



## Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Government debate: Fairer Scotland for Disabled People

March 2019

Close the Gap is Scotland's expert policy and advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We have 18 years' experience of working with policymakers, employers and employees to influence and enable action to address the causes of women's inequality at work.

### 1. Introduction

Close the Gap welcomes the Scottish Government's ambition to halve the disability employment gap, and the Government's wider focus on improving labour market outcomes for disabled people. Disabled women are undoubtedly affected by the disability employment gap, and work by Close the Gap and others has shown that disabled women face dual labour market disadvantage and inequality on account of their gender and disability. Disabled women also face different barriers to employment than the barriers faced by disabled men.

### 2. Disabled women and the labour market

Disabled women's experiences of the labour market is an under-researched area, and there continues to be a lack of robust, disaggregated data at the Scottish-level. However, **women account for 55% of those in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and 65% of those in receipt of Attendance Allowance in Scotland.**<sup>1</sup>

Disabled women face a larger pay gap than the gender pay gap faced by non-disabled women. **The average pay gap for disabled women is 22% when compared with non-disabled men and 11% when compared with disabled men.**<sup>2</sup> In terms of working hours, **disabled women are much more likely to work part-time than disabled men** (48% compared with 18%). Disabled women are also more likely to work part time than non-disabled people with 42% of non-disabled women and 11% of non-disabled men working part-time.<sup>3</sup> This sees disabled women further concentrated into low paid and

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2019) *Disability Assistance in Scotland: consultation*

<sup>2</sup> Sykes, Wendy et al (2013) *Barriers to employment and unfair treatment at work: a quantitative analysis of disabled people's experiences*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

insecure work, as most part-time work is found in the lowest paid jobs and sectors.<sup>4</sup> Disabled women are more likely to be under-employed and are more likely to be in low-paid jobs than non-disabled people. **35% of disabled women are paid below the National Living Wage compared with 25% of non-disabled men and 29% of non-disabled women.**<sup>5</sup>

**Disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled women (1 in 2, compared with 1 in 4)** and are more likely to experience sexual abuse, particularly when their abuser is also their carer. As acknowledged by Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women and girls, violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of women's wider inequality. An employability strategy that works towards narrowing the gender pay gap and reducing economic inequality between women and men and between disabled women and non-disabled people at a societal level, could ultimately reduce disabled women's experience of men's violence.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Fairer Scotland for Disabled People – Employment Plan**

There is increasing consensus on the importance of an intersectional approach and strong pre-existing evidence of the differing experiences of disabled men and women in the labour market. Despite this, and the fact the Plan identifies the recently-published Gender Pay Gap Action Plan as an aligned area of work, there is no mention of gender or the specific barriers faced by disabled women. The baseline data used to inform the Plan is not disaggregated by gender, meaning the gendered differences in employment rates and occupations are rendered invisible within implementation.

For example, the Plan highlights that disabled people want more job opportunities that offer flexible working. However, while we know that flexible working opportunities are particularly important for women who must balance earning with caring<sup>7</sup>, there is no mention of gender in the context of flexible working. There is also no mention of accessible and affordable childcare as being a key barrier for disabled women entering and progressing within work.

The Plan also outlines a range of actions to address the barriers faced by disabled parents living in households affected by child poverty. However, there is yet again no connection made between child poverty and women's poverty. This is in direct contradiction to existing evidence and the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan which asserts that gender and poverty are inextricably interlinked.<sup>8</sup> Overall, the

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<sup>4</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *The Gender Penalty*

<sup>5</sup> EHRC (2017) *Being Disabled in Britain: A Journey Less Equal*

<sup>6</sup> Engender (2016) *Unblocking the Pipeline: Gender and Employability in Scotland*

<sup>7</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *The Gender Penalty*

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government (2018) Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022

actions fail to take account of the socially constructed difference between women's and men's lives and experiences.

#### **4. Workplace culture**

Focusing on increasing the employment rate of disabled people should not be at the expense of considering the experience of disabled people at work. Workplace culture is a key barrier for the employment of disabled people, particularly for disabled women who face workplace barriers on account of both their gender and disability. Inclusion Scotland research found that, while most disabled people said they are limited by a health condition, illness or disability, they also reported a range of other barriers such as the biased and discriminatory attitudes of employers. This is echoed by findings from a recent Engender survey of disabled women which found the main issues faced by disabled women as being judged, not being taken seriously or listened to and a constant struggle to be respected.<sup>9</sup>

Building on the social model of disability, we are supportive of Inclusion Scotland's work on 'employerability' which addressed the fact that most of the activities geared towards disabled people's employment focuses on the perceived lack of capacity, rather than the barriers presented to disabled people including negative attitudes and exclusionary practices. In a recent survey by Disability Agenda Scotland, 64% of respondents said that they had felt at risk of losing their job because they did not have the right support and almost a quarter said that they found their employer's recruitment practices to be negative towards disabled people.<sup>10</sup>

#### **5. Social security and welfare reform**

Disabled women's labour market inequality is compounded by the fact disabled women are amongst the very hardest hit by welfare reform.<sup>11</sup> Over half of the cuts to benefits between 2010 and 2015 fell on disabled people and their families. Disabled women face higher living costs as a result of their disability<sup>12</sup> which, when combined with benefits cuts and high rates of part-time, low paid work means that in-work poverty rates are likely to rise for disabled women under Universal credit.

#### **6. Conclusion**

It is vital that the Scottish Government and its delivery agencies adopt an intersectional approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives intended to half the disability employment gap and improve outcomes for disabled people. In the context of the Disability Employment Plan, this should involve the recognition that disabled people are not a homogenous group and disabled women's experiences will be inflected by

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<sup>9</sup> Engender and Inclusion Scotland (2017) *Gender Matter in Disability*

<sup>10</sup> Disability Agenda Scotland (2017) *Disability Employment: End the Gap*

<sup>11</sup> Engender (2016) *Securing Women's Futures: Using Scotland's New Social Security Powers to Close the Gender Equality Gap*

<sup>12</sup> JRF (2016) "In-work Poverty Hits Record High as the Housing Crisis Fuels Insecurity"

ableism and sexism.

An employment action plan which does not actively consider women and does not utilise gender disaggregated data in design, delivery and evaluation will simply not improve labour market outcomes for women.