

Taking Forward the Government Economic Strategy: A discussion paper on tackling poverty, inequality & deprivation in Scotland

Engender is a membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this '*Discussion Paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland*'. Notably, the paper sets out that in analysing poverty we must also recognise that the issues experienced by men and women may be gender-specific and demand distinct approaches to be taken in addressing the needs of men and women.

A society where women and men are truly treated equally is one which will be better for all of us to live in and tackling gender inequalities is crucial for achieving a fairer and more prosperous society for **everyone**.

International evidence (particularly from Nordic countries) shows that tackling women's poverty and gender inequalities in particular is much more effective at tackling children's poverty, and other areas of deprivation such as health and educational outcomes, than any other measure. If Scotland wants to lead the world in tackling poverty and improving outcomes for children and future generations, it should draw on the best policies available internationally, and the evidence suggests that social democratic models of policy that reduce gender inequalities have the best results in that respect.

Engender holds that it is vitally important to make people, organisations, institutions and policy makers aware of the disproportionate level of poverty faced by women and its impact on women, families and Scotland's development.

Rationale:

- Women are more likely to be poor than men, and are likely to stay in poverty much longer.
- Less than 12% of women receive the full basic state pension based on their own contributions, and a woman's average retirement income is 53% of men's because they take time out to care. The recent tax changes have particular negative impact on women pensioners between the ages of 60 and 65.
- 66% of Scotland's estimated 650,000 unpaid carers are women.
- The average woman working full-time is paid 15% less than a man. The pay gap is 35% less per hour for part-time workers
- Women's dependence on male partners creates vulnerabilities to domestic violence, abuse and poverty on separation.
- Poverty makes women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- Women's poverty has a significant impact on children's health and wellbeing.

Engender supports the key areas for action by the Scottish Government as outlined within the discussion paper while recognising that the three areas identified are extremely broad. We feel that there are a number of actions that would make a real and substantial change in the lives of women across Scotland.

- **Effective gender mainstreaming**
- **Gender budgeting**
- **Monitoring the Gender Equality Duty (GED) – implementation / outcomes**
- **High Level Outcome for gender equality**
- **Addressing multiple inequalities**

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is essential if the government is to fully appreciate the differential impact of its anti-poverty strategies on women and men. In some policy areas, the priority accorded to gender equality has been very limited.

Gender mainstreaming involves mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of women and men. The government must transform the way it collects data so that it can disaggregate by gender and more accurately assess poverty risks by focusing on individuals. Without reliable data it has been all too easy for agencies to continue to offer 'one size fits all' solutions to poverty which does not help the position of women.

Key Principle

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*

Gender budgeting

The Scottish Executive's *Equality Strategy, 2000* set out a number of actions that underpin the commitment to mainstreaming and this includes developing mechanisms for equality impact assessment of budgets and spending plans. From a gender mainstreaming perspective, gender sensitive budgets prove to be a crucial mechanism for promoting gender equality across the whole range of government activities. The practice of producing a gender sensitive budget will improve the allocations of resources between women and men; will aid in tracing, and making transparent, the relationship between policy objectives and spending and will provide a framework for more participatory policy making. More crucially it serves to support gender mainstreaming in economic policy making.

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Monitoring the GED implementation/outcomes

The Gender Equality Duty should give more attention to why poverty affects more women than men. Public spending exercises should ensure that recipients of funding are required to demonstrate how the services they offer, whether in provision of research or a direct service provision will consider impact on women and men. With a clear steer from the government on the gender dimension of poverty public sector agencies will be better able to address poverty issues effectively.

There needs to be recognition that different approaches are required to support female lone parents out of poverty, than may be needed by young male ex-offenders. While local delivery agencies may recognise this, national strategies often do not.

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High level outcome for equality

The government does not currently have a high level outcome for equality. It is generally agreed that inequality is intrinsically linked to poverty, as a cause and a consequence. Given that public bodies generally budget, implement and perform towards achieving those outcomes against which they will be measured Engender believes that establishing a high level outcome for equality would be an effective tool in the promotion of anti poverty policy and practice.

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Women and multiple deprivation

Poverty is about more than just numbers and women suffer multiple deprivation. At the heart of the problem lies low income, but along with that low income comes a denial of choice and opportunity that most people take for granted. Living on a low income in Scotland means seldom having your voice heard and being seen as having less value than others. We will only succeed in ending child poverty when we address mother's inequality by ensuring they have access to equal pay, adequate benefits and freedom from discrimination.

Women's inequality must be kept on the agenda and anti-poverty policy in Scotland must take issues of multiple identity and discrimination into account. Race, ethnicity, faith/belief, age, disability, geography and sexual orientation are all aspects which combine with gender and poverty to produce different patterns of discrimination and deprivation.

Any cross-cutting initiative to address deprivation needs to engage with the multiplicity of issues that face women in poverty.

The 'Multiple and Complex Needs Initiative' which is part of the *Closing the Opportunity Gap Approach to Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage*, aims to improve services for people with multiple and complex needs. A literature review was published by the Scottish Executive in 2007 as part of a continuing process and a first stage in a programme of work under the initiative.

In terms of the range of themes covered in the literature addressing multiple and complex needs, two apparent gaps emerged: firstly there was little specific focus on gendered experience, whether in relation to service users or carers, and secondly, the focus on the views of people with multiple and complex needs on their pathways in and through services appeared to be under-developed. The former would require gender awareness in research and monitoring, while the latter would require in-depth, user-focused and longitudinal research as well as user involvement in monitoring and evaluation (Rosengard et al, 2007)

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- *The adoption of policies and services that are founded upon user involvement, consultation with people experiencing poverty, and community engagement and empowerment, so that policies and practice are informed by the real experience of those whom we are trying to help*

Disability

Disability poverty is about much more than financial poverty; it can be about poverty of opportunity, of expectation and of aspiration as well as the costs of living in a disabling world. It is about education (disabled people are still twice as likely to have no qualifications); having accessible and affordable housing; being able to use public transport; finding a job; access to shops and services and the provision of health and social care.

The links between disability and child and pensioner poverty are clear, as are the links to women's poverty. Women who are themselves disabled as well as women caring for disabled children or family members are heavily disadvantaged by the loss of income and/or opportunities.

Engender would like to see:

- The government tackling disability poverty as part of the work to meet its wider poverty targets
- Disability properly included in the current debates around child poverty, fuel poverty, housing, employment and social care reform.

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- *A conviction that everyone – regardless of their circumstances – should be supported to achieve their potential*
- *Targeted support for the most disadvantaged – but within a framework of universal service provision and a minimum ‘offer’ that we expect everyone to be able to access*

Jobs and Income Inequality

In the last 30 years, women’s position in society has changed rapidly and dramatically. Greater numbers of women, generally those with higher educational qualifications, are employed at a senior level in the public service and in professions such as higher education and the law.

This leads to the myth that gender equality has been achieved which certainly is not the case since women as a whole are still more at risk than men of having an income lower than the national average.

The full time gender pay gap in Scotland is currently around 15% and the part-time gender pay gap in Scotland is 35% (ASHE, 2007).

A major factor in the gender pay gap is the presence of children (as well as the assumption that women might have children), rather than age, marriage or education. Women are still expected to perform the majority of household chores and child care. Women are expected to cut down on their paid work, quit their jobs, take emergency leave from work, or refuse promotions, in order to care for children, elderly parents or in-laws, or disabled relatives. The whole family suffers when women are under-paid and their work is under-valued. The Government cannot hope to meet its commitment of ending child poverty unless serious inroads are made into closing both the full-time and part-time gender pay gaps.

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Occupational Segregation

Education, peer pressure, careers advice and childbirth/motherhood guide women into 'traditional' and often lower paid and part-time work; an inflexible working culture and rigid support services combined with expensive and inaccessible childcare push carers out of full-time jobs.

This has a lifelong impact on a woman's wages, accumulation of pension benefits, and experience in her chosen occupation.

Women are paid low wages for "women's work": Women's work, evolving from work that women are expected to do for free, such as caring for and teaching children, nursing the sick, preparing food, cleaning, serving others, managing a household, is not seen as skilled or valued as a necessary and important part of our social, political and economic development.

A decent and fulfilling job is a key element in securing a better life. However despite the importance we place on employment in our society, and the emphasis given by all political parties to 'making work pay', far too many people (mainly women) remain trapped in low paid jobs.

Furthermore, for many a job may not be an immediate or even long term option because of sickness, disability, parenting or other caring responsibilities.

Engender would like to see:

- The government working to end poverty by addressing women's inequality, ensuring that women have access to equal pay, adequate benefits and freedom from discrimination.
- Gender pay audits made compulsory for all organizations.
- An increase in the number of hours mothers can work without losing their benefits from four to sixteen.
- New measures being introduced to encourage fathers to be more involved in children's upbringing.

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Caring

Despite shifts in attitudes over the last 10 years, the assumption that caring is still, for the most part, 'women's work' must be challenged. The value of unpaid care of adults should receive proper recognition, and care workers should be better paid. Unpaid care should be shared fairly between men and women and this should be promoted through policy, programmes and practice. If the contribution of carers to society and the economy is to be fully recognised and supported, it is vital that unpaid carers are effectively supported with adequate finance, whilst also having the opportunity to participate in working life.

The UK Government's Work and Families Act, 2006 offers greater support to working parents and extends the right to request flexible working to other groups with caring responsibilities. However it would also be useful to develop a national campaign on the business case for retaining carers by affording them flexibility. Companies that treat staff fairly are more productive, find it easier to retain skilled staff, and ensure that they have a positive corporate image.

The contribution of those working but not paid must also be supported and valued. In addition, the value of welfare benefits and pensions relative to incomes remains low.

The benefits system is too complicated, too bureaucratic and too reliant on means testing. But without simultaneous action to reverse the growing inequalities of wealth – as in the increasing gap in property wealth – the impact of action on jobs and incomes in tackling poverty will be substantially undermined.

Engender would like to see:

- A move away from means tested benefits.
- A shift away from the assumption that caring is 'women's work'.
- Caring work to be properly valued and financially rewarded.
- Promotion of men as care givers.

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- *Targeted support for the most disadvantaged – but within a framework of universal service provision and a minimum 'offer' that we expect everyone to be able to access*
- *A focus on providing work for those who can work, alongside support for those who can't – this should of course be sustainable work that lifts households out of poverty and provides real personal development opportunities*
- *The promotion and adoption of partnership working and seamless service provision which effectively connects with individuals and successfully moves them through the system (with service providers focusing on what they do best and then passing people on) in order that, as far as is feasible, they make progress at every stage and do not become stuck in the 'revolving door' of support services, circulating in and out of poverty or work*

- *An approach that improves the internal capacity of disadvantaged individuals to lift themselves and their families out of poverty by developing their resilience, while also seeking to tackle the structural barriers (such as market failures, unresponsive public services or prejudice and discrimination) that prevent some people from accessing the opportunities available to others*

Workless-ness

Current government strategy – with its focus on work as the key route out of poverty – is only partially effective. A half of children and working age adults living in poverty are living in households where an adult works.

Four out of ten (39%) of children in poverty are in single mother households. A further three out of ten (29%) are in households where the father works full-time, but the mother is on low income or no income. In addition, statistics show that lone mothers are at double the risk of being in poverty as couples with children.

Engender would like to see:

- A focus within Workforce Plus, enterprise and business support activity on tackling the low pay, insecurity, discrimination and family unfriendly practice that often makes work an ineffective route out of poverty.
- Programmes to assist some of those facing the biggest barriers to work, such as women with drug use problems, must be judged and funded on the basis of individual progress, not just jobs gained.
- Policy in Scotland needs to balance drive to target resources with the need to ensure support reaches all families that need it e.g. work towards a universal approach to free childcare at the point of delivery.
- Employers considering which roles within their organisations could be done on a sufficiently flexible basis to enable carers and other women, unable to work the traditional 9-5 hours, to do them.

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Low levels of educational achievement, poor training, ill health or discrimination, along with structural problems such as inadequate childcare or lack of appropriate and/or locally accessible jobs, mean that even when women do access paid employment it is often insecure and poorly rewarded.

In Scotland, just under half (43%) of households with children use some form of childcare and the most common form – a relative (generally another woman), is used in 27% of cases while 10% use a nursery. The main reason given for needing childcare is to 'enable self/partner to work' (SHS, 2007).

More than 90% of lone parents are women and are disproportionately represented among those who face poverty. They are twice as likely to be poor as compared with couples with children. Almost half of all lone parents in Scotland are in income poverty, 3 times the rate for couples with children.

Families with disabled children also face significant barriers to employment and for the minority who do access paid employment; it may not be financially beneficial. Women with disabled children spend significantly longer periods of time caring for their disabled children and as a consequence, when they return to work they all too often find themselves offered work which is low paid and below their level of training/qualifications.

Engender would like to see:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cost benefit analysis of free childcare carried out for the economy. The argument being that if we pay childcare staff well for the work they do this would get more women and men into the labour market, address income poverty and reduce the need for tax credits. |
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Benefits

The UK government has introduced substantial improvements to benefits for families with children.

However, high levels of poverty in workless families raise serious questions about the structural effectiveness and administrative reliability, the adequacy and the accessibility of the benefit system.

Lack of information and an increasingly complex system exclude some of the most vulnerable citizens from accessing benefits to which they are entitled.

For BME and Gypsy Traveller communities in the UK, take-up of benefits is lower than for the white population because of confusion about the system, cultural obstacles and the failure of the social security system to provide adequate help for minorities seeking access to benefits. The current benefit system provides an inadequate safety net for those unable to work, whilst the emphasis on work as the solution to poverty risks further stigmatising those who, for whatever reason, can't work.

The number of children in working families who need tax credits to avoid poverty has risen steadily from around 2 million, mid 1990's, to around 3 million, 2005/06. So as the number of children helped by tax credits has increased so too has the number needing tax credits to do so. Net result is that the number of children who are both in working families and in poverty is similar to a decade ago.

Two-fifths of all children in poverty live in households where someone is in paid work. Clearly work has not been the route for families to escape poverty (Palmer et al, 2006).

Engender would like to see:

- Families, both in and out of work, having the advice and information they need to receive the benefit and tax credit financial supports to which they are entitled.

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Pensions

With less than 12% of women receiving the full basic state pension and with a woman's average retirement income estimated at around 53% of a man's – many women find themselves in poverty in old age.

It is an unfortunate fact that at present, career breaks, low pay and/or caring responsibilities mean that over 4.3 million women pensioners across the UK have failed to build up sufficient National Insurance (NI) contributions to qualify for the full basic state pension.

Reforms promised for 2010 should alleviate the position. From April 6, 2010, the number of NI years needed to qualify for a full state pension falls to 30 from 39 for women and 44 for men. But with no phasing-in, a woman who retires on April 5, 2010, would need 39 years NI contributions to receive a full state pension.

The proposed reforms will happen too late for many current pensioners and those retiring in the next few years.

Engender would like to see:

- The Government looking at ways of introducing changes retrospectively to help current women pensioners and to reduce the sharp differences in entitlement between people reaching pension age before and after the 2010.

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Education

A high quality education is not only a defence against poverty in later life, but is essential to allow the development of every individual's potential and to ensure that they are able to access the widest range of opportunities in the future. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often not able to take advantage of the benefits that education can offer them.

More needs to be done to tackle educational inequalities and to ensure our education system not only equips people for the labour market but supports individuals' participation in the social, cultural and democratic life in Scotland.

The subjects that children and young people study in school have a significant effect on their future opportunities in the job market. Gender stereotyping influences the choices that pupils make in what subjects they study and what work experience placements they choose. These choices create further cultural resistance to non-traditional options and the negative effects are highlighted by the persistence of the gender pay gap in the workplace. With regard to vocational training, the number of participants in Scotland's Modern Apprenticeship programme pursuing non-traditional apprenticeships has dropped. This significantly undermines the economic gains to be made by addressing skills shortages in traditionally segregated sectors like construction and child care (EOC, 2006).

Engender would like to see:

- Occupational segregation properly addressed since this predominantly ensures that girls and women are concentrated in low paid, low status jobs with lifetime livelihood implications for them and their families.
- Childcare workers' wages to be raised in line with wages, for example, for plumbers. This would be a real challenge for the Scottish Government and one which would make a real impact.
- The Gender Equality Duty actively promoting equality by ensuring that the interests of pupils are not narrowly defined by gender stereotypes and the study of non-traditional subjects and work experience placements are promoted.

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- *A focus on early intervention and prevention wherever possible – to break the cycle of disadvantage*

Violence Traps Women in Poverty

Poverty can be a very powerful factor in preventing women leaving abusive situations. There is a widespread assumption in public policy that women have a man's income to fall back on. This assumption is out of touch with the reality of many women's lives today and is a key reason for the greater risk of poverty faced by women. Unfortunately, there are many incidences where women become trapped in violent relationships because they are reliant on male partners for financial security.

In 2006/07 there were 48,801 cases of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2007). Just under half (23,803) of these led to the recording of one or more criminal offences. 87% of these were with a female victim and a male perpetrator. 42% involved co-habitees or spouses, 34% ex-partners or ex-spouses. 90% of all recorded incidents took place in the home.

Domestic abuse is not confined to one socio-economic group – any woman can become a victim of domestic abuse and women from wealthier backgrounds are not necessarily less vulnerable. The telling issue in relation to poverty, is the ability (or not) of women to support themselves once they have taken steps to extricate themselves from abusive situations.

Prostitution is another aspect of violence against women (VAW) which is closely linked to poverty. Women involved in prostitution are exploited by men and disadvantaged at many levels, in respect of poverty, poor housing, poor health, unemployment and low educational attainment; many with a history of sexual abuse and physical violence; drug and alcohol dependency and mental health issues. Many women will also have suffered the loss and stigma of having their children 'looked after' by others or adopted, therefore pushing them further into the margins of society as 'failed' parents. Tackling poverty is arguably the best way to end prostitution.

While poverty plays a causal role in relation to VAW, the converse is also true. That is, VAW is a causal factor in women's poverty, and also poverty more generally.

Poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others.

The link between VAW and human poverty is clear. However, even if we use a purely material definition of poverty, one concerned only with consumption and expenditure, it is still the case that VAW plays a role in creating, maintaining, and deepening poverty.

For individual women, VAW and economic dependence can interact in a vicious circle. Actual and threatened VAW can maintain and deepen women's economic dependence on men, which renders them vulnerable to VAW, which in turn maintains and deepens women's economic dependence. At the household level, VAW can constrain women's choices, limit their productivity, and prevent them from bargaining effectively with their husbands or partners, all of which can undermine the health of women and their children. This household-level poverty then has wide-reaching consequences. If we look beyond individuals and households to communities and societies at large, we see that VAW entails both actual socio-economic costs and 'opportunity costs' for development. These often go unrecognised by policy makers and development practitioners.

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Housing

Inadequate housing, living in temporary accommodation or homelessness compound and consolidate disadvantages in a variety of inter-linking ways. BME households are more than six times more likely than white households to be overcrowded, or homeless and living in temporary accommodation and children who have disabilities or chronic health problems are put at greater risk by poor housing conditions and inadequate access to services. Poor housing disrupts access to schools and the labour market, and erodes social and support networks.

Lone parents (predominantly women) are often forced into high rental property from private landlords and there is an assumption that lone mothers are getting financial support/child maintenance from the father which is most certainly not always the case.

Women on low incomes are being priced out of the market for mortgages. Social house building is at an all-time low and Scotland needs to build new good quality and environmentally friendly homes for rent as well as ending the 'right to buy' policy to ensure the remaining public housing stock is not sold off.

Engender would like to see:

- Improved access to affordable and appropriate housing which is essential in tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- More good quality and environmentally-friendly social housing being built across Scotland.
- An extension to the Warm Deal and Central Heating Programme to include low income households with children and people in receipt of disability benefits.
- An end to the Public utilities companies' price differential between direct debit and pre-payment schemes.

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Community Regeneration and Local Democracy

Despite the rhetoric about social capital there is little political debate around how to develop social relationships within disadvantaged neighbourhoods or about the role that women play in building them.

We are aware that women's representation decreases the higher up the decision making process, with women being more likely to sit on community level boards, and men on citywide boards. Issues of who holds the power are key since if women's voices are not there at decision making tables, their needs and priorities will be overlooked. It could be said that women earn social capital and men spend/benefit from it. 75% of people in local groups in the UK are women yet when funds roll in and jobs occur, the men appear.

Regeneration policy must ensure that local service provision and access to services is of the highest quality in disadvantaged areas. Combining a gender aware approach with a good understanding of other equality areas, we are more likely to get: accurate diagnosis of need, effective tailoring of programmes and resources to meet diverse needs, interventions that avoid compounding structural inequalities and interventions that reach the whole community.

Women are disproportionately affected by the issues that regeneration aims to tackle – poverty, disadvantage and discrimination. Women and men use our physical environment very differently and have different needs relating to this.

Women are more likely to live in and spend time in run down areas, as they outnumber men in socially rented accommodation and are more likely to spend time in the home doing caring work so liveability issues can affect women more than men. Gender has to be a big issue in undertaking physical regeneration in our city centres, in parks and open spaces, business, retail and leisure sites.

Women use transport very differently than men, being more likely to use public transport than men and not having access to a car. This is also a major problem for women in rural areas where public transport is extremely limited and often based around the assumption that people are travelling to jobs which are 9-5 and not needing to travel at such 'off-peak' times in response to shifts, childcare or caring responsibilities.

A strong gender analysis needs to be at the heart of the sustainable communities' agenda – from policy making, design and planning stages, through to management, delivery and monitoring and evaluation (gender mainstreaming).

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Health

On average, health in Scotland has improved over the last decade not least as a result of the acknowledgment that health inequalities are social justice issues, not merely medical.

However the shift from a purely medical model to a more holistic or social model of health care has not been an easy transition, nor indeed could it be argued that policy changes have had the desired effects on service delivery.

Engender holds that the major barrier for women to the achievement of the highest attainable standard of health is inequality between women and men.

Engender would like to see:

- Abolition of prescription charges to ensure that women and men on low incomes have access to the medicines they need
- Improved access to all sport and leisure facilities by ensuring that all people living in low income households have free access
- Increased resources to support the creation of more one-to-one counselling services for those with mental health problems. Women are generally more likely than men to experience common mental health problems and longer-term episodes of depression. Levels of depression are highest among mothers of young children, lone parents and those who are economically inactive. Debt has been shown to have a detrimental effect on mental and physical well-being due to stress and stigma and fewer associated life opportunities (DWP, 2004).
- More drug and alcohol abuse support services for women. It is recognised that violence experience of abuse, poverty and drugs are at the root of street prostitution. While prostitution itself may predate drug use it has been clearly reported by women as being used to 'cope with' their experience of prostitution.
- Greater support for more community based health initiatives to help improve overall community well-being with recognition that there is a continuing need for women only services
- Expanding public transport and cycle paths to encourage alternative forms of transport in order to integrate exercise into everyday life

Key Principles

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*
- *A focus on tackling the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty*
- *Achievement of the right balance between closing the gap/tackling inequality and helping the very poorest in society*
- *A conviction that everyone – regardless of their circumstances – should be supported to achieve their potential*
- *The promotion and adoption of partnership working and seamless service provision which effectively connects with individuals and successfully moves them through the system (with service providers focusing on what they do best and then passing people on) in order that, as far as is feasible, they make progress at every stage and do not become stuck in the 'revolving door' of support services, circulating in and out of poverty or work*

Engaging with the Wider Public

A barrier to more effective action against poverty is a lack of public understanding and awareness of the aforementioned issues, including the fact that poverty is not simply about money. Despite the best efforts of voluntary and community organisations in attempting to raise the profile of poverty and social exclusion, the debate is not high on the public agenda. Without a better understanding of the poverty that exists, large sections of the population will remain unconvinced of the need to devote greater energy and resources to tackling poverty.

Engender would like to see:

- A Scottish Government-led high profile and sustained national campaign against poverty through TV, radio and newspapers to raise public awareness, support and understanding
- The creation of a regularly updated 'Consensus Measure of Poverty', better able to reflect the Scottish public's judgement of a decent standard of living
- Poverty Impact Statements to show how policies and new legislation would address poverty and the 'proofing' of all local and national government activities to show the impact on poverty

Key Principles

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*
- *A conviction that everyone – regardless of their circumstances – should be supported to achieve their potential*
- *The development of more active public engagement around poverty in Scotland as an issue which should concern us all and which requires action from the private as well as the public and third sectors*

ISSUES CONCERNING RESERVED & DEVOLVED PROGRAMMES

How well reserved and devolved programmes currently complement each other and any areas where co-operation can be improved:

The effectiveness of reserved and devolved programmes currently struggle from a lack of transparency, information-sharing, and overall communication. This can lead to confusion of authority for constituents looking to access and benefit from services.

Case Study Example

A case study example (from a Scottish Local Authority) is a single woman with four children and who is pregnant with her fifth. She is the head of her own household and billed as such by the Council for her rent, council tax, any other service provision. She receives benefits through the JobCentre for each of her children, as well as her own Income Support.

She has a boyfriend who lives alone in a separate residence, which is also documented through the Council and he receives benefits as well.

Recently, JobCentre cut her benefits because they believed that the couple were residing together in the woman's flat with her children and did not believe they were entitled to individual benefit provision.

Although the woman says that the boyfriend does stay over a couple nights a week, there is no regular pattern and maintains that he does live in his separate residence.

The Council has also looked into this situation and assessed that he is still living in his own residence and he continues to receive Housing Benefit for this residence. JobCentre, however, maintains their belief that the couple is residing together, but has only cut the woman's benefit, while continuing to award the man a share that should cover the man and woman as a cohabitating couple.

This decision is taken despite the fact that it is the woman's residence that JobCentre believes the man to be primarily residing in; despite the fact that the woman is the primary carer for 4 (soon to be 5) children; and despite the fact that the local authority does not believe the couple to be cohabitating and continues to award their local benefits, such as Housing Benefit, separately.

The woman feels that JobCentre is effectively forcing them to claim as couple in order to receive their due benefits without interruption. Whether the threat of this is actualised or not, the service provision the woman has experienced has served in part to threaten the autonomy of her decision-making about her personal relationships; she should not feel economically dependent on relationship status. There is also the issue of a lack of a transparent opportunity to appeal – the woman does not feel empowered to disagree with this decision.

The only local office she is able to get to without transportation is a Scottish Parliament constituency office, which due to reserved/devolved restrictions, is not able to deal effectively with this type of case.

This example is one of a variety that exemplifies the disjunct in information-sharing, assessment criteria, and communication between reserved and devolved programmes. Furthermore, the woman's benefits were cut pending investigation, rather than continuing the benefits until a final determination was made. In the end, the woman was also forced to travel to _____ in order to re-instate the benefits claim in her name – which was considerably more difficult considering her caring responsibilities and limited income, than it would have been for the man in question. There are local authority offices much closer to her residence, but these offices do not have the reserved power to alter the status of the JobCentre-dispensed benefits.

As is evident from this case, a family relying on benefits as the primary source of income can be placed in economic danger by uncoordinated decisions from government agencies. There was potential for this case to have been resolved more efficiently had there been greater information flow between reserved and devolved agencies, with consistent and established criteria for benefit provision from both agencies, and local offices (particularly for reserved agencies) to aid service provision.

The key barriers to greater partnership working and examples of how these can effectively be overcome:

As stated above, some of the key barriers to greater partnership working include lack of information exchange, transparency, and authority. These can be overcome in different ways – one example may be to increase the devolved powers to encompass a greater (or complete) share of welfare services.

Engender would like to see:

- The Scottish Government take an increased role in welfare service provision to help those in need benefit from pooled resources, more consistent information sharing and practical considerations
- Creation of a Minister for Women within the Scottish Government

Key Principles

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*
- *The promotion and adoption of partnership working and seamless service provision which effectively connects with individuals and successfully moves them through the system (with service providers focusing on what they do best and then passing people on) in order that, as far as is feasible, they make progress at every stage and do not become stuck in the 'revolving door' of support services, circulating in and out of poverty or work*
- *An approach that improves the internal capacity of disadvantaged individuals to lift themselves and their families out of poverty by developing their resilience, while also seeking to tackle the structural barriers (such as market failures, unresponsive public services or prejudice and discrimination) that prevent some people from accessing the opportunities available to others*

Welfare Services

An increased role in welfare service provision can range from greater fiscal raising powers, which can lead to new and different models of revenue distribution and public service spending. It can also change the nature of the existing relationship in the UK from a strict definition of “reserved” and “devolved” powers to a more fluid relationship among “reserved,” “devolved,” and “shared” powers (and service provision) that would move into the new “shared” category (Steel Commission, 2006).

It can benefit from pooled resources and more consistent information sharing, standards enforcement, and practical considerations such as shared local offices that make it easier for constituents to access the variety of benefits information and agencies they often utilise in conjunction, but are rarely in the same location or communicate with one another.

Key Principles

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*
- *The promotion and adoption of partnership working and seamless service provision which effectively connects with individuals and successfully moves them through the system (with service providers focusing on what they do best and then passing people on) in order that, as far as is feasible, they make progress at every stage and do not become stuck in the ‘revolving door’ of support services, circulating in and out of poverty or work*

Minister for Women

Another way to enhance the partnership between the reserved and devolved governments and their programmes is to ensure that larger policy objectives are championed and monitored across all portfolios at national government level. In this sense, it would be productive to create the position of a Minister for Women at the devolved level in the Scottish Parliament.

Although equal opportunities are currently reserved, this is another area where a shift in regulatory power can clearly benefit policy implementation.

Within the gender equality strand lie every other equality strand as well – ethnic minority, age, religious belief, disability, and sexual orientation. While it is important to examine the particular issues of each area, it is clear that women’s issues span areas that are both reserved and devolved. It is vital then that any equal opportunities policy or gender-specific programme that is being considered by the reserved government at Westminster (through their Minister for Women or any other department) has a complementary champion at the Scottish Parliament level.

As gender-specific legislation is passed at the UK level on sexual discrimination and gender duties, a Scottish Minister for Women will be able to monitor and direct the aspects of those programmes that will be implemented differently in Scotland – if say the legislation impacts on health or housing services, or the gender duties are being considered on public bodies within the remit of the Scottish Government.

A Minister for Women in the Scottish Parliament will also have a powerful voice on the formation of the budget and its annual implementation, ensuring that a focus on women-specific issues that cut across all subjects and government departments will be accounted for. Without this position, there is a present danger of Scottish-specific aspects being lost within the legislation and female voices lost in budgetary decisions – which are detrimental not only to the position of women, but to their families, the economy, and any proposed attack on poverty.

Any areas where it is believed enlargement of the devolution settlement could improve the seamless provision or support and achieve a greater impact on poverty and income inequality:

As stated above, there are areas such as welfare services that would be greatly improved by an enlarged devolution settlement – whether these powers would be completely devolved or “shared” would be the result of further political debate and discussion.

Enhancement of welfare and other services may also benefit from increased revenue raising powers for the Scottish Parliament, as also briefly mentioned above. With greater fiscal responsibilities, there is potential incentive for greater efficiency within service provision and the ability to tailor aspects of the benefits system to the Scottish population, particularly to coincide with the actions and governance of local authorities.

Engender would like to see:

- The Scottish Government take an role in employment law in order to take initiative on the gender pay gap and ‘family-friendly’ policies such as parental leave
- Increased devolved competency over asylum to address Scottish-specific population needs, poverty cycles in asylum communities (with employment training and childcare assistance), and practical hardships for families

Key Principle

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*

Employment Law

In terms of specifically addressing poverty and income inequality, there is great potential for these issues within employment law and equal opportunities legislation. Both of these subjects are currently reserved, but poverty-afflicted constituents within Scotland, particularly women, could greatly benefit from increased devolved competence on these matters.

Despite equal pay legislation, the gender pay gap continues to operate at 15% deficit for full-time women as compared to full-time men and a 35% deficit for part-time women. This has a glaring connection to female and child poverty. As has been documented in Scotland by organisations such as Close the Gap, underlying reasons for this disparity are connected to occupational segregation, caring responsibilities, and pay system discrimination.

In terms of caring responsibilities, the 'traditional' female-male roles are reinforced by the current benefits system. In the UK, statutory maternity pay - as directed through the reserved agencies - is paid for a maximum of 39 weeks as compared to a maximum of 2 weeks for statutory paternity pay (www.direct.gov). This has a significant effect on reinforcing the role of women as primary carers, which impacts not only on the hours and wages they are able to earn outside the home (with less access to extra training and high-paid shift or overtime work), but also the types of employment they are encouraged to enter.

If Scotland had a devolved responsibility over employment law, it can take initiative in addressing employment issues specific to Scotland and implement 'family-friendly' or other such policies that will benefit local areas. A common example to highlight the more generous of parental leave policies is that of Sweden, where up to 68 weeks paid leave (at around 80% of full salary) is offered to either parent, with a financial incentive for at least 2 months of that time to be taken by the father. There are also generous paid sick leave provisions and the option for each parent to reduce their normal working hours by 25% until the child is 8 years old (www.oecd.org).

How would this benefit Scotland specifically? Sweden enjoys a relatively high birth rate as compared to the UK and to Scotland in particular (*the population of England and Wales is predicted to rise by 7million by 2041 <+12%> while the Scottish population declines by 0.5 million <-10%>) (Burnside, 2004).

Targeting such family-focused employment practices to the Scottish population under devolved authority would both benefit the population issues by encouraging the birth rate, as well as making the earning potential of women more tenable – addressing the pay gap and poverty-related issues in one fell swoop.

Key Principles

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*

- *A focus on providing work for those who can work, alongside support for those who can't – this should of course be sustainable work that lifts households out of poverty and provides real personal development opportunities*

Asylum

Another poverty-related area that could benefit from increasingly devolved powers is that of asylum. Asylum and immigration are currently reserved matters and while there are many arguments to maintain immigration as a UK policy area, there are aspects of asylum where increased regulatory discretion by the Scottish Parliament can again be used to address matters of inequality and poverty factors.

As legislation currently stands, asylum-seekers are banned from entering into legal employment. For individuals and families that have come to the UK to escape oppression or violence, this is yet another hurdle that effectively condemns them to poverty with little recourse for improvement.

Similar to the employment law incentives and birth rate issues, there is also a clear demographic and economic need for extra labour in Scotland, which may differ in specifics as compared to England or Wales. Of the 7% of asylum-seekers that are currently employed in the UK, 90% of this group are in jobs that do not match their skills – this adversely affects the individual, families, local community, and the economy (Scottish Executive & Scottish Refugee Council, 2004).

Providing the Scottish Parliament with powers to regulate asylum in Scotland provides potential to address the cyclical experience of poverty felt in asylum-seeker communities. In addition to removing the ban on employment, which is the most obvious route out of poverty for these communities, Scottish authorities can also develop integration schemes specific to the country, with English language and skills training.

Employment training and recruitment agencies, with childcare assistance and related provisions, can also be established to link up these communities with viable economic opportunities across Scotland – a worthwhile endeavour for engaging asylum applicants as close to 70% of applications are successful (2004).

Another positive point for moving asylum into devolved administration is the practicality of the registration and application process. Under the current programme, all asylum applicants to the UK must travel to Liverpool for registration – regardless of where they will be living.

This is a huge practical inconvenience for individuals and families – particularly those headed by single parents – who are already living on a very limited income due to the employment ban. Even without any of the larger changes, making registration available in Scotland would assist asylum-seeker communities currently existing around the poverty line.

Key Principle

- *A conviction that everyone – regardless of their circumstances – should be supported to achieve their potential*

Constituencies in Scotland, such as employers, with whom the Scottish Government should do more to influence thinking and action on tackling poverty:

Engender would like to see:

- Engagement with employers to target occupational segregation and pay system discrimination – starting with state-sponsored agencies like JobCentre Plus
- Early years intervention challenging gender stereotyping and increase in programmes like business and leadership mentoring for young people
- Effective policy monitoring and public awareness campaign of less obvious routes to poverty

Key Principle

- *The need for gendered analyses - and, where necessary, gendered approaches*

In terms of what groups the Scottish Government should be targeting for engagement on tackling poverty, employers are an obvious and important choice. Some of the potential to engage with employers on this matter have been discussed above in the points on employment law and parental leave, but there are other areas in the realm of employment that affect female poverty (and by association, family & child poverty) such as the issues briefly touched upon with the gender pay gap – such as occupational segregation and discrimination within pay systems.

If the devolved powers are changed, there will be opportunity for the Scottish Government to engage with agencies such as JobCentre to ensure that they types of jobs being offered to men and women do not fall into segregated themes. It is vital to ensure that the positions offered have equal pay, equal benefits, and equal opportunities for growth and promotion. Another case example was a man looking for employment assistance with the JobCentre who was never offered anything but scaffolding work, despite his insistence that he did not want to continue in that line of work and would prefer to go into computer training/administrative assistant work. This type of occupational segregation pressure placed on men is most certainly being experienced by women as well (as also seen by a recent trend in JobCentre vacancies for female “lap dancers” and “pole dancers”) and does nothing to alter income inequality and poverty cycles.

This pressure can be targeted for elimination in the early years. In an area where the Scottish Government currently does hold remit, it will be necessary to develop early years programmes challenging traditional gender stereotyping and develop consistent subject matter within all levels of education with classes or information that focuses on abuse prevention, gender awareness, citizenship, life skills, etc. It would also be very valuable to examine existing models for business mentoring and public life and participation mentoring that can help young people, particularly young women, find a voice and develop potential for productive social and economic futures.

Finally, there is a lack of effective long-term monitoring of policy – or at least a lack of good general awareness of many detailed policy initiatives among the general public. Efforts to raise public awareness on some of the less obvious pitfalls and aspects of poverty may be beneficial in the long-term work to tackling poverty's root causes.

If you wish to contact Engender about any issue raised in this response please telephone us on 0131 558 9596 or email Carol.Flack@engender.org.uk

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