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London, January 22 (RHC)-- Britons from ethnic minority backgrounds in the United Kingdom have been disproportionately affected by job cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a study by the

Trades Union Congress (TUC), which represents unions in the country.

From September 2019 to September 2020 – a period that included the peak months of the UK's first coronavirus wave – the number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers in employment fell by 5.3 percent, compared with a 0.2 percent fall among white workers, the TUC said. The figures mean ethnic minority staff were made redundant at a rate 26 times higher than white workers.

Frances O'Grady, the TUC's secretary-general, said the pandemic had "held up a mirror to discrimination" in the labour market, as she called on the UK government for measures to end "systemic racism and inequality." "The time for excuses and delays is over," O'Grady said.

"BME [Black and minority ethnic] workers have borne the brunt of the economic impact of this pandemic," she said. "In every industry where jobs have gone, BME people have been more likely to be made unemployed."

"And when BME workers have held on to their jobs, we know that they are more likely to be working in low-paid, insecure jobs that put them at greater risk from the virus."

Patrick Roach, the chair of the TUC's anti-racism task force, said government officials must address the causes and effects of "structural racism" and set out a national recovery plan. "This disturbing evidence showing that Black workers have lost their jobs at a far greater rate during the COVID-19 pandemic should be a wake-up call for the government," he said.

About 8.5 percent of ethnic minority workers, or one in 12, are now unemployed according to the TUC's analysis, which was based on the UK's latest labour market data. By comparison, 4.5 percent of white workers, or one in 22, are currently out of work.

Unemployment among both groups rose in the year to September 2020, but joblessness among ethnic minorities grew 1.5 percent compared with 0.9 percent among white people. Despite a multibillion-pound government-funded furlough scheme, in total, more than 800,000 people in the UK have lost their jobs since the pandemic started, according to official figures.

The losses have been concentrated in sectors such as hospitality and retail, and have disproportionately affected ethnic minority employees in those industries. The number of ethnic minority staff employed in the food and accommodation industries fell by 23 percent, compared with a 13-percent fall among white workers.

There was an even greater disparity in retail, where the number of white workers fell by one percent, compared with a drop in ethnic minority workers of 16 percent. "Previously we had families who were just getting by," Halima Begum, director of the UK's Runnymede Trust race equality think-tank, told Al Jazeera. "Their lives have now been capsized by the storm brought on by COVID."

She said the TUC's findings were "no surprise" given people from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to be working in sectors such as hospitality and retail and, more generally, in low-paid, precarious jobs with fewer employment rights.

She also warned some were likely to face a slower economic recovery from the pandemic, because poverty rates in ethnic minority communities were already disproportionately high, even before the global health crisis.



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