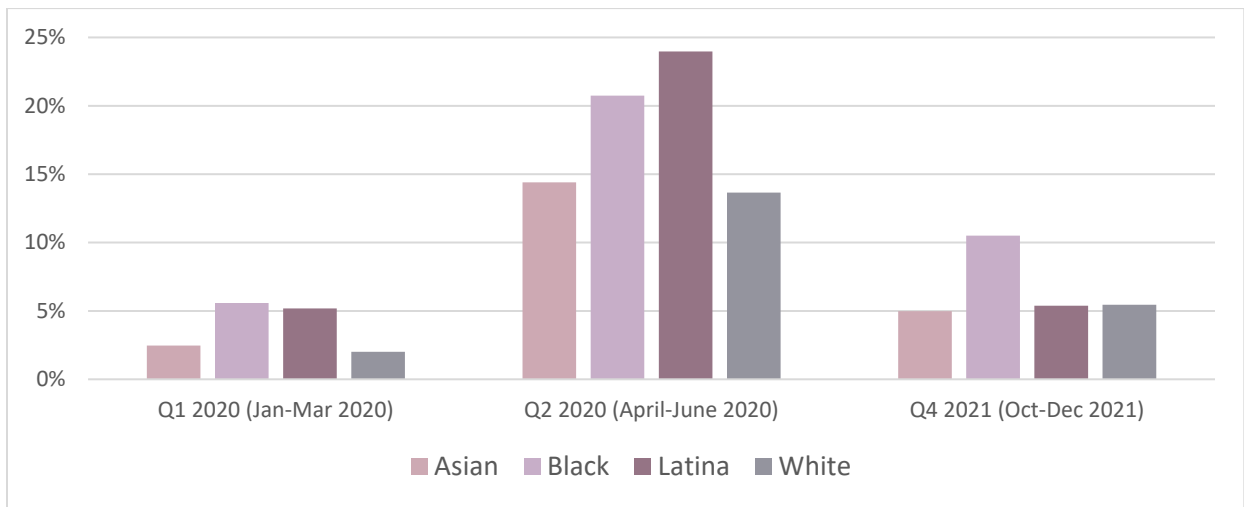
Chart 3: NYC Unemployment Rates by Gender



Source: Comptroller’s office’s analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

Disaggregating the data by race and ethnicity shows particularly high rates of unemployment among Black New Yorkers, who are experiencing rates double that of pre-pandemic levels. As of the fourth quarter of 2021, Black women, who comprised 22% of the labor force, accounted for more than one in three women unemployed in the city (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Unemployment rates among NYC women by race/ethnicity



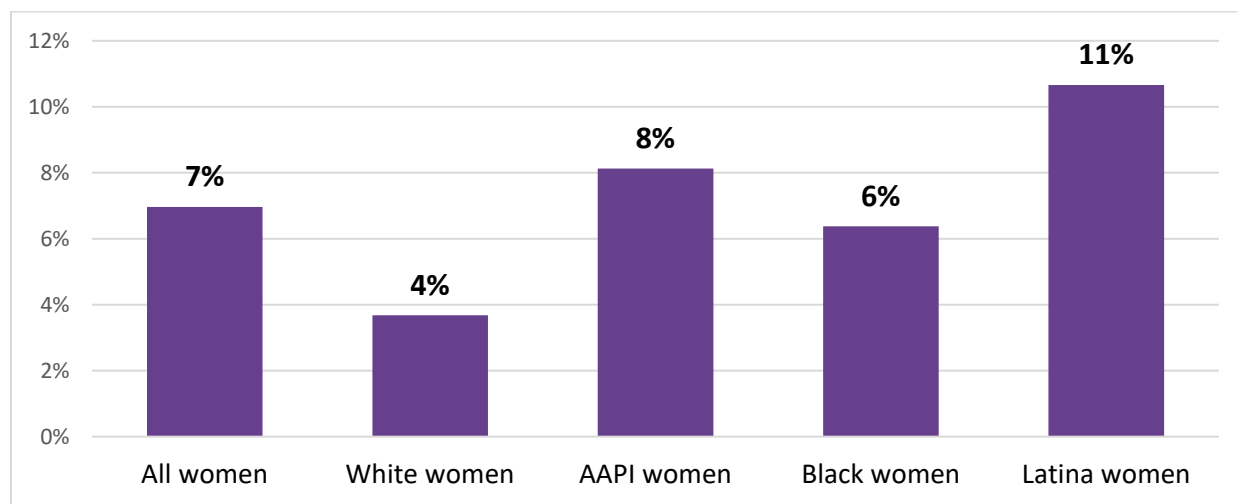
Source: Comptroller’s office’s analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

Beyond these measures, which relate to women’s connection to paid work, it is important to note that women have also assumed a disproportionate share of unpaid labor and family caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic, as they have historically. An analysis by the Citizens’ Committee for Children of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, which offers insight into pandemic-related demographic changes for the greater New York City region, shows that women living with children are two and a half times more likely than men to say child

care is the primary reason they are out of work.³ Additionally, a survey of more than 1,200 New Yorkers that the Comptroller’s office and A Better Balance jointly administered toward the end of 2020 revealed that more than half of women caring for children had to cut back on their paid working hours as a result of the pandemic, compared to only one in three men.⁴ Women were twice as likely as men to need time off from work due to child care responsibilities, with women of color more likely than white women.

Pandemic-related job losses and interruptions to paid work put significant strain on existing social safety net programs, with Medicaid, SNAP, and cash assistance seeing increased enrollment during the pandemic – all programs of which women are more likely to be beneficiaries. Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data show women in New York City are more likely than men to access health insurance through Medicaid and comprise 58% of New Yorkers over the age of 18 on Medicaid. Women of color are more likely than white women to not have any access to health insurance, with the uninsured rate highest (more than one in ten) among Latina women (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Share of women in NYC without health insurance coverage, by race and ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019 5-year estimates. Data represent New Yorkers ages 18 and older.

In addition to the ways in which the pandemic compounded existing challenges with respect to women’s economic security, available data and New Yorkers’ lived experiences indicate that many women encountered additional risks to their safety, both at home and in their communities. Survivors of domestic violence who responded to a survey the Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence conducted between December 2020 and June 2021 reported that their abusers were exerting more control over their lives.⁵ In June 2020, shortly after widespread lockdowns went into effect, calls to New York City’s 24-hour domestic violence hotline, operated by Safe Horizon, were up 50% compared to 2019, and visits to NYC HOPE, the City’s domestic violence website, increased as well.⁶ At the same time, the city, like many others across the country, saw an increase in gun violence. The police killing of Breonna Taylor in March

2020 underscored the present threat of anti-Black violence. And locally, rising hate and violence against Asian women in particular has acutely compromised Asian women’s ability to feel safe moving through their neighborhoods and the city.

Recommendations for a Feminist Recovery

The pandemic, and the havoc it waged on the livelihoods, wellbeing, health, and safety of women of color in particular, came at a time when the city was still grappling with how best to tackle persistent gender and racial/ethnic disparities in employment, housing, health care, experiences of discrimination, and more. Local legislation passed not long before the pandemic, including bills to address sexual harassment, increase pay transparency, and fund abortion care, marked important steps toward greater gender equity in the city. However, the ways in which COVID-19 has contributed to the further destabilization of families threatens that progress. In the remainder of this brief, Comptroller Lander and Council Members Cabán and Hanif outline twelve areas on which New York should focus further policy interventions and invest in public resources to enable women to thrive into the future.

1. Expand Access to Affordable Child Care

While New York City has long failed to provide adequate access to quality, affordable child care, with just one in seven income-eligible families with young children receiving financial assistance and far too many New Yorkers living in “child care deserts,” the child care crisis reached a boiling point during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ In the face of plummeting revenues brought on by the recession and increased outlays for pandemic-related expenditures, child care providers struggled to continue paying teachers and support staff, as well as fixed costs such as rent and insurance. Some providers were forced to close and many others remain on the brink of closure, unable to fully recoup their losses. While robust federal stimulus investment in child care over the last two years has helped stabilize the industry, additional public dollars will be needed to create a sustainable system that adequately addresses the financial burden of care for low- to moderate-income families.

The New York State Fiscal Year 2023 budget is poised to include some \$3 billion in total spending for child care infrastructure, likely increasing income eligibility for subsidized care well above the current cap of 200% of poverty. If passed, alongside sufficient investments in the workforce, this will increase access to care and bring down costs for thousands of families across the state and could pave the way for the creation of a publicly funded universal child care system.

Still, there is more New York City can do to support providers and parents and help realize such a system. The fact that child care reimbursement rates continue to be based on a market-rate survey that shows only what families can afford, not what quality care costs, is a fundamental flaw, and New York City should support efforts to switch to a cost estimation model, filling the gap in funding with City resources if necessary. In addition, providers who are part of the

subsidized system have long reported that poor customer service and outdated technology, from the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in particular, have exacerbated payment and eligibility issues. The City should invest the funds needed to strengthen the work of provider- and parent-facing agencies. Finally, subsidized care should be available to all families regardless of immigration status, and should the State budget not address this, the City should make sure no families are excluded on these grounds.

2. Support Flexible Scheduling Policies

The past two years have been a struggle for parents and caregivers, particularly for those working in jobs with stringent schedules or that require in-person participation. While disruptions in the regular schedule of child care and schooling caused by pandemic-related closures have left many parents and caregivers reeling, the impacts have been most acutely felt by women and other marginalized groups in the city. Women, people of color, lower-income, and part-time workers are all less likely to have access to flexible scheduling and are also more likely to be retaliated against for requesting flexible accommodations.⁸ Women, who serve as primary caregivers for most families, are repeatedly forced into impossible choices between unpaid care responsibilities and paid labor work. The choice is further complicated when an individual’s paid labor work is highly volatile, unpredictable, and exploitative.

In 2017, the City Council adopted a law requiring “fair scheduling” for fast-food and retail workers. The law requires advanced notice of schedules and scheduling changes, providing much needed stability to some service sectors. The City should look to expand that successful law to other industries with strict attendance requirements, like hospitality and health care, industries that are also majority-women. Requiring predictable scheduling from service sectors that employ low-wage workers will not solve the crisis of unpaid care work that falls primarily on women’s shoulders, but it will provide significantly more predictability to allow for advanced child care and elder care planning. Additionally, the City should pass legislation that would entitle employees the right to work remotely if their child’s school or child care program is closed, remote-only, or in a hybrid model. While not every employee in New York City will be able to perform their work remotely, our city should support those who can and shift the burden of requesting flexibility from the worker to the employer.

New York City’s relationship to in-person work has been forever changed, and women and caregivers especially, have found flexible policies valuable.⁹ The City should not only embrace this new reality, but encourage it, empowering working families to find the balance between work and care that best serves their needs.

3. Invest in Quality Elder and Disability Care

To build a true care economy where the most vulnerable New Yorkers have the resources and support services needed to thrive, significant investments in intergenerational, disability, and elder care must be made. New York City has a robust network of senior centers and naturally

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occurring retirement communities (“NORCs”) but few supports for familial elder and disability caregivers or home care workers, the latter of which are 90 percent women, 67 percent immigrants, and 75 percent people of color. With an increasingly large older adult population and desire among many to “age in place,” the demand for home care workers has never been higher. Despite this demand, home care workers are overworked and underpaid and home care providers are facing a nearly 20 percent labor shortfall.¹⁰ Statewide, New York home care workers earn a minimum wage of \$13.20 an hour.

New York could immediately, and visibly, recognize the value of gendered elder and disability care work by raising wages for home care workers. The New York State Legislature should immediately pass the “Fair Pay for Home Care Aides” bill, sponsored by Senator May and Assemblymember Gottfried, which would raise the wage floor to between \$19.80 and \$22.50 an hour.¹¹ Raising wages for home care workers would net an estimated \$3.6 billion for New York State, eliminate the labor shortage in the home care sector, create tens of thousands of new jobs for a predominantly female workforce, and ensure older and disabled workers have access to the in-home care needed to live safe and healthy lives.¹²

4. Establish Universal Just Cause Protections

The majority of workers in the United States are subject to “at-will” employment, meaning they can be fired at any time for any reason (or no reason at all). Firing a worker for not smiling at customers, dressing a certain way, refusing a manager’s sexual advances, and speaking up against ill-treatment could lead to termination in at-will employment scenarios. Fear of retaliation by way of unfair firings can limit the reporting of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the workplace, with women and low-wage workers of color bearing the brunt of the burden.¹³ While workers may have some limited legal options to challenge arbitrary or discriminatory firings, the burden is on them to make their case. And the odds are stacked against them: only 1% of plaintiffs in workplace discrimination cases prevail in trial.¹⁴

“Just cause” employment, in contrast, requires workers to be given a reason for their firing. Layoffs, poor performance, and hostile behavior would constitute “just” reasons for firing, so long as the employer had clear policies in place and the employee was given written warnings for violations. In 2021, the New York City Council passed a law that established “just cause” protections for fast food workers. To empower workers to speak up against discrimination or harassment without fear of retaliation or firing and to end the practice of arbitrary (and often-times sexist, racist, and homophobic) firings, New York City should implement universal just cause protections for all employees. A common-sense labor and civil right, just cause protections would ensure that the most vulnerable workers in the city, including women, people of color, and lower-wage workers, are more empowered in their workplace and free from the threat of retaliation firings.

5. Support Workers in the Gig, Freelance, and Contingent Economy

Many women in New York City work in the broad gig, freelancer or contingent-economy, some as for-hire-vehicle drivers and delivery workers, others as domestic workers, nail salon technicians, artists, journalists, and home health aides. While this work, widely classified as independent contracting, ranges from the highly exploitative, dependent, and low-wage to the fully autonomous and well-paying, some of the struggles faced by women in the contingent economy are universal. Independent contractors, both those who are improperly classified by their employers and those who are properly classified, are not entitled to the vast benefits offered to traditional employees, like employer-sponsored health care, a minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and paid time off. Since the provision of benefits in the United States is overwhelmingly tied to employment, those without a traditional employer-employee relationship are left without access to life-saving social insurance. While the flexibility afforded by some freelance work can be desirable for caregivers, women and persons who can become pregnant are uniquely burdened by the lack of paid sick and disability leave provided to independent contractors and freelancers.

While many improvements to the contingent economy can and should be made at the federal level, including but not limited to passing the federal PRO Act and establishing universal Medicare for All health insurance, and others at the State level, including but not limited to passing reclassification legislation using the widely established ABC test for employment, there are also meaningful changes that New York City can pursue today to better protect these at-risk workers. So that independent contractors can accrue and access benefits and social insurance, like health insurance, disability insurance, and paid time off, New York City should create a portable benefits fund. Portable benefits are tied to an individual, not an employer, and can move with the individual from job to job without a loss of coverage. The City should require companies whose workforce includes a large percentage of independent contractors to contribute to a portable benefits fund (where the worker would also contribute) that would accrue across jobs. The New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection would administer the benefits. Providing a city-sponsored portable benefits fund would not only offer stability to existing independent contractors and freelancers but may encourage others who, for reasons such as caregiving responsibilities, workplace harassment and discrimination concerns, or pay equity issues, would choose to freelance if not for the lack of consistent benefits.

In addition, the City Council should pass Council Member Hanif's upcoming legislation to expand the NYC Earned Safe and Sick Leave Law to cover app-based gig workers and other workers misclassified as independent contractors. This bill would ensure that more than 140,000 workers in New York City are able to take a paid sick day to take care of themselves or family members when needed. Especially in the middle of a pandemic, New Yorkers should not have to choose between going to work when they are sick and missing a critical paycheck.

6. Expand Opportunities for Worker Ownership and Employment in the Trades

Joblessness caused by the COVID-19 economic recession has, as this policy brief shows, resulted in significant gendered impacts that the City should not expect the private sector to meaningfully address alone.¹⁵ To help New York City's economy, and to do so in ways that build a more equitable and just future, the City should immediately invest in job training and job creation strategies to expand access to good-paying, stable jobs for the most marginalized workers. One such strategy could include tasking New York City's Department of Small Business Services to increase recruitment of women and women of color in their apprenticeship and training programs, like ApprenticeNYC and First Course NYC. Jobs in the trades, such as construction, manufacturing, commercial driving, and telecommunications, do not typically require a four-year degree, pay much higher than minimum wage, and come with benefits and stability not typically found in low-wage service jobs.¹⁶ While participation by women in trades careers has been on the rise, New York City should deepen its financial investment in successful job placement programs and expand partnerships with successful organizations like Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW), a non-profit organization who has placed 3,000 New York women into trades careers in the last 10 years.¹⁷

Prior to the pandemic, women-owned businesses were growing faster than all businesses and increasing in every borough. Due, in large part, to the successful WE NYC program by the New York City Department of Small Business Services, the number of women-owned businesses in New York City had increased by 42% between 2012 and 2019.¹⁸ Despite these gains in representation, women, primarily women of color, still face an uphill battle in obtaining the funding needed to launch a new business. New York City should consider seeding small local investment funds, community banks, and community development financial institutions (CDFIs) who could then provide capital to Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises ("M/WBEs") and Black- and brown-owned businesses. Further, just like New York State has a separate loan and bond program for M/WBEs, so too should New York City. Increasing the availability of fidelity bonds and loans for M/WBEs will allow for smaller M/WBEs to access more capital, grow their businesses, and successfully bid on city contracts.

Lastly, New York City should double down on efforts to support the creation of worker cooperatives by increasing funding for the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative and developing a new flexible grant program for worker cooperative start-up and operating costs. Enabling workers, particularly the most marginalized workers, to become cooperative worker-owners with the ability to set their own hours (including flexible hours that allow them to manage unpaid care responsibilities), determine their wages, and ensure safe and dignified workplaces can help lift families of color out of poverty.¹⁹

7. Lift the Wage Floor and Support Human Services Workers

Jobs should enable all New Yorkers to provide what they need for themselves and their families. But stagnant wages in lower-paying industries and rising costs have pushed many families to the brink, unable to make ends meet at the end of the month, facing mounting debt and, in many cases, eviction. Prior to the pandemic, nearly one in four (24%) women living at or below the poverty line in New York City were employed, underscoring the prevalence of low wages in those sectors where women have historically been and continue to be overrepresented.²⁰ New York has led the nation in recognizing the economic benefits of lifting the wage floor, and New Yorkers' lived experiences indicate that we must revisit the minimum wage once again. With inflation eroding purchasing power, raising and indexing the minimum wage will ensure we do not leave people at the bottom of the income ladder behind.

One of the lower-wage industries in which New York City women are concentrated is the human services sector. New York City relies on non-profit human service organizations, staffed predominantly by women of color, to deliver essential services like afterschool programs, child welfare, senior care, and public assistance, among many others.²¹ Despite receiving government contracts, human services workers receive near-poverty wages. Social workers in government-funded non-profit human services organizations receive 20 to 40 percent less in pay than their equivalents working in hospital, school, or other settings.²² Statewide, preschool teachers are paid 74 percent more in public schools than in their non-profit counterparts. Though the problem of low wages in New York's human services sector has been widely reported, improvements have been slow to realize.

The City could lift the incomes of hundreds of women in the city by addressing the needs of the human services sector in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget, including by establishing, funding, and enforcing an annual cost-of-living adjustment on all human services contracts, increasing the living wage floor, and establishing a wage and benefit schedule for government-contracted human services workers comparable to the salaries of public employees in the same field. New York City must finally stop short-changing the women of color who keep countless families fed, housed, and cared for – including through a once-in-a-generation public health crisis – and compensate their labor fairly.

8. Increase Access to Safe, Affordable Housing for Survivors

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any type of violence that is rooted in exploiting unequal power relationships between genders. Domestic violence (DV) is a pattern of economic, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse committed against members of the same family or household or individuals who are or have been in an intimate relationship. While GBV and DV occurs in a wide variety of settings, they disproportionately impact women, women of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.²³ Survivors of color, in particular, face significant barriers

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to accessing services, including but not limited to fear of involving law enforcement and its impacts, lack of language access, cultural norms around mental health and healing services, and housing discrimination.

While there is evidence that violence against women increased during the pandemic, as outlined earlier in this brief, pre-pandemic rates of violence were already resulting in financial hardship, as well as housing insecurity, for New York City women on a large scale. Domestic violence accounted for more than 40 percent of the family population entering Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters in 2018 – by far the single largest cause of homelessness for people entering the system. As previously detailed in a report by the New York City Comptroller’s Office, there are a number of structural barriers that make it difficult for survivors to access safe, affordable housing and/or remain housed.²⁴ Limited sources of income, lack of credit history, and landlords’ reluctance to accepting housing vouchers can hinder survivors’ ability to acquire housing. The challenges are multiplied for survivors with children, with disabilities, with limited English language proficiency, and who are gender expansive. To increase the ability of survivors to maintain and access housing, the City should create a Survivor Housing Stability Fund which would provide fast and flexible low-barrier grants to survivors to cover urgent expenses, including rent payments, legal services, moving costs, and implementing a safety plan. A bill to create a New York City Survivor Housing Stability Fund will be introduced in the coming weeks by Council Members Cabán and Hanif.

9. Invest in Community Safety Strategies

Year after year, New York City’s policing and carceral budgets balloon while critical social and economic programs fall victim to austerity cuts. The Mayor’s Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget, which allocates \$5.4 Billion to the Police Department (NYPD) and \$1.2 Billion to the Department of Correction (DOC), continues this misallocation of resources.²⁵ When including fringe benefits, pensions, and debt service, both of these already bloated budgets more than double in size. This overreliance on punitive approaches to the multitude of problems that the city faces does not create a safer city. In fact, it creates distinct harm and violence for women. In the coming fiscal year, the City needs to shift funding away from these failed solutions and towards community-oriented interventions.

To this end, the NYPD’s Vice Enforcement Division (Vice), which is responsible for cracking down on consensual sex work, should be disbanded immediately. Vice has consistently demonstrated that it is a rogue unit within an already unaccountable department that cannot be trusted to operate in the city. One of their common practices is to disguise undercover officers as buyers of sex, encourage someone into verbally agreeing to exchange sex for money, and subsequently make an arrest.²⁶ Even at its most routine, this is a coercive tactic that punishes consensual sex workers for participating in arrangements that should be decriminalized. At its most egregious, officers have repeatedly used this arrangement as a vehicle for systematic sexual harassment and assault.²⁷ In both cases, the workers that are harmed are predominantly women and gender non-conforming people who are Black and Brown, immigrants, and/or LGBTQ+. Instead of arresting

these New Yorkers, the City should be supporting them with economic empowerment tools and connections to housing, health care, and other essential services.

Additionally, the Department of Correction should expeditiously close the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island, which is the housing unit dedicated for women and trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people who are detained. Currently, there are only approximately three hundred women and TGNC individuals being held on the island. Through a multi-faceted strategy centered on decarceration, the City can bring that number down to zero. Given that women and TGNC individuals in Rikers face unique challenges including high rates of sexual violence this is an urgent need.²⁸ There are already extremely successful Alternatives-to-Incarceration programs that allow women and TGNC people charged with misdemeanors and felonies to address their individual needs while remaining with their communities and families.²⁹ The City of New York should dedicate expanded funding to these programs in order to increase the number of participants they serve.

Further, critical reforms must be made to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) in order to orient their work away from unnecessary family separation and more towards expanding resources that will keep families together. The outcomes of ACS's work are racially discriminatory, as data shows that approximately 90% of parents facing an ACS investigation are Black or Latino.³⁰ The City should pass legislation that would ensure parents have the resources they need in ACS proceedings and hold ACS accountable through public reporting requirements. This could include requiring written and verbal communication of parental rights at the start of an investigation in the language that parents understand, mandatory provision of legal counsel at the point of first contact and in the hearing process, and publishing data concerning ACS's use of drug tests as justification for removal.³¹

10. Prevent and Respond to Rising Violence Against AAPI Women

The severe rise of violence committed against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women is deeply abhorrent and must be addressed. Unfortunately, hate crimes against other groups including Muslim, Jewish, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ New Yorkers have also increased. While no single solution to this problem is a panacea, there are a number of community-oriented approaches that New York City can and should employ in order to prevent violence from occurring and to repair harm when it does occur.

Bystander intervention trainings equip participants with the skills needed to successfully de-escalate and non-violently interrupt incidents of hate. While the City funds local non-profit groups to administer these culturally-competent trainings through the Hate Crimes Initiative, the Initiative's budget has been repeatedly cut in recent years, which has limited its impact.³² In the upcoming fiscal year, the City should fully fund the Initiative in order to expand trainings across all five boroughs, especially in languages other than English.

People with serious mental illness are much more likely to be a victim to violence than to be the perpetrator. As we seek to improve our city’s mental health, it is important that those with serious mental illness are not stigmatized or framed as threats. In addition to dissuading people from seeking out resources this can also propel harmful policy campaigns that criminalize health issues.³³ At the same time, serious mental health conditions have played a role in a number of hate violence incidents. The City must immediately strengthen its mental health infrastructure and increase funding for respite centers and mental health clubhouses, which provide supportive community spaces where those in crisis can have their immediate needs met and get connections to longer-term care.

One dynamic that has made AAPI women particularly vulnerable to hate violence is the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype, which positions Asian Americans as inherently separate from broader American culture. The inaccurate and discriminatory exclusion of Asian-American history and culture from school curriculum strengthens this harmful trope. New York City can chip away at this harmful stereotype by emphasizing the multitude of ways that the AAPI community has shaped American history and culture in the classroom. New York State should follow the lead of Illinois by passing legislation that would require schools to provide instruction in Asian American history and civil impact.³⁴ However, New York City’s Department of Education should not wait for this legislation to mandate what they should already be doing: it can and should make a proactive effort to incorporate these subjects into its curriculum.

When violence does occur, restorative justice programs can play a key role in providing resolution for the victim and the community without relying on incarceration. These programs facilitate spaces for the perpetrator to understand the full impact of their actions and to make amends to the victim and community at large. While this work is challenging, it can create a lasting impact in our neighborhoods and repair harm in a more comprehensive way, and the City should dedicate additional funding to these efforts. Resources to support rapid responses to incidents of violence, which could include neighborhood safety events and town halls, should also be prioritized. However, these responses must be designed in a way that meets and is tailored to the needs of working women and women who have historically faced language barriers in such spaces.

11. Increase Access to Reproductive Health Care and Sexual Health Education

All New Yorkers deserve access to comprehensive reproductive health care services in New York City, including abortion, the ability to determine when and how they give birth, and the resources to parent with dignity. But for many New Yorkers, especially those most economically insecure, barriers to accessing such care remain. Even though New York City is home to many dedicated providers who offer free or low-cost reproductive health care services, visiting physicians and undergoing even routine procedures necessitates time that some patients, especially low-wage workers, often cannot afford. Meanwhile, the pandemic arrived after several years of deliberate work on the part of the Trump-Pence administration to gut family planning, including by pulling

funding from health care providers who counsel patients about abortion. At the same time, successful efforts to undermine the right to abortion in State legislatures across the country and through the courts have increased demand here in New York City, and a major Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade* looms, the outcome of which could bring even more people from out of state to New York seeking care.

In recognition of this dire landscape, New York City became the first city in the country to allocate public funds for direct abortion care through the Fiscal Year 2020 budget. However, those funds, allocated in subsequent years as well, have been slow to materialize, due to challenges in navigating the City's procurement process. Moving forward, the City can fulfill its stated commitment to reproductive justice by increasing funding and support for community-based providers, including those providing direct financial assistance to those seeking abortion care, who are still reeling from the onslaught of the last several years but must be equipped to expand their reach in the months and years to come. But we must also seed new community-based birth options, including home births and freestanding birth centers by doing our part as a city to address barriers to licensure. The recent announcement by the Mayor that the City would be expanding initiatives aimed at increasing birthing people's access to midwifery care and doulas – who have been shown to improve maternal health outcomes, particularly for women of color – are welcome steps.³⁵

Comprehensive, quality, and *early* sexual health education not only contributes to better reproductive health outcomes but also equips young people to build healthy relationships as they age, navigate gender identity and power dynamics, and recognize and respond to abuse.³⁶ Yet, many New York City public schools do not even have a teacher assigned to teach health.³⁷ As the Fiscal Year 2023 budget for the Department of Education is debated, we should also ensure sufficient resources are available to expand access to K-12 sexual health education, including professional development and training for school health instructors.

12. Expand Health Care Coverage and Increase Language Access

All women in New York City should have access to affordable health care in their communities. COVID-19's especially severe impact on communities of color revealed the consequences of decades of discrimination in the provision of medical care, poor access to preventive health care, and environmental racism. In New York City, pre-pandemic uninsured rates were higher among women of color than white women, as highlighted in this brief, underscoring the need to expand health care coverage. State legislation has been introduced to create a state-funded health plan open to New York adults currently excluded from coverage due to immigration status.³⁸ A recent Comptroller's office analysis found that the proposal would generate \$710 million in total annual benefits while increasing access to care for undocumented New Yorkers.³⁹

One step New York City can take in the short term to increase access to care is to boost funding to support greater language access. Women in New York City represent a variety of cultural

backgrounds and speak dozens of languages. Nearly one out of every two (49%) women in New York City speak a language other than English at home, the most common being Spanish (24%), followed by Chinese (7%), and Russian, Urdu, and French (all at 3%).⁴⁰ When health care services are not provided in New Yorkers' languages, it is the most economically vulnerable who suffer most. Well over half (57%) of women at or below the poverty line speak a language other than English at home. Some New Yorkers report that translation services, even when timely and available, are not always adequate, and implicit bias remains a compounding problem.⁴¹

To help ensure that no one is denied City services, including care, due to language barriers, the City should invest additional funds this year toward building the supply of quality, inclusive interpretation services in New York City. This should include \$2.5 million for the development and launch of a Community Legal Interpreter Bank (CLIB) which would recruit, train, and dispatch legal interpreters to immigration legal service providers. It should also include an increase of \$750,000 in Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative funding to develop and launch language services worker-owned cooperatives for African, Asian, indigenous Latin American languages of limited diffusion.

Conclusion

The gender and racial disparities the pandemic laid bare are the result of decades of policymaking – decades of choices about how we spend public resources, who counts, and who benefits, that have too often been shortsighted at best and rooted in sexism and racism at worst. But policymaking that centers the city's most marginalized women and gender nonconforming people – and recognizes that their wellbeing is interconnected with our collective health as a city – can begin to change the conditions of New Yorkers' lives for the better. It is through this intentional work, and indeed only through it, that we will be able to realize a truly inclusive recovery.

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Like so much of the work discussed here, the vast majority of the work of producing this report was done by women in our offices whose work is too often underappreciated. We honor their work, and recognize that a feminist recovery demands that recognition, compensation, and support be better shared across all our endeavors.

Endnotes

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