

## **Engender Parliamentary Briefing:**

### **Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate on the Scottish Budget 2023-24**

25<sup>th</sup> January 2023

#### **SUMMARY:**

- The cost of living crisis is disproportionately affecting women, enabling violence against women and girls and entrenching gender inequality.
- We continue to be concerned about the lack of attention the Scottish Budget process pays to structural gender inequality, and women's and men's differing lived experience.
- MSPs must hold the Scottish Government accountable for the impact that decisions on cuts to social care portfolios in the Scottish Budget 2023-24 will have on women across Scotland.
- We ask for your support to continue calling for the following gendered economic policy solutions to be included in the Scottish Budget to reduce gender inequality.<sup>1</sup>
- To embed a gendered approach into future Budget decision-making, we urge the Scottish Government to turn the Equality and Budget Advisory Group (EBAG)'s recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting into a prioritised and well-resourced action plan.<sup>2</sup>

#### **BACKGROUND**

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation. Our aspiration is for a Scotland where women and men have equal access to rights, resources, decision-making and safety. We welcomed publication of the Draft Scottish Budget for 2023-24 and, in particular, the commitments on progressive steps for taxation on higher earners and that most devolved benefits will rise in line with inflation. However, in a context of deepening inequality for women during a cost of living crisis, with the impacts of Covid-19 continuing to be felt, there are key areas of concern which still need to be addressed.

Inflation is higher for products aimed at women, and women's salaries are less likely to keep track with inflation than men's. The current crisis of spiralling inflation is therefore highly gendered<sup>3</sup>. The Scottish Government must therefore interrogate the ways in which the Budget cumulatively impacts on women and men. There is no area of policy whereby women and men do not have different experiences or differential access to power, resources, and safety.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of our most recent asks for Scottish Government centred around women's access to financial resources can be found here: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-briefing-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> EBAG (2021) Equality Budget Advisory Group: recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting - 2021-2026 parliamentary session. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-budget-advisory-grouprecommendations-for-equality-and-human-rights-budgeting---2021-2026-parliamentary-session/>.

<sup>3</sup> See for example recent coverage by the New Statesman:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/business/economics/2022/08/uk-inflation-rate-higher-for-women>

Budgets are not neutral but present an opportunity to re-enforce these inequalities or to address them according to political and public policy goals. This is why we welcomed the Finance and Public Administration Committee's recommendations 77 and 78, which reflect our evidence<sup>4</sup> that there must be a more proactive approach from Scottish Government in gendering the Budget. However, we believe the Draft Scottish Budget does not show enough progress to meet these recommendations from the Committee.

## **SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS**

### **1. Gender Budget Analysis**

We continue to have concerns regarding the lack of attention the Scottish Budget process pays to structural gender inequality, and women's and men's differing lived experience. Existing commitments to gender budgeting have not led to its consistent application in Scotland. Yet with the unfolding economic crisis, robust and intersectional gender budget analysis is more urgently needed than ever.

The Scottish Budget 2023-24 must fundamentally take stock of the issues within a comprehensive application of gender budget analysis (GBA). This means that allocation of resources across all spending portfolios must proactively seek to address the underpinning inequalities experienced by women in Scotland. Policy analysis that informs revenue-raising and spending decisions must be underpinned by equality objectives that reflect women's lives, such as addressing the disproportionate delivery of care and reproductive labour that is often excluded from economic discussions.<sup>5</sup> GBA can therefore expose unwitting bias within budgetary processes that are otherwise assumed to be gender-neutral. Used well, it will strengthen gender equality of outcomes across all public expenditure and government departments, with broad benefits for communities overall.

### **2. Equality and Fairer Budget Statement**

The Equality and Fairer Budget Statement 2022-23 did not include robust analysis of the negative impacts of decisions on equalities groups, such as cuts to the social care portfolio and the impact of inflation on the Scottish Child Payment. There must be robust analysis of how the decisions made by Scottish Government, due to inflationary pressures and the UK economic context, have included analysis of the resulting impacts on equalities groups.

The current EFSBS instead includes a list of disparate issues that give only a cursory reflection of spend on equalities issues across government. This scattergun approach does not allow for analysis of the cumulative impact of spending on women, men and gender equality, offers no explanation as to why specific inequalities were included at the expense of others, and limits the ability to make clear connections between the rights and inequalities identified, as well as across protected characteristics.

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<sup>4</sup> Engender (2022) Submission of evidence to the Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee call for views on its pre-budget scrutiny 2023-24. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-finance-committee-submission-pre-budget-scrutiny-cost-of-living-002.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Engender and Close the Gap (2020) Making inclusive growth work for women in Scotland. Available at: [https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/1591173199\\_Gender--Inclusive-Growth---Making-inclusivegrowth-work-for-women-in-Scotland.pdf](https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/1591173199_Gender--Inclusive-Growth---Making-inclusivegrowth-work-for-women-in-Scotland.pdf).

We echo the statement made by the Scottish Women’s Budget Group<sup>6</sup> that the EFSBS must be created as a tool to inform budget decision-making, rather than retrofitted after key decisions have been made. At an early stage in the budget process, there must be resource to provide quality, transparent analysis of the equality impacts through the budget in an accessible format to shape decision-making. We must continue to demand that Scottish Government turn the Equality and Budget Advisory Group (EBAG)’s recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting into a prioritised and well-resourced action plan.

### 3. The Scottish Budget’s Potential to Tackle Gender Inequality

In addition to asks for further transparency in the decision-making process of how equalities impacts shape the Scottish Budget, we ask for your support to continue calling for specific gendered economic policy solutions to be included in this year’s Budget to reduce gender inequality. These include:

- Calls from across the women’s sector, led by violence against women organisations such as Scottish Women’s Aid, to establish a dedicated fund to support women leaving an abusive partner. This was committed to in 2020 and has yet to be implemented.<sup>7</sup>
- The implementation of fast-tracking delivery of automatic individual payments of Universal Credit from the outset of the claim, as first committed to in 2017.
- To work towards a living wage for unpaid carers, in the short-term doubling the Carers Allowance Supplement and creating a Carers Hardship Fund.
- To commit the Scottish Child Payment to primary legislation and ensure that payments are increased in line with inflation.
- To expand funded childcare to 50 hours of universal, flexible, accessible and culturally competent childcare per week.

Further information and context on these asks and how they are centred around women’s access to financial resources are available in our briefing on the Cost of Living Crisis.<sup>8</sup>

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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#### ABOUT US

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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<sup>6</sup> SWBG (2022) Responding to the Draft Budget 2023-24. Available at:

<https://www.swbg.org.uk/news/blog/responding-to-the-draft-budget-2023-24/>

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Women’s Aid (2020) Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse Scottish Government working group report. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Improving-Housing-Outcomes-for-Women-and-Children-Experiencing-Domestic-Abuse-Report.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Engender (2022) Parliamentary Briefing: Cost of living crisis. Available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-briefing-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>.