



## Engender and Close the Gap response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery report

July 2020

### 1.0 Gender equality and the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery

The differential impact of Covid-19 on women and men has been well-rehearsed. Engender and Close the Gap have issued multiple briefings making the case for a gendered response to Covid-19,<sup>1</sup> advocating for the use of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data in developing policy interventions,<sup>2</sup> and analysing the impact on women's labour market participation.<sup>3</sup> We also worked with other national women's organisations to develop nine principles for a gender-sensitive economic recovery.<sup>4</sup> These principles recognise that women's equality is a precondition of a wellbeing economy, and we published a supporting paper exploring how Covid-19 might be an inflection point in gendering Scotland's approach to inclusive growth.<sup>5</sup> We submitted all of this information to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (AGER).

Despite this advocacy, and widespread media coverage of some of the gendered issues around Covid-19's economic effects, AGER's report is not gendered. Despite the profoundly gendered nature of the crisis, which has impacted female-dominated sectors and substantially increased women's unpaid work, the report barely mentions these as concerns. Its analysis does not integrate these gendered issues and nor is there any evidence of them in the recommendations it has produced. Consequently, Scottish Government will need to pay particular attention to taking a gendered approach within its response if it is to avoid redistribution of jobs from women to men being a feature of 'recovery'. **Without mitigation, actions for**

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<sup>1</sup> Engender (2020) Women and Covid-19. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-Briefing---Women-and-COVID-19.pdf> [Accessed April 15, 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Engender (2020) Covid-19: Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Covid-19-Gathering-and-using-data-to-ensure-that-the-response-integrates-womens-equality-and-rights.pdf> [Accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Close the Gap (2020) Disproportionate disruption: The impact of Covid-19 on women's labour market equality. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Disproportionate-Disruption---The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-labour-market-equality.pdf> [Accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>4</sup> Engender, Close the Gap (2020) Gender & Economic Recovery. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery---Engender-and-Close-the-Gap.pdf> [Accessed July 10, 2020].

<sup>5</sup> Thomson E (2020) Making inclusive growth work for women in Scotland. Engender & Close the Gap.

## **recovery based on AGER's report will worsen women's economic position, and widen income and wealth gaps.**

We do not doubt the creativity and commitment of the individuals who were commissioned to form AGER. However, the fact that its report contains an exhortation that recovery plans be informed by gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data while simultaneously ignoring its own advice is indicative of a profound gap in capacity and focus. The policy areas the report touches on are unquestionably gendered: employment, skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship, education, care, macroeconomics. If women are not to be pushed behind by economic recovery then their different experiences of work, skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, education, and care will need to be part of Scottish Government's thinking and action.

### **2.0 Gendering the response to specific AGER recommendations**

We set out below some top lines on key issues that Scottish Government should consider when developing its response.

- 1. Infrastructure spending should include childcare and social care.** We recognise the value to the economy of spending on digital infrastructure, as well as its value as an enabler of home-working and digital participation. We also recognise that spending on childcare and social care should be treated as infrastructure spending. It too is an enabler of paid work, but it also supports the realisation of women's equality and rights, and children's rights.<sup>6</sup> It is of particular economic and social benefit to the poorest families, including those headed by single mothers.<sup>7</sup>
- 2. Regional and place-based models can exclude women and other protected groups.** There is evidence that place-based programmes can redistribute spending away from women, Black and racialised groups, and disabled people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See: De Henau J, Himmelweit S, Lapniewska Z, Perrons D (2016) Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries. International Trade Union Confederation. Available at: [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care\\_economy\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf) [Accessed July 17, 2020] and Lapniewska Z (2016) Growth, Equality and Employment: Investing in Childcare in Scotland. WiSE Research Centre, Glasgow Caledonian University. Available at: <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/wise/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/centresprojects/wise/98178%20WiSE%20BRIEFING%20PAPER%204%20August.pdf> [Accessed May 5, 2020].

<sup>7</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) 2020 WBG Briefing: Childcare and gender. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/2019-wbg-briefing-childcare-and-gender/> [Accessed July 17, 2020].

<sup>8</sup> O'Hagan A, Hill-O'Connor C, McRae C, Teedon P (2019) Evaluation of participatory budgeting activity in Scotland 2016-2018: research findings Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018/> [Accessed July 17, 2020].

Mechanisms like the public sector equality duty (PSED) have failed to ensure that local decision-making is gender-sensitive.<sup>9</sup>

- 3. The care sector review should take place and should also include social care for disabled children.** Engender has long advocated for a living wage for unpaid carers, in lieu of the existing social security entitlements.<sup>10</sup> The review should also consider how other services, including employability and higher and further education, can be made accessible to carers. It should also include tidying up the complicated regulatory environment around social care, so that individuals can seek reviews of the decisions made about how care is delivered to them and their dependent children.<sup>11</sup>
- 4. The care sector review should also include developing action to address the undervaluation of the predominantly female workforce.** The challenges around recruitment and retention of the care workforce cannot be viewed in isolation from the gendered experiences of working in the care sector<sup>12</sup>. Women care workers are undervalued, underpaid and underprotected in an increasingly precarious employment landscape<sup>13</sup>. The review should integrate an understanding that a valued, fairly remunerated workforce in secure employment is a necessary step in delivering good quality care services.
- 5. The acceleration of fair work should also mean fair work for women.** Fair work is important in an increasingly precarious labour market but realising fair work for women means recognising women's higher levels of employment precarity<sup>14</sup>, their concentration in low-paid work<sup>15</sup>, and the gendered barriers to flexible working<sup>16</sup> to enable women to balance work with their caring role. A Centre for Workplace Transformation must be gender competent, take a gendered approach, and prioritise the increasing precarity of women's employment and the

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<sup>9</sup> Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2018) Effectiveness of the PSED Specific Duties in Scotland. Equality and Human Rights Commission. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/effectiveness-psed-specific-duties-scotland> [Accessed February 17, 2020].

<sup>10</sup> Engender (2017) Gender Matters Roadmap: Towards Women's Equality in Scotland.

<sup>11</sup> Engender (2017) Gender Matters Roadmap: Towards Women's Equality in Scotland.

<sup>12</sup> Hayes, Lydia (2017) Stories of Care: A labour of law - gender and class at work, Palgrave: London

<sup>13</sup> Close the Gap (2020) Submission to the Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee inquiry into social care, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-submission-Health-and-Sport-Committee-inquiry-into-social-care.pdf> [Accessed 16 July 2020]

<sup>14</sup> Close the Gap (2020) Falling Through the Cracks: Women, Covid-19 and the gig economy, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Women-COVID-19-and-the-gig-economy.pdf> [Accessed 16 July 2020]

<sup>15</sup> Close the Gap (2018) Women, work and poverty in Scotland, available at:

<https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1--Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf> [Accessed 16 July 2020]

<sup>16</sup> Close the Gap (2019) Flexible Working for All? The impact of the right to request flexible regulations in Scotland, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Flexible-Working-for-All.pdf> [Accessed 16 July 2020]

undervaluation of women's work. Addressing undervaluation is necessary to address women's and children's poverty, and to tackle the gender pay gap<sup>17</sup>.

- 6. Skills interventions should work to reduce occupational segregation as a central aim.** Gender-blind skills initiatives entrench the gender segregation that characterises Scotland's education and skills pipeline<sup>18</sup>. Occupational segregation drives the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on women's labour market equality, and is a key factor in the disproportionate level of unemployment women, especially Black and minority ethnic women and young women, have experienced, and are anticipated to experience in the future<sup>19</sup>. Occupational segregation also contributes to sectoral skills shortages, and is a drag on growth<sup>20</sup>. Upskilling and reskilling initiatives should be gendered, and aim to reduce occupational segregation. There should also be sufficient flexible places in colleges and universities to enable women to combine learning with caring roles.
- 7. In-work training programmes should be informed by women's experiences of training in the workplace.** There is evidence that women are less likely to have access to training, particularly women working in low-paid part-time jobs<sup>21</sup>, less likely to undertake training that will enable them to progress or secure a pay rise, and more likely to have to do training in their own time and to contribute towards the cost<sup>22</sup>. The expansion of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund should target the effective utilisation of women's under-used skills, reduce occupational segregation, and gather gender-sensitive sex disaggregated data on learner participants including the types of courses undertaken.

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<sup>17</sup> Grimshaw, Damian and Jill Rubery (2007) Undervaluing Women's Work, European Work and Employment Research Centre, University of Manchester, Equal Opportunities Commission: Manchester

<sup>18</sup> Close the Gap (2018) The Gender Penalty: Exploring the causes and solutions to Scotland's gender pay gap

<sup>19</sup> Close the Gap (2020) Disproportionate disruption: The impact of Covid-19 on women's labour market equality, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Disproportionate-Disruption---The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-labour-market-equality.pdf> [Accessed 16 July 2020].

<sup>20</sup> Close the Gap (2016) Gender Equality Pays: The economic case for addressing women's labour market equality in Scotland, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Gender-Equality-Pays.pdf>, [Accessed 16 July 2020]

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016) Inquiry into the gender pay gap

<sup>22</sup> Aldrige, Fiona and Corin Egglestone, (2015) Learning, Skills and Progression at Work: Analysis from the 2015 adult participation in learning survey, UK Commission for Employment and Skills