

UK, with severe poverty woes, hard to sustain global influence



AFP
Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) walks past members of the public waiting to receive their vaccine as he visits a COVID-19 vaccination center, the Al-Hikmah Vaccination Center in Batley, England on Feb. 22, 2021.

When a country has more than 1.5 percent of all households living in destitution and one-third of children under five living below the poverty line, should the country still deserve the title of a "major power"?

According to a recent Guardian report, the number of UK households plunging into destitution more than doubled last year's figure, from 197,400 to 421,500, a reflection of the devastating fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. An earlier BBC report said that about 34 percent of under-fives, or 1.3 million, live below the poverty

line across the UK, with London having the worst rate of poverty for children in this age group, reported globalsources.com.

The figure is much more miserable than the one from a World Bank-UNICEF analysis last year regarding developing countries which showed nearly 20 percent of all children below five live in extremely poor households.

The poverty issue in the UK is not an issue of oddity. Rather, it has been repeatedly disclosed by the media in recent years. In 2018, an independent expert appointed by the UN spent nearly two weeks traveling in

the UK to study the poverty situation in the country. The UN special rapporteur found that poverty was "systematic" and "tragic."

As a British Twitter user said, these figures are "shameful." The once-glorious empire on which the sun never set just enjoys undeserved fame. Now, the UK is undoubtedly in one of its most difficult eras in history.

The initial response to the COVID-19 epidemic by the Boris Johnson administration met with fierce criticism, which already shows the economic woes within the country that could not afford any lock-

down measures. The epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to the UK's boastful financial sector and services sector.

The UK now has Europe's highest death toll with more than 120,000 epidemic victims. Its national strength is declining, which triggered anxiety and aimlessness that was ultimately manifested by Brexit. Baffled by the economic fallout, the UK can hardly sustain the welfare supposed to be granted to those living in destitution, especially children. Therefore, the high rate of poverty in the UK is simply not that surprising.

Nonetheless, UK politicians barely view addressing the poverty issue as a policy priority. Rather, they have brought their political acting to the international stage. The UK has kept a high profile in regional and international issues. In spite of lacking the ability to take a lead among the West to find faults with China, it has been making provocations against China on several fronts. Like the US, the UK did not show due care about the COVID-19 deaths and those living below the poverty line, but resorted to baseless human rights allegations regarding China's policies in its Hong Kong and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Nonetheless, its poverty statistics are the biggest stain on its hypocritical human rights concept.

If a country is wracked with poverty, it cannot realize national prosperity and social stability. Nor will the country achieve its ambitions of being "global" and being "a major power" at large.

"We are no longer a great power. We will never be so again," declared former UK prime minister John Major in a pre-recorded lecture at Middle Temple on November 9, 2020. But one tip for the UK to resume its global influence now is to stop meddling in the affairs of other countries with borrowed power when its domestic situation is in such shambles.

We can't blame a pandemic for regression in workplace gender equality

CX Spotlight is an official supporter of International Women's Day 2021. Here, the conference's organizer, HubSpot, explains why post-pandemic growth must be approached in an inclusive way.

As the UK starts to claw its way out of the latest national lockdown, we're beginning to see a tentative reflection on the fall-out of the pandemic more generally. Unfortunately, it's becoming clear that 2020 won't go down in the history books as a year we made great strides tackling gender equality.

Early data suggests that a lot of the burden of the pandemic has fallen on women and, in turn, has negatively impacted their careers. In the UK, we've seen claims that government policies have been "repeatedly skewed towards men" and that they have "failed to consider the labor market and caring inequalities faced by women". Issues that don't appear to be localized to our own shores, thedrum.com reported.

In the US, startling figures suggest that of the net 140,000 jobs lost in the US economy last December, all of them were held by women. These distressing figures demonstrate a longer-term challenge that needs addressing as economies start to rebound and we position for growth post-pandemic.



Against such a backdrop, it's never been more fitting that this year's theme to International Women's Day (IWD) is #ChooseToChallenge. It is a moment in time to remind the world about women's achievements, raise awareness of women's equality and push for progress.

At HubSpot, we're showing our support for IWD in a tangible way. CX Spotlight, our virtual customer experience conference dedicated to leading women in the digital industry, is an official supporter of International Women's Day 2021. Taking place on March 2, we've purposely made the event free to register and packed the line-up with inspiring female speakers from LinkedIn to Revolut to Unilever.

We firmly believe that we can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality and that, collectively, we can all help create a more inclusive society. Simply put, we can't lose our grip on gender equality. We can't overlook the qualities women bring to the workplace that help businesses succeed and we can't blame a pandemic for regression in workplace gender equality. In fact, businesses that do not empower women will be more likely to fail. A good example is Goldman Sachs, the giant multinational investment bank and financial services company, which recently claimed that it won't take companies public if they have all-male corporate boards.

Yet it appears there's still a great deal of work to do in many workplaces. Our latest HubSpot Sales Enablement Survey for the UK, which looked at how remote working and selling has changed company culture, revealed that while 60% of respondents agreed that women, in particular, have excelled at sales during the pandemic because they tend to be able to lead with a strong sense of empathy when engaging with customers, the percentage of women offered financial bonuses has dropped from 41% to 33% since the beginning of the pandemic.

Compare this to the 1% drop seen for men, down to 56%, which is already significantly higher. It's clear the value women bring to organizations is still being overlooked and undervalued, and we believe this has to change immediately. But change only happens if there's buy-in from the very top and a long-term vision for making changes a reality.

HubSpot's fifth annual Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Report clearly sets out the progress we've made against diversity targets. It demonstrates some of the ways the business flexed over the last year to lead with empathy and support employees through the pandemic, from introducing more days off to providing a programme for families with virtual education sessions and extra entertainment to support those juggling work and caring duties.

While we're proud of the progress we've made, we know we need to continue to "walk the walk" to make strides to build a more inclusive and equitable company to be part of the lasting change we need to see across the industry.

As businesses of all sizes position for growth post-pandemic, it's essential that they do it in an inclusive way to allow all employees equal ability to succeed and be rewarded for their hard work and commitment. However hard it has been for all of us, we can't let the pandemic be an excuse for a regression in equality in the workplace.

If you also share our passion for this subject and want to hear some fresh conversations from marketing, sales and customer service experts on how to better understand customers and turn big data into actionable tactics, we'd love you to join us at CX Spotlight on March 2.

Disabled young people living on poverty-level benefits rises 300% in Australia

The number of young people with disabilities in Australia surviving on below-the-poverty-line welfare benefits has "exploded" by more than 300% over the past decade, new data reveals.

As the Morrison government mulls an increase to unemployment benefits, Children and Young People with Disability Australia (Cyda) has seized on the new statistics to join welfare groups, Labor, the Greens, the business lobby, unions and the Reserve Bank in calling for a permanent boost to income support payments, the Guardian wrote.

In a pre-budget submission, Cyda cited Department of Social Services data that reveals an enormous rise in the number of young people with a "partial capacity to work" receiving jobseeker or youth allowance payments.

Guardian Australia has reported extensively on the increase of sick or disabled welfare recipients, but the trend is often attributed to older jobseekers who experience health issues as they age.

However, the new data obtained by Cyda showed a 372.8% increase among jobseekers aged between 20 and 25 with a partial capacity to work, up from 5,308 in

2009 to 25,096 in 2020.

Between 2009 and 2020, youth allowance recipients under 19 with a partial capacity work rose by 174.9%, increasing from 2,299 in 2009 to 6,319 in 2020.

Meanwhile, the number of students aged 20 to 25 with a disability getting youth allowance skyrocketed 970.3%, increasing from only 936 in 2009 to 10,018 in 2020.

Mary Sayers, the Cyda chief executive, said the figures had "exploded" for a number of reasons, including that governments had tightened access to the disability support pension, which is paid at a higher rate.

"The other is the absolute entrenched disadvantage that young people face in the labor market," she said. "So we've got a whole range of these really intractable problems that need attention."

"These are young people who have partial capacity to work as well. So it's already recognized that they have some barriers to working full-time. So then to force them to live in poverty is an absolute crime."

Anu Francis, 25, who lives with several physical and neurological conditions and sometimes uses a

wheelchair, has been surviving on youth allowance during her studies at university.

"It's pretty hard," she said. "I'm still living at home just because with that money I literally can't afford to move out."

Francis, who is studying secondary and special education, said she had been knocked back for the disability support pension in what she said was not a "fair assessment".

She studies full-time in order to keep her youth allowance pay-

ment, even though her doctor said that ideally she would do part-time hours, in part because of a taxing and costly regime of weekly medical appointments.

"It's kind of a part-time job in itself," she said.

Francis said she had also been told she would not be granted the disability pension unless she dropped to part-time studies.

"[This] is a huge loophole that a lot of people have," she said. "You just have to take a leap of faith, enroll in part-time study, and you



Anu Francis theguardian.com

Men need to do their share in education

Fathers' involvement in their children's education is consistently shown to result in better educational outcomes for young people, as well as leading to more positive attitudes, greater enjoyment, better behavior and—critically—a reduced risk of exclusion (Women doing more home schooling during lockdown than men). This applies to primary and sec-

ondary education, and relates to the involvement of non-resident fathers as well as fathers in two-parent families, according to the Guardian.

Men clearly need to step up to the mark. But there is also a need for employers to recognize this crucial role and allow time off for fathers—as well as mothers—to play their part and to attend

school meetings and consultations.

A cultural change is needed in the UK to acknowledge the all-important role that both parents play in nurturing the next generation, and to give them the necessary support in fulfilling it. As the pandemic has clearly shown, schools cannot educate children on their own.



MAX MUMBY/GETTY IMAGES