



Close the Gap and Engender joint briefing for Ministerial Statement: Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report

22 June 2021

1. Introduction

It is nearly 20 years since the Equal Opportunities Commission wrote ‘poverty in Britain is highly gendered’¹, warning that policies which neglect to consider the realities of women living in poverty were destined to fail. In 2021, women are still more likely to be in poverty; more likely to experience in-work poverty; and more likely to experience persistent poverty than men.² Around 20% of women’s total income comes from the benefits and tax credit system, compared with 10% of men’s.³ Women also rely more on public services, and as a result, up to 86% of net ‘savings’ between 2010 and 2020 came from women’s incomes.⁴

The Scottish Government’s Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018 – 2022 explicitly recognises that **women’s poverty is also inextricably interlinked with child poverty**. The annual Ministerial Statement on the Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report is a vital time to recognise these links and to ensure that interventions are appropriately targeted, especially as the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and rolling back women’s equality.

2. Gender equality and the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan

Recognition of the inextricable links between gender and poverty, and women’s poverty and child poverty can be seen in a number of key policy documents including

¹ Bradshaw, J., Finch, N., Kemp, P., Mayhew, E. & Williams, J. (2003). *Gender and Poverty in Britain*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1474746403001246>

² Close the Gap (2018) *Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know* available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1--Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf>

³ Engender (2015) *Securing Women’s Futures*. Available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Securing-Womens-Futures---using-Scotlands-new-social-security-powers-to-close-the-gender-equality-gap.pdf>

⁴ Women’s Budget Group (2016) *The impact on women of the 2016 Budget: Women paying for the Chancellor’s tax cuts*. Available at https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/WBG_2016Budget_FINAL_Apr16-1.pdf

Scotland's gender pay gap action plan, and the child poverty delivery plan. Because of women's greater provision of primary caregiving and gendered norms surrounding unpaid work and household management, women's incomes remain a critical factor in child poverty. Evidence shows that where women's disposable income is reduced, spending on children decreases.⁵

The 2018-22 Child Poverty Delivery Plan adopts a strong focus on women's labour market equality while further recognising that "wider social structures and power relations mean that we cannot simply assume that women share the same access to resources, whether from paid work or from social security as men when they are in the same household." However, although the Delivery Plan sets out proposed indicators that are to be disaggregated by sex where possible, the previous updates have not included such a breakdown.⁶

The next Plan, due for publication in 2022, must maintain a strong focus on women's access to incomes and labour market equality. As detailed in the End Child Poverty Coalition manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, this should include actions to address the undervaluation of women's work, tackle occupational segregation, increased support for children and their caregivers through social security and the delivery of affordable and flexible childcare.⁷

3. Women's and Child Poverty in Scotland

- **Women are more likely to be in low-paid, undervalued work.** Work that is seen as "women's work", such as cleaning, care and retail, is systematically undervalued in the labour market because this work is done by women. Four in ten of those working in retail and wholesale are paid less than the real Living Wage⁸ and 80% of people working in hospitality reported that they were struggling with their finances before the Covid-19 lockdown.⁹
- **Women continue to undertake the majority of care for children.** This requires women to find work that is part-time to balance earning and childcare. Women account for 75% of the part-time workforce, and 42% of employed women work

⁵ CPAG (2012) Ending child poverty by 2020. Available at https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-Ending-child-poverty-by-2020-progress-made-lessons-learned-0612_0.pdf

⁶ See Scottish Government (2019) Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan First year Progress Report 2018-19. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-first-year-progress-report-2018-19/> and Scottish Government (2020) Tackling child poverty: second year progress report (2019-2020). Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-second-year-progress-report-2019-20/pages/4/>

⁷ End Child Poverty Coalition (2021) *A manifesto for ending child poverty* available at <https://cpag.org.uk/end-child-poverty-scotland>

⁸ Resolution Foundation (2020) *Risky Business*. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/risky-business/>

⁹ IPPR (2020) *COVID-19: What's the outlook for Scotland's workforce?* Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/blog/outlook-for-scotlands-workforce-furlough-job-losses>

part-time compared to 13% of men.¹⁰ Part-time jobs are more than three times as likely to pay below the Living Wage than full-time roles.¹¹

- **Access to affordable childcare is a major barrier to women being able to work, study and access vocational training.** Due to the high cost of childcare, 25 percent of parents living in absolute poverty in Scotland have given up work, a third have turned down employment due to inaccessible and unaffordable childcare, and a further 25 percent have not been able to take up education or training.¹² Pausing the rollout of 1140 hours of childcare due to the pandemic has disrupted parents' plans and added to instability in the sector. The closure of schools and nurseries has further increased caring responsibilities in the home and drastically affected women's ability to remain in paid work.¹³
- **Measures to tackle household poverty do not pay attention to gendered inequalities in access to resources.** The design of the UK's 'welfare' system denies partners in a couple equal access to an independent income that meets individual needs through the single household payment of Universal Credit. Action at Scottish Government level to introduced individualised payments has been slow. A focus on household level income may lead to hidden poverty within households especially for women and children, reinforce outdated gender roles and aggravate the risk of domestic abuse.¹⁴
- **Measures to increase household incomes through social security are undermined by the design of the UK welfare system.** Despite a temporary uplift to reserved benefits of £20 per week, this does not compensate for the years of the benefit freeze, the impact of the extremely low benefit cap, and the conditionality and sanctions regime. Although the Scottish Child Payment is not subject to the Cap nor to the two-child limit, its impact is clearly reduced by their existence. The two-child limit continues to undermine women's human rights and to push women and children into even deeper poverty.
- **There is a particularly high risk of poverty among Black and minority ethnic women, disabled women, lone parents, and refugee and asylum-seeking women.** COVID-19 job disruption is having a disproportionate impact on these groups of

¹⁰ Boyle, Ruth (2019) 'Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Key to tackling poverty in Scotland', *Anti-Poverty Review Issue 30*, pp.11-13 available at <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SAPR-30-.pdf>

¹¹ Jones, Gareth (2019) 'Women benefit from living wage expansion', *Third Force News*, available at <https://tfn.scot/news/women-benefit-from-living-wage-expansion>

¹² Save the Children. (2017). *Soaring Childcare Costs Push Parents out of Work in Scotland*.

¹³ Close the Gap and Engender (2021) Joint briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on women with childcare responsibilities in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Close-the-Gap-and-Engender-Joint-Briefing-on-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-women-with-childcare-responsibilities-in-Scotland.pdf>

¹⁴ Engender (2016) Gender Matters in Social Security: Individual Payments of Universal Credit. Available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender-matters-in-social-security---individual-payments-of-universal-credit.pdf>

women because of the patterns of their employment, the two-child limit and benefit cap and hostile immigration policies including No Recourse to Public Funds.

- **Women and their children are facing a rising tide of poverty as a result of Covid-19.** Women are more likely to work in a sector affected by Covid-19 restrictions, such as hospitality and retail and are also more likely to lose their jobs in a post-Covid recession.¹⁵ Women account for 60% of workers earning less than the living wage and receiving only 80% of their usual salary through the Job Retention Scheme may push these women into poverty.

4. Conclusion

Children's access to resources, safety and wellbeing cannot be divorced from the circumstances of their mothers. Achieving Scotland's Child Poverty Targets requires urgent and concentrated action to eradicate poverty and inequality experienced by women. A gender-neutral focus on household income can mask poverty and security of those within it. While the Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018- 2022 recognises this explicitly, action on the gender pay gap, social security and childcare has not been adequately prioritised. As a result of the pandemic, women who were already struggling are now under enormous financial pressure, being pushed into further and deeper poverty. Ultimately, without specific interventions to promote gender equality and secure women's incomes, Covid-19 will exacerbate both women's and children's poverty in Scotland.

About us

Close the Gap is Scotland's policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We have been working with policymakers, employers and employees for 20 years to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's labour market inequality.

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to increase women's social, political and economic equality, enable women's rights, and make visible the impact of sexism on women and wider society. We work at Scottish, UK and international level to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.

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¹⁵ Close the Gap (2021) *One Year On: How COVID-19 is impacting women's employment in Scotland* available at https://www.closethegap.org.uk/content/resources/1617267711_One-Year-On---How-COVID-19-is-impacting-womens-employment-in-Scotland.pdf