



Engender Parliamentary Briefing: Equalities and Human Rights Committee Debate: Valuing the Third Sector

1 December 2020

1. Introduction

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. In pursuit of this vision, we work across a full breadth of policy domains relating to the economic, social, political and cultural rights of women, and often closely with the wider women's sector in Scotland, the UK and Europe to develop our expertise, share information and maximise our impacts for women and girls.

We welcome the opportunity to share a small glimpse of the impact the women's sector has had in Scotland ahead of the parliamentary debate initiated by the Equality and Human Rights Committee on Valuing the Third Sector. We also highlight the role of the women's sector in Scotland in delivering equality and human rights priorities and to reflect on issues raised by the Committee's report in respect of sustainability and impact during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Funding the women's sector in Scotland

International evidence shows that investing funding in women's organisations creates disproportionately positive impacts on the lives of women and girls.¹ The work of women's organisations demands close understanding of the lives of women and girls and the workings of law, policy and practice in diverse areas, from sexual health to education to media and political representation and violence against women. Analysis of policies on violence against women has shown that "a strong, autonomous feminist movement is both substantively and statistically significant as a predictor of government action to redress violence against women."²

Over recent years, the women's sector in Scotland has secured significant and wide-ranging policy changes such as:

¹ OECD (2010) Investing In Women and Girls: The Breakthrough Strategy for Achieving all the MGDs. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/45704694.pdf>.

² Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon (2010) "When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy".

- Scotland's 'gold standard' Domestic Abuse Act;
- The development of *A Fairer Scotland for Women: Gender Pay Gap Action Plan*;
- Commitments to implement separate and individualised payments of Universal Credit in Scotland;
- Development and implementation of *Equally Safe*, Scotland's strategy to end men's violence against women;
- Comprehensive duties to integrate gender into the Scottish National Investment Bank;
- Parity on public board positions and the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018; and
- Commitment to incorporate the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women into Scots Law.

Globally, spending on women's equality in the national budget falls far below investments in policies and industries that continue to harm women rights.³ In the context of Covid-19, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner has cautioned that states must accelerate efforts to protect and fund women-led organizations and social movements over the course of the pandemic and the recovery amid shift in priorities of donors.⁴

Scottish Women's Aid is calling for a new funding model to ensure adequate and effective support to transform lives so that women, children and young people are able to recover and thrive. Funding for specialist domestic abuse services remains precarious and insufficient to provide a comprehensive service for all who need it. Funding for local services is inconsistent, and Women's Aid groups have therefore been increasingly reliant on grants from organizations such as the Big Lottery to supplement the inadequate local and national government funding.

A focus on short term budgets and project funding is incompatible with the role of the women's sector to hold government to account for its commitments to improve the lives of women and girls and the vital systems change we need to secure. The Association for Women's Rights in Development has highlighted the limitation of project orientated funding in women's rights organising.⁵ A move to three-year funding cycles, as has now

³ Kasia Staszewka, Tenzin Dolker and Kellea Miller, *The Guardian* (2019) Only 1% of gender equality funding is going to women's organisations – why?. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>.

⁴ UN Human Rights High Commissioner (2020) COVID-19 recovery "unattainable" without women-led organizations and movements- UN independent expert, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Womens-movements-and-freedoms-of-assembly-and-association.aspx>.

⁵ Arutyunova, Angelika, and Cindy Clark (2013) "Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots." Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).

happened in Scotland, allows more longer term and systemic focus which are necessary in delivering comprehensive policy advocacy and stable services.

3. Covid-19 and Women's Rights

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant consequences for women, exacerbating pre-existing gendered inequalities in almost every area. For example:

- **A reduction in social care packages⁶** has led to an increase of the number of unpaid carers in Scotland by 392,000 to 1.1 million, of which 61% are women.⁷
- **A widening gender gap in unpaid work⁸ and a reduction in women's paid work.** Mothers doing paid work from home are interrupted over 50% more often than fathers.⁹
- The majority of **key workers with highest exposure to the virus are women**, working in often low-paid and increasingly precarious jobs such care, childcare, nursing and retail.¹⁰
- **Persistent inadequacy of social security**, which has severe consequences for women's human rights and poverty levels.¹¹
- **Restrictions in women's healthcare, including screening programmes, sexual health and changes to the functioning of maternity services.**
- **A shortage of suitable refuge accommodation has been exacerbated by restrictions on moving and a lack of temporary housing options during lockdown**, leaving women with an **impossible choice to stay in an unsafe home or risk homelessness.**¹²
- Rape Crisis Scotland has highlighted that **access to justice has been stalled** with court closures compounding delays to cases and exacerbating the stress and harm to victim-survivors.¹³

Ensuring that the needs are met of women who have lost work, lost the support of vital services, experienced men's violence and whose health has been compromised by the pandemic will require sustained commitment from women's organisations for years to come. Preventing a significant rollback of women's rights will place additional demands

⁶ Glasgow Disability Alliance (2020) GDA's Covid-resilience engagement and response: Interim report. Glasgow Disability Alliance.

⁷ Carers UK (2020) Carers Week 2020 Research Report.

⁸ A. Adams-Prassl, T. Boneva, M. Golin and C. Rauh, (2020) Inequality in the Impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence from Real Time Surveys.

⁹ A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.

¹⁰ Close the Gap (2020) Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of Covid-19 on women's labour market equality.

¹¹ Sefton, T., Monk-Whinstanley, R. and Howes, S. (2020) No one knows what the future can hold. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/no-one-knows-what-future-can-hold>.

¹² Scottish Women's Aid (2020) Crisis and Resilience: The Impact of the Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and Service Providers in Scotland. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SWA-COVID-Report.pdf>.

¹³ Rape Crisis Scotland (2020) On Covid-19 and Courts - A Statement From Sandy Brindley. Available at: <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/news/news/on-covid-19-and-courts---a-statement-from-sandy-brindley/>.

on the expertise within public bodies and the women's sector and require increased collaboration and better consideration of women's needs.

4. The Women's Sector's Response to the Pandemic

Like almost all organisations, Engender has shifted its focus during the pandemic to concentrate on women's equality and rights as they are affected by Covid-19. In the initial weeks of the crisis unfolding in Scotland, Engender:

- Published a paper on the predicted impacts of Covid-19 on women and necessary steps to mitigate the harms to women's incomes, safety and economic participation;
- Secured a requirement in the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act for the Scottish Government to proactively consider equality when introducing public health measures;
- Provided review and feedback to draft equality impact assessments and relevant guidance on fast-moving frameworks and service delivery changes;
- Advocated that other areas of women's equality must not be forgotten during the pandemic, such as enabling women to access abortion healthcare; and
- Ensured that women's voices were brought to bear on policy decisions by participating in research and polling partnerships, and our @WomenCovidScot initiative.

We have seen welcome high-level commitments to women's equality during the pandemic. However, the detail of policy created in response to Covid-19 has often failed to consider women's specific needs, for example the impacts of school closures and home learning for mothers' continued labour market participation. The now long overdue review of the public sector equality duty in Scotland must consider how aspects of the mainstreaming processes coped or failed to cope in this crisis. It is clear to Engender that women's organisations will remain a critical part of the process by which women's equality and rights are considered within policymaking and legislating in Scotland.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ABOUT US

Engender is a membership organisation working on feminist agendas in Scotland and Europe, to increase women's power and influence and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve gender equality and justice.