

## Engender Parliamentary Briefing: The Scottish Government Budget 2025-26

November 2024

### BACKGROUND

The Scottish Budget 2025-26 is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to commit to securing women's rights, especially for women most impacted by poverty and other forms of marginalisation. Women and men have different access to power, resources, and safety. Budgets are not neutral; they have the power to reinforce or address intersectional gender inequality.

Action by the Scottish Government to advance equality has become even more urgent as recent challenges such as austerity policies, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis have deepened women's inequality and rates of poverty. This inequality is felt most severely by women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, who are experiencing disproportionate impacts of these various crises.

We are asking MSPs to raise the following points during scrutiny of the Scottish Budget 2025-24:

- It is vital the **Scottish Budget process uses gender budget analysis (GBA)** in decision-making on spending and that the impacts on intersectional gender equality have been adequately recognised and addressed.
- **The Scottish Government must invest in embedding intersectional gender equality at the heart of public bodies' decision-making** to improve policies and public services for women. This must include adequately resourcing the proposed Equalities and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy and investing in reforming the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland.
- Targeting women's economic inequality is an effective way to eradicate child poverty, and recognition alone of the link between addressing women's poverty and child poverty is not enough. **The Scottish Budget must enable investment in targeted policy solutions which strengthen women's financial security, particularly those experiencing intersecting marginalisation.**
- The Scottish Budget **must address women's inequality in access to safe, secure, and affordable housing** and ensure women can realise their housing rights.
- The Scottish Government must address **the lack of progress in recognising and addressing inequalities for women and marginalised groups in the culture sector** when making decisions on funding for the culture portfolio.
- The next phase of the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan 2021-24 must **include significant investment to address women's unequal health outcomes** and develop a Scottish Institute for Women's Health.

## SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Invest in Embedding Gender Mainstreaming

**The Scottish Government must invest in embedding intersectional gender equality at the heart of public bodies' decision-making to improve the reach and impact of policies and public services for all women.**

Improving intersectional gender mainstreaming is vital to realising the four Scottish Government priorities the Budget seeks to achieve: eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and improving public services.<sup>1</sup> These areas impact women and men differently, especially where they experience compounding forms of marginalisation.

Policy must be designed to recognise and respond to structural inequalities in order to positively impact the most marginalised communities.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the value and potential of mainstreaming equality are not well understood or invested in across the Scottish Government. With the Human Rights Bill currently paused, there must be investments in policy commitments to progress equalities approaches in Scottish policymaking.

Our asks:

- **Apply gender budget analysis (GBA)** meaningfully and transparently in decision-making processes for the Scottish Budget.
- Adequately **resource the proposed 'Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy'** to ensure it leads to practice change across government.
- **Invest in strengthening and reforming the Public Sector Equality Duty.** The PSED is currently not fit for purpose, and organisations and public services are not doing enough to improve their practices and meet these legal duties.<sup>3</sup>
- **Revisit Scotland's 'National Strategy for Economic Transformation'** to improve gender mainstreaming and recognise the need for investment in women-led growth sectors, including the care economy.

### 2. Tackle Women's Poverty and Child Poverty

**Targeting women's economic inequality is an effective way to eradicate child poverty, and recognition alone of the link between addressing women's poverty and child poverty is not enough. The Scottish budget must enable greater investment in targeted policy solutions which strengthen women's financial security.**

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<sup>1</sup> Engender (2024) 8 Steps Towards Women's Equality. Available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/8stepstowardswomensequality.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Engender (2020) What Works for Women: Improving Gender Mainstreaming in Scotland:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/WHAT-WORKS-FOR-WOMEN---improving-gender-mainstreaming-in-Scotland.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Engender (2022) Response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland. Available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-response-to-PSED-consultation.pdf>

Eradicating child poverty is the First Minister's number one priority, and we welcomed that fact that Programme for Government 2024-25 recognised the inextricable link between addressing women's and children's poverty. However, we are yet to see targeted actions which tackle the disproportionate impact poverty is having on women's lives, especially for women who experience other forms of marginalisation.

We know women's incomes are lower than those of men, and they have less access to well-paid and secure work, are more reliant on social security, have less access to, and smaller pensions, and inequitable access to resources within households.<sup>4</sup> Women also make up the majority of one-parent families and are more likely to be primary caregivers for children. They often act as the shock absorbers of poverty in our communities.

Women make up the majority of disabled and older people and of those providing unpaid care for people unable to access formal care services. Income inequality dictates who has or doesn't have access to social care, and the cost-of-living crisis has pushed many carers into extreme financial hardship. Migrant women and women with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) are also at acute risk of deep poverty. NRPF is particularly harmful to migrant women affected by abuse as without a safety net; they face an increased risk of destitution and exploitation. Women experiencing domestic abuse are often unable to leave an abusive partner due to financial constraints and economic coercive control.

Our asks:

- **Increase investment in the Scottish Welfare Fund and create targeted streams of the fund to support marginalised women** most at risk of poverty, including migrant women and those impacted by the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition.
- **Introduce targeted financial support for unpaid carers**, including through a dedicated 'Carers Hardship Fund' that could be delivered via the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Implement the long-standing commitment to **abolish social care charging**, as these charges create severe financial barriers to accessing social care, which damages women's social and economic equality.
- **Commit to a national fund which supports women experiencing domestic abuse**, building on the work of Scottish Women's Aid's 'Fund to Leave' pilot.

### 3. Address Women's Housing Inequality

**The Scottish Budget must address women's inequality in access to safe, secure, and affordable housing and ensure women can realise their housing rights.**

We recently published a joint report with Shelter Scotland on 'Gender and the Housing Emergency.'<sup>5</sup> This explores how women's access to housing and experiences of homelessness are shaped by structural gender inequality and other intersectional forms

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<sup>4</sup> Engender (2022) Women and the Cost of Living Crisis. Available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Women-and-the-cost-of-living---updated-copy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Engender and Shelter Scotland (2024) Gender and the Housing Emergency. Available at:

<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Shelter-Scotland-and-Engender-Report.pdf>

of marginalisation. Women's financial insecurity fundamentally impacts access to housing, leading to a higher likelihood of women experiencing certain forms of housing instability, poor housing and homelessness. Women are also more likely to depend on social housing and spend longer periods in unsuitable forms of Temporary Accommodation, particularly if they have children, as we see significant strain and underfunding of public services which are often not gender-sensitive in design.

Our asks:

- **Reverse the 37% cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.** This reflects the fact that women are more likely to rely on social housing and are therefore disproportionately impacted by a lack of social homes.
- **Secure funding for gender-sensitive Temporary Accommodation (TA),** especially for women with children. Work must be done with local authorities to deliver an increase in temporary accommodation that meets women's needs.
- Provide appropriate, safe housing and **accommodation solutions for women with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF),** who are at acute risk of homelessness.

#### 4. Progress Gender Equality in Culture Funding

Engender hosts the Equal Media and Culture Centre for Scotland (EMCC)<sup>6</sup>, which provides research and monitoring and advocates for intersectional gender equality in the media and creative and cultural industries across Scotland.

**We are concerned about the Scottish Government's lack of progress in recognising and addressing inequalities for women and marginalised groups in the culture sector when making decisions on funding for the culture portfolio.**

Media and culture help shape societal attitudes and have the power to transform the world around us. However, there remains a persistent lack of representation of women and diverse voices in positions of power in Scotland's arts, media, cultural, and sports industries. This is particularly pronounced for minoritised women. Under 25% of national arts and culture body directors are women in Scotland.<sup>7</sup>

Structural barriers, such as lack of access to funding, inflexibility of roles, and a lack of consistent, well-paid work, continue disproportionately affecting women's representation and participation in Scotland's creative and cultural sectors. Around 60% of part-time roles in the arts sector are held by women.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, a recent Creative Scotland survey found that almost three times the number of women to men cited care responsibilities as a significant barrier to their work in the arts.<sup>9</sup>

Our asks:

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<sup>6</sup> More information on the Equal Media and Culture Centre for Scotland is available here:

<https://emcc.engender.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> Engender (2023) Sex and Power 2023. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/resources/SEX--POWER-2023.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> National Advisory Council on Women and Girls - Gender Inequality in the Creative Arts. Available at: <https://www.generationequal.scot/arts-and-creative-industries-what-we-already-know/>

<sup>9</sup> 'Understanding Diversity in the Arts Survey Summary Report', pub.2017

- **Fulfil the promised £25m funding for the culture sector in 2025/26.**
- Renew commitment to **meeting the pledge for an annual £100m investment for the culture sector** to be delivered by 2028-29.
- Acknowledge and address systemic gender disparity in the culture sector by **employing gender budgeting in decision-making on culture funding.**

## 5. Fund Action to Address Women's Health Inequalities

**The next phase of the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan 2021-24 must include significant investment for systemic change to address women's unequal health outcomes.**

We welcomed the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan 2021-24, which raises the profile of women's health inequalities and provides overarching direction to tackle them. Women continue to experience ingrained health inequalities in Scotland and significant gaps remain in available intersectional, gender-disaggregated data on women's health experiences. This limits our ability to understand the full extent of women's health outcomes and is why it is crucial that work to address women's health inequalities remains a political priority. However, the next phase of work must come with adequate funding to create the systemic change required.<sup>10</sup>

The 2021-24 Women's Health Plan also committed to establishing a Scottish Institute for Women's Health. However, this has still not been delivered. We believe investment in a permanent body is needed to help drive the necessary systemic changes to policy, guidance, and medical training that will improve women's health experiences and outcomes in the long term.

Our asks:

- Ensure the **next phase of the Women's Health Plan includes funding and investment** to deliver commitments and has accountability measures to ensure it is delivered across the country.
- **Invest in developing a new Scottish Institute for Women's Health.**

## 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 levels to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.

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<sup>10</sup> Engender (2024) Scottish Government Debate: The Women's Health Plan 2021- 2024 – Progress and Next Steps. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-Parliamentary-Briefing---Womens-Health-Plan-2021-24.pdf>