



# SECURING WOMEN'S FUTURES: USING SCOTLAND'S NEW SOCIAL SECURITY POWERS TO CLOSE THE GENDER EQUALITY GAP

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Welfare reform and the UK Government's wider austerity agenda are having a grotesquely disproportionate impact on women's access to resources, security and safety. Over the decade of austerity, from 2010 to 2020, 86% of net 'savings' raised through cuts to social security and tax credits will come from women's incomes.<sup>1</sup>

The explanation for this enormous imbalance lies in women's pre-existing inequality:

- Women are twice as dependent on social security as men, with 20% of women's income coming from the benefits and tax credit system, compared with 10% of men's.<sup>2</sup>
- Women have fewer financial assets and less access to occupational pensions than men, and women are 66% of the paid workforce living in poverty in Scotland.<sup>3</sup>
- 92% of lone parents are women, and women make up 95% of lone parents in receipt of Income Support.<sup>4</sup>
- Women provide around 70% of unpaid care<sup>5</sup> and 74% of Carer's Allowance claimants are women.<sup>6</sup> Women are twice as likely to give up paid work in order to care.<sup>7</sup>
- The gender pay gap in Scotland is 14.8%. Women working part-time earn 33.5% less than men working full-time, and women are 75% of the part-time workforce. On average women earn £175.30 less per week than men.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Women's Budget Group (2016) *The impact on women of the 2016 Budget: Women paying for the Chancellor's tax cuts*

<sup>2</sup> The Fawcett Society (2006) *Who benefits? A gender analysis of the UK benefits and tax credit system*

<sup>3</sup> CPAG (2014) *Poverty in Scotland 2014: The independence referendum and beyond*

<sup>4</sup> Engender (2012) *Multiple Jeopardy: The impacts of the UK Government's proposed welfare reform on women in Scotland*

<sup>5</sup> Skills for Care (2012) *Carers Matters – Everybody's business*

<sup>6</sup> Carers UK (2014) *Caring and Family Finances Inquiry*

<sup>7</sup> The National Carers Organisations (2013) *Submission to the Expert Group on Welfare*

<sup>8</sup> Close the Gap (2016) *Gender pay gap statistics*

The gender inequality of welfare reform will have far-reaching impacts for many different women. Women have been placed at greater risk of deeper and sustained poverty. In addition to meeting basic needs, economic inequality affects access to social and cultural participation. Welfare reform measures have created and will continue to create further barriers to women's full participation in society, including within their communities and in political spaces.

By 2020, women who are lone parents will experience an estimated loss of £4,000 per year, a 20% drop in living standards and a 17% drop in disposable income.<sup>9</sup> Where women's disposable income is reduced, spending on children decreases and links between women's and child poverty are widely recognised.<sup>10</sup> Child poverty shapes life chances, development and wellbeing, and subjects children to extreme stigmatisation.

This is the backdrop against which the Scottish Government gains new powers over social security, many of which overlap with devolved policy and services that are crucial for women's equality. This provides an opportunity for the Scottish Government to make progress against commitments on gender equality, by pausing to take stock of ways in which social security, and specific welfare reform measures in particular, have not delivered for women. We are calling for new powers devolved under the Scotland Act 2016 to be engaged in support of women at the margins in Scotland.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's social security in Scotland is decreasing, especially for lone parents, unpaid carers, women experiencing domestic abuse and women who face multiple inequalities, like refugee women and disabled women. Although the Scottish Government does not have the power to fully mitigate the issues we set out in our full report,<sup>11</sup> with new competence over social security it has an opportunity to practise equality and to help stem this tide.

### Developing use of new powers

#### Scottish Government should

1. Work directly with different groups of women to design new legislation and delivery systems, so that services are fit for purpose.
2. Include women's equality as a principle on the face of primary legislation that enables delivery of social security in Scotland.

<sup>9</sup> Women's Budget Group (2016) *A cumulative impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies*

<sup>10</sup> CPAG (2012) *Ending child poverty by 2020*

<sup>11</sup> Engender (2016) *Securing Women's Futures: Using Scotland's new social security powers to close the gender equality gap*

3. Mainstream gender in the development of new legislation, policies and programmes, including greatly improved equality impact assessments.
4. Review the impact of devolved services on women's equality and ensure that they are joined-up with new social security programmes.
5. Include plans for a summit on women's social security within the Programme for Government 2016-17.

## **Paid work**

### **Scottish Government should**

6. Introduce automatic individual payments of Universal Credit, with entitlements relating to children allocated to the main carer and elements for disability, unpaid carers and housing dispersed accordingly.
7. Invest in employment support services targeted at diverse groups of women, including carers, disabled women, refugee women and women experiencing domestic abuse.
8. Design employability programmes that address occupational segregation as a central aim.

## **Unpaid work**

### **Scottish Government should**

9. 'Top up' Child Benefit with a Scottish Child Premium of £5 per week.
10. Set the new Maternity and Early Years Allowance at a level which at least matches the original Sure Start Maternity Grant and peg eligibility against income.
11. Create a new Living Wage for Carers, to which all carers in employment and education, and carers of all ages are entitled.
12. Develop pilot schemes for a Citizen's Income in Scotland over the course of the next parliamentary term.

## **Domestic abuse**

### **Scottish Government should**

13. Urgently assess the impact of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap on refuge provision and develop alternative funding arrangements, beyond Discretionary Housing Payments, from April 2017.
14. Ensure that all women are able to access refuge accommodation, regardless of their entitlement to housing benefit, immigration status, or access to public funds.

## Multiple discrimination

### Scottish Government should

15. Monitor the impact of UK Government welfare reforms and new Scottish Government social security policy on diverse groups of women.
16. Ensure that social security legislation and delivery takes account of the particular experiences and rights of refugee and asylum seeking women living in Scotland.
17. Create a destitution fund to mitigate the impact of restrictions and administrative delays in accessing public funds for those with insecure immigration status and EEA migrant women experiencing domestic abuse.
18. Create a system of disability benefits that treats claimants with dignity and respect, and takes account of disabled women's experiences.

## Welfare reform mitigation

### Scottish Government should

19. Provide training on gender equality to policymakers and discretionary decision-makers, and target uptake by women across its 'welfare reform mitigation' programme.
20. Monitor uptake of the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments by diverse groups of women and publish gender-disaggregated data.
21. Ring-fence funding for women's organisations and gender-sensitive services relating to welfare reform, as part of a broad shift to strategically link the Equality Budget Statement and the Draft Budget.
22. Remove restrictions on accessing the Scottish Welfare Fund for those with insecure immigration status facing short-term emergencies.

Read the full report at [www.engender.org.uk/gendermattersinsocialsecurity](http://www.engender.org.uk/gendermattersinsocialsecurity)

