



Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Government Debate: Investing in Scotland's Green Economy

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

1. Introduction

Securing a fairer, greener economy is a central focus of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation¹ and commitments to securing a just transition to a net zero economy have featured in successive Programmes for Government. In particular, investing in and creating green skills and jobs is seen as critical for securing a green economy. **However, the potential impact of the growth and investment in green jobs and skills on women's labour market participation has not been a core consideration of the just transition.**²

Within current green skills, jobs and economy policymaking, there is a considerable lack of gender considerations and the impact this economic shift will have on women. This is despite evidence that the creation of, and investment in, green jobs, sectors and skills will disproportionately benefit men, and not necessarily mean a fairer economy for women.³ This lack of consideration for gender equality is particularly concerning considering women are grossly under-represented in priority sectors of the just transition. **Without mitigating action, investment in the green economy are likely to further reinforce women's labour market and economic inequalities and sustain the gender pay gap.** It is therefore crucial that action and investment to create a greener Scottish economy, mainstream gender into economy policymaking, including: targeted action to enable women's access to green sectors; developing gender-sensitive upskilling and reskilling interventions; and putting fair work for women at the heart of the just transition.

¹ Scottish Government (2022) *National Strategy for Economic Transformation*, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/>

² Close the Gap (2021) *Making sure a green economy also works for women*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/news/blog/making-sure-a-green-economy-also-works-for-women/>

³ Ibid.

2. Putting fair work for women at the heart of the just transition

Within the current discourse on just transition, attention on gender is extremely limited, with little acknowledgement of the barriers women face, including gender norms and stereotypes, occupational segregation, workplace discrimination and inflexible work practices. **Without integrating a gender analysis, investment in the green economy will favour men and male-dominated sectors, and disbenefit women.**

It is therefore crucial for Scottish Government and its delivery agencies to put fair work for women at the heart of the just transition. **This will require taking substantive action to tackle the lack of quality part-time and flexible working; biased and untransparent recruitment and development practice, and male-orientated workplace cultures.** There are limitations to how well the Scottish Government's current fair work agenda can address these barriers, as its policy framework does not afford sufficient attention to women's labour market experiences and there is a lack of gender-specific actions that will realise fair work for women. It is therefore vital that fair work policy development mainstreams gender, to ensure that effective action is consciously delivered that both women's access and progression in green jobs and reduce occupational segregation, and tackling women's wider workplace inequalities.

For example, a key barrier for women to enter and remain in STEM roles is the male-dominated workplace cultures and lack of employer action on equalities. Lack of flexible working in priority sectors also acts as a barrier to women's participation. **Only 12% of jobs in manufacturing and just 11% in construction were advertised with flexible working options in 2022⁴, compared to 28% of roles advertised across the Scottish labour market.** Women's roles as primary caregivers means they need work that allows them to balance caring with earning, which makes access to flexible working crucial for women to enter and maintain paid work. The lack of flexible work illustrated in these priority green sectors is likely to create substantial barriers to women's entry and progression, further reinforcing their concentration in low-paid, part-time work, and risking their exclusion from investment in green jobs and sectors.

3. Green jobs for the green economy

A key driver of securing the just transition and a greener economy is the investment in, and creation of, green jobs and skills. There is currently no single definition of

⁴ Timewise (2022) *The Timewise Scottish Flexible Jobs Index 2022*, available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Scottish-Flexible-Jobs-Index-2022.pdf>

green jobs, however, in the *Green Jobs in Scotland* report published by Skills Development Scotland, green jobs are defined as “...jobs that, through an ongoing process of ‘greening’, can be classified as either 1) new and emerging, 2) subject to significant changes in work and worker requirements, or 3) increasing in demand.”⁵

Illustrative examples of green jobs in these three categories, such as hydrogen cell technicians, architects, and insulation installers, are male-dominated occupations within the Scottish economy. This bias to male-dominated sectors is replicated within the five ‘priority sectors’ identified within the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan as being crucial to the net zero economy, including energy, transport, manufacturing, agriculture and manufacturing. As table 1 below shows, **women are disproportionately underrepresented within these sectors, accounting for less than a quarter (21.2%) of those employed in priority sectors.** Evidence shows disabled women and racially minoritised women are particularly under-represented in these priority sectors.

Industry by SIC (2007)	% of women currently in workforce	Total workforce jobs
Engineering professionals ⁶	11.1	55,700
Construction	17.3	171,713
Manufacturing	26.2	176,623
Transport and storage	21.1	131,478
Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply	33.9	21,582
Total	21.2	557,096

Source: NOMIS, workforce jobs by industry (SIC 2007) and sex, 2023

Note: Table 1 utilises Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (SIC) that best align with the priority sectors outlined in the CESAP.

This data reinforces **Close the Gap’s concerns that increased policy focus on, and investment in, these priority sectors will mean investment in men’s jobs and skills. This in turn, will disbenefit women,** worsen women’s unemployment and underemployment, widen the gender pay gap, while also exacerbating women’s and children’s poverty. As women’s employment was disproportionately impacted by Covid-19, prioritising investment in male-dominated sectors will entrench women’s socio-economic inequality and their worsen experiences of poverty.

⁵ Rubio, J.C., Warhurst, C., and Anderson, P. (2022) *Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis*, available at:

https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/q2lhg1v5/green-jobs-in-scotland-report_final-4.pdf

⁶ Engineering professionals data comes from annual population survey, occupation (SOC2020) by sex by employment type, Jan 2021 – Dec 2021

To prevent further exacerbating women’s labour market inequality, it is vital that gender considerations are mainstreamed into investment in green sectors, including gender-sensitive upskilling and reskilling programmes and tackling occupational segregation.⁷ Occupational segregation is correlated with sector skill shortages, therefore addressing the barriers to women accessing these priority sectors is necessary to meet future labour demands in the green economy and maximise potential growth.⁸

4. Recognising care as a green sector

It is evident from the current sector prioritised **that the Scottish Government understands investment in a green economy in narrow, traditional terms,** focused on investment in physical infrastructure projects and green energy solutions. **This is despite evidence that care jobs are also low carbon jobs,⁹ and that equivalent investment in care is 30% less polluting and produces 2.7 times more jobs than an equivalent investment in construction.¹⁰** As of yet, however, there has been little consideration given to the importance of, and opportunities around, implementing large scale investment in green social infrastructure, including child and social care. In addition, there is no mention of, or meaningful engagement with, the care economy in the CESAP,¹¹ NSET,¹² or Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan,¹³ which is a critical weakness.

Close the Gap has called on Scottish Government to adopt a gendered definition of green jobs, in particular, by designating the care sector as priority sector alongside those identified in CESAP. This call echoes that made by the Just Transition Commission,¹⁴ who highlighted the importance of high-quality social infrastructure to

⁷ Close the Gap (2021) *Making sure a green economy also works for women*, available at:

<https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/news/blog/making-sure-a-green-economy-also-works-for-women/>

⁸ 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>

⁹ Engender (2020) *A recovery plan which works for women also works for the planet*, available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/guest-post-a-recovery-plan-which-works-for-women-also-works-for-the-planet---/>

¹⁰ Women’s Budget Group (2020) *A Care-led Recovery from Coronavirus: The case for investment in care as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in construction*, available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

¹¹ Skills Development Scotland (2020) *Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025: Key Issues and Priority Actions*, available at: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/w0ulewun/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

¹² Scottish Government (2022) *National Strategy for Economic Transformation*, available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation-delivery-plans-october-2022/>

¹³ Scottish Government (2023) *Draft Energy Plan and Just Transition Plan*, available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/draft-energy-strategy-transition-plan/>

¹⁴ Just Transition Commission (2022) *Making the Future – second Just Transition Commission: initial report*, available at:

the just transition due to its many positive multiplier effects, including: improving childcare provision that is critical for enabling women's economic participation; drive policy focus and the allocation of resources to grow the sector; improving terms and conditions for the female-dominated workforce, including issues around low-pay and systemic undervaluation of 'women's work'; and, tackling the systemic inequalities experienced by women and other marginalised groups.

5. Gender sensitive upskilling and reskilling

Achieving a fairer, green economy requires investing in green skills and jobs. **However, current approaches to upskilling and reskilling are gender-blind, and lack the coherences needed to deliver positive outcomes for women's labour market equality.** Therefore, it is vital that upskilling and reskilling programmes relating to the just transition take account of women's experiences of skills acquisition to ensure the gendered barriers they face are addressed.

Whilst the CESAP included a limited number of actions for gender-sensitive reskilling and upskilling support, there is little evidence to suggest these have been implemented. **Furthermore, the Green Jobs Fund and the Green Jobs Workforce Academy, do not engage with occupational segregation or the other inequalities women face in the labour market.** As evidence¹⁵ has shown women are less likely to have access to skills acquisition and in-work training and development, particularly women in low-paid, part-time jobs,¹⁶ **failure to incorporate gender into reskilling and upskilling programmes for the just transition are unlikely to benefit women, and will further entrench occupational segregation, the gender pay gap and women's labour market inequalities.**

Current upskilling and reskilling initiatives are focussed on supporting workers in male-dominated carbon-intensive sectors, such as oil and gas, and skills acquisition for net-zero STEM sectors. **Paired with the lack of consideration of women's under-representation in these sectors, this focus represents investment in men's skills, opportunities, and employment in a net zero economy, and will leave women behind.**

<https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220721075007/http://www.gov.scot/publications/making-future-initial-report-2nd-transition-commission/>

¹⁵ Close the Gap (2023) *Response to Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-response-to-the-draft-energy-strategy-and-just-transition-plan-May-23.pdf>

¹⁶ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016) *Inquiry into the gender pay gap*, available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6038/gender-pay-gap-inquiry/>