



Close the Gap
Annual Review 2022



Introduction

2022 has been a year where government policy was firmly focused on economic recovery. However, for women, the combined impact of the emerging cost of living crisis with the lingering effect of the pandemic means recovery seems a long way away. The existing structural inequalities faced by women when engaging with the labour market mean that these crises have had a deeper impact on women's lives. Women are concentrated in lower-paid jobs, often characterised as “women's work”, which remain undervalued despite being foundational to the economy and key to recovery. The impact of inflation is widespread, but is felt even more sharply by low-paid women, particularly racially-minoritised women and single parents, with many more pushed into poverty. Close the Gap has worked to highlight the gendered effects of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic on the labour market, and advocate that policy responses on economic recovery do not leave women even further behind. These crises have underscored the need for a gendered approach to policy development if Scotland's economy is to work for women. As key economic policies and programmes are developed there is a critical opportunity for government and public bodies to embed action on occupational segregation, undervaluation, women's in-work poverty and violence against women. Close the Gap will continue to advocate for change in these areas and on all causes of the gender pay gap, so that women's equality in the labour market can be realised.

Anna Ritchie Allan
Executive Director



Policy advocacy work with policymakers and other stakeholders working around the labour market

Women's poverty

The cost of living crisis has had a disproportionate impact on women, due to their concentration in low-paid stereotypically female jobs, and higher levels of poverty. Our work on women's poverty has therefore never been more critical.

We have strengthened our links with anti-poverty organisations, working to highlight the gendered dimensions of poverty. We have produced a range of briefings and articles on topics including the gender pay gap and women's poverty, and racially-minoritised women's poverty, to influence wider anti-poverty policy advocacy work to better integrate a gendered perspective. We continue to be an active member of the End Child Poverty Now coalition, sharing expertise on the need for action on women's poverty to be central to tackling child poverty. We engaged with Challenge Poverty Week highlighting the gendered impact of the cost of living crisis, and are members of the new Scottish Labour Child Poverty Commission. We also continue to advocate for a gendered approach to policymaking and interventions on tackling low-paid work including in the implementation of the new child poverty delivery plan and in advocating for a gender-sensitive minimum income guarantee.

Addressing the undervaluation of women's work

The economy-wide undervaluation of women's work is a key cause of women's poverty, the gender pay gap, and women's labour market inequality, and is therefore a strategic priority for Close the Gap. We have worked to influence policy development so that action on undervaluation is central to the design of the National Care Service, the refreshed fair work action plan, and the child poverty delivery plan. We are also pleased to be sharing our expertise as part of the advisory group overseeing research by University of Glasgow on women with multiple low-paid jobs.

Gendering skills policy

Gendered barriers prevent women from acquiring certain skills, while the skills they are more likely to have are routinely under-utilised or undervalued in the labour market. Despite this, much of the policy around skills fails to take account of these barriers, or of women's concentration in low-skill, segregated sectors. Close the Gap has continued to advocate for gender to be integrated into upskilling and reskilling programmes, particularly around green jobs. The move towards a just transition and a green economy must include women. However, our analysis shows that there is little attention to women's experiences, and without deliberate action there is a significant risk that women will be left behind.

Participation in public body equality advisory groups and working groups

Staff participate in a number of public sector equality advisory groups and working groups, which enables us to influence and advocate for the gendering of employment and service delivery policies. Existing memberships include Social Security Scotland equality advisory group, Skills Development Scotland gender stakeholder group, Audit Scotland equality advisory group, and Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service equality advisory group. Close the Gap works with partner and stakeholder organisations to share learning and expertise around gender and the labour market. As part of this, we are members of the Equate Scotland steering group, and Engender's expert group on primary prevention.

Other policy advocacy work with key stakeholders

A large component of Close the Gap's work is reactive policy advocacy which may be focused on the development of a strategy or policy, and also includes responding to consultations, giving evidence to parliamentary committees, and briefing parliamentarians ahead of debates. This year our reactive work has included work on the fair work action plan, the gender equality taskforce on education and learning, the review of the public sector equality duty, the equality evidence strategy, the young person's guarantee, green skills, the ethnicity pay gap strategy, National Care Service, National Strategy for Economic Transformation, and the Centre for Expertise on Equality and Human Rights.

We have also engaged with a variety of other consultations, inquiries and legislative scrutiny processes focused on a broad range of policy areas including violence against women, cost of living, childcare, fair work, low income and debt, developing the young workforce, Scottish National Investment Bank, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the labour market.



Enabling employers to tackle the gender pay gap

An important part of Close the Gap's work is influencing and enabling employers to identify and tackle the inter-related causes of the gender pay gap.

Supporting private and third sector employers to report their gender pay gap

We supported large employers obliged to report their gender pay gap information under the UK regulations by promoting the use of our Close Your Pay Gap online tool. We provided bespoke support on pay gap reporting to individual employers to enable them to tackle the causes of their pay gap, and benefit from the gains associated with gender equality.

Advancing workplace equality for racially minoritised women

In December 2022 Close the Gap launched a suite of new employer resources on taking an anti-racist approach to gender equality at work. The launch event included a keynote from the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work, and a panel discussion with racially-minoritised women with expertise in this area. The resources contains information on the intersection of racism and sexism in the workplace, the barriers faced by racially-minoritised women, and how to take an anti-racist approach to tackling gender inequality in the workplace. This is the first guidance of its kind in Scotland and there has been a high level of interest, demonstrating a clear demand from employers for support.

Supporting smaller employers to tackle sexual harassment

We launched a set of new resources to enable smaller employers to tackle and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. The resources are part of our online Think Business, Think Equality tool and include a self-assessment test which provides tailored feedback and bespoke action plan; alongside practical guidance on policy development, handling reports and enabling the necessary culture change to prevent sexual harassment. This complements work on sexual harassment being delivered under the Equally Safe at Work banner.

Creating a menopause-aware workplace

Scotland's Women's Health Plan has led to a welcome focus on how menopause affects women in the workplace. A quarter of women experience difficulties associated with menopausal symptoms at work, so there is a clear need for employer action. We developed a briefing for employers to enable them to create a menopause-aware workplace. The briefing includes advice and guidance on raising awareness of menopause in the workplace, what line managers can do to support staff, developing a menopause policy, and how to ensure this is implemented effectively. The briefing was launched at an over-subscribed webinar, demonstrating a strong interest in the issue and employer demand for support. We subsequently developed and delivered a tailored capacity-building session on menopause and the workplace for NHS boards in response to demand from the sector.



Equally Safe At Work

Close the Gap has expanded the innovative employer accreditation programme, Equally Safe at Work, which was piloted with a group of early adopter councils, resulting in four becoming bronze accredited. Equally Safe at Work enables employers to deliver action that will advance gender equality at work, better support victim-survivors in the workplace, and prevent violence against women (VAW).

In March 2022 the programme was rolled out to a new cohort of nine councils which are now working towards development and bronze level accreditation. We continue to engage wider councils in a shadow group which enables employers to share learning from delivering work on gender equality both as part of and outwith the accreditation process. The shadow group has also allowed Close the Gap to strengthen networks in the local government sector and to develop a pipeline of councils for Equally Safe at Work accreditation activity.

Equally Safe at Work was also expanded to the NHS and the third sector, where four NHS boards and five third sector organisations are currently working towards development level accreditation. An NHS shadow group comprising six boards has also been established and, similar to work in local government, will enable the sharing of learning and will build a pipeline for NHS boards to do the accreditation at a future stage.

This year saw a wide range of capacity-building work with employers participating in Equally Safe at Work. We developed and delivered e-learning modules on flexible working and VAW and work, and learning and development resources on sexual harassment. We also delivered training to build gender competence in employer working groups.

We would like to thank all the employers engaged with Equally Safe at Work for their continued commitment to advancing gender equality at work and preventing VAW.



Parliamentary engagement

A significant component of our parliamentary engagement work this year has been engaging with parliamentary processes, including giving evidence to parliamentary committees, and briefing parliamentarians ahead of debates. This year we have provided evidence to a wide range of inquiries and legislative scrutiny processes including the Covid-19 Recovery Committee inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on Scotland's labour market, the Health, Sport and Social Care Committee scrutiny of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, the Social Justice and Social Security Committee session on violence against women, and the Economy and Fair Work Committee inquiry into town centres and retail.

We have also developed a range of MSP briefings for parliamentary debates. These have covered a broad variety of topics including Long Covid, Programme for Government on the cost of living, childcare, and International Women's Day.



Collaboration

Collaboration is core to Close the Gap's work, and we would like to thank the broad range of organisations we have worked with this year.

Engender | Rape Crisis Scotland | Scottish Women's Aid | Scottish Women's Rights Centre | Zero Tolerance | Women 50:50 | EQUATE Scotland | Women's Enterprise Scotland | Work and Equalities Institute at University of Manchester | The ALLIANCE | Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights | Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre | Scottish Women's Budget Group | The Young Women's Movement | Improvement Service | COSLA | Aberdeen City Council | Highland Council | Perth & Kinross Council | Midlothian Council | North Lanarkshire Council | South Lanarkshire Council | Shetland Islands Council | NHS Ayrshire and Arran | NHS Dumfries and Galloway | Public Health Scotland | Healthcare Improvement Scotland | West Dunbartonshire Council | Glasgow City Council | Angus Council | East Ayrshire Council | Inverclyde Council | Fife Council | East Dunbartonshire | Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland | ACOSVO | Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire | Enable Scotland | Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Service | Poverty Alliance | One Parent Families Scotland | Poverty and Inequality Commission | End Child Poverty Coalition | Institute of Directors Scotland | Human Rights Consortium Scotland | Young Scot | University of Glasgow | Blue Triangle | Educational Institute of Scotland | Heriot Watt University | GMB Union | Royal College of Nursing Scotland | Scottish Parliament | Skills Development Scotland | Talat Yaqoob, independent consultant | abrdn | UK Women's Budget Group | Fawcett Society | Chwarae Teg | WEN Wales | Women's Resource and Development Agency | Northern Ireland Women's

Budget Group | CEMVO | Central Scotland Regional Equality Council | Disability Equality Scotland | Equality Network | Glasgow Disability Alliance | Grampian Regional Equality Council | Inclusion Scotland | Just Right Scotland | LGBT Youth Scotland | MECOPP | Multi-cultural Family Base | Path Scotland | Scottish Pensioner's Forum | Scottish Trans | Scottish Women's Convention | Semper Scotland | Amnesty International | BEMIS | Encompass Network Carers Scotland | Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland | Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance | Stonewall Scotland | Women's Support Project |



Infrastructure

Our board sets policy and objectives, and ensures good governance practice around management and financial stability. The board of trustees meet quarterly to provide governance and oversight to ensure the effective delivery of Close the Gap's strategic aim of women's labour market equality. Responsibility for operational activity is delegated to the Executive Director, who leads the staff team.

We would like to extend our thanks to Scottish Government which provides core funding for Close the Gap and Equally Safe at Work, and ROSA the Fund for Women and Girls which funds our project on sexual harassment.

Our trustees are:

Nicole Busby, Convener

Claire Fleming, Vice-Convener

Samantha Bedford, Treasurer

Jenifer Johnston

Polly Jones



Staffing

This year, our dedicated staff team have worked hard to ensure that women's experiences of the labour market are visible during an escalating cost of living crisis. We were delighted to welcome Laura Martins, Leonie McConnell and Kelly Eagle to our Equally Safe at Work team, and Patrycja Kasprzak as our new Communications and Administration Assistant. We would like to thank our skilled staff team for their hard work during this challenging time.

Anna Ritchie Allan

Executive Director

Lindsey Millen

Policy and Development Manager

Ruth Boyle

Policy and Parliamentary Manager

Kelsey Smith

Programme Manager

Laura Martins

Programme Officer

Leonie McConnell

Programme Officer

Kelly Eagle

Research and Evaluation Officer

Patrycja Kasprzak

Communications and Administration Assistant

We're also delighted to congratulate Joanna Wilson, whose PhD studentship Close the Gap supported, on attaining her PhD. Joanna's work focused on how the availability of flexible working affects the distribution of unpaid work, and the gender pay gap in Scotland.

Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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Close the Gap

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