



# VISION FOR A FEMINIST RECOVERY

ENGENDER MANIFESTO FOR THE  
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION 2021

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# OUR VISION

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation. We work to secure a Scotland where women have equal access to resources, rights, power and safety as men and make visible the impacts of sexism and misogyny.

We advocate for a Scotland where women are part of every political and economic decision, both as decision-makers and as citizens who share equally their consequences. This includes understanding the complexities of all women's lives and impacts of multiple and intersecting discrimination for Black and minority ethnic women, younger and older women, disabled women, lesbian, bisexual and trans women and women from rural communities as well as women who are mothers, women who have experienced domestic abuse or men's violence, and women who experience poverty among other nuanced and multifaceted realities.

In 2017 Engender published our Gender Matters Roadmap, created in consultation with women from across Scotland. It sets out a series of measures that, with political will, can be taken by the Scottish Government and other bodies in order to move towards women's equality in Scotland by 2030. It describes a Scotland with the following features:

- Women's rights are realised regardless of ability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or background;
- Women and their children are safe and secure from harm;

- Women have equal access to resources and opportunities;
- Women have equal influence in political and economic life;
- Women are able to participate fully in society and culture;
- Women and women's unpaid and paid work are valued;
- Diverse groups of women are at the forefront of the women's movement.

This manifesto describes the steps we believe necessary to take us closer to that 2030 vision over the next parliament.

However, the 2021 elections come at an extraordinary point in our collective history. The tragedies seen over the past months as Scotland and the world responded to the Covid-19 pandemic have, and continue to have, significant impacts for women's wellbeing. Lockdown and an as-yet-unknown scale of economic recession have disrupted women's support networks, such as childcare, and made their livelihoods more precarious. This crisis will inevitably extend its reach across the next parliament.

Reaching our 2030 vision for a gender equal Scotland is not impossible, despite Covid-19. Deliberate and urgent action is required now. We call on Scotland's political parties to stop women's equality being set back and sign up to these ambitions to realise a more equal Scotland within this decade.

# WOMEN & COVID-19

This election is like no other we have seen in our lifetimes. Responding to the Covid-19 crisis and recovery is likely to be a defining mission of the next Government.

Covid-19 is not an equaliser. Instead, the disease and the measures implemented to respond to its impacts have entrenched and made deeper the inequalities that run through Scotland, affecting women, disabled people, Black and minority ethnic communities, rural populations, LGBT people and other groups in multitudes of intersecting ways.

For women, the effects of the pandemic for social, economic and political life are expansive. UN Women now estimates that gender equality could be set back 25 years because of the pandemic. We have set out our view that a failure to consider gendered impacts of crisis-response measures will have lasting consequences for women's incomes, safety, wellbeing, health and equality. Taking a gendered approach can mitigate the negative health, economic and social consequences of this pandemic for women.

The Scottish Government's established bodies tasked with examining long-term responses to the pandemic have

inconsistently considered women's equality. The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery was not gendered, despite itself calling for recovery plans to be informed by gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data. For example, the group recommended that there was a need to review the structure, funding and regulation of the care sector to ensure its sustainability and quality going forward, including workforce issues. Because women are more both more likely to be employed in the sector and to rely on social care as recipients of care, any changes will have significant impacts for women's equality and lives. However, the recommendations of the group are missing the gender analysis that would ensure that women's economic and social equality are a key consideration of such reforms.

The Social Renewal Advisory Board's report "If Not Now, When?" makes a number of recommendations on issues of importance to women's rights and equality, including a need for action on pay and incomes, support for unpaid carers and human rights incorporation. While we need to do more and pay more attention to women's lives, we must not also avoid taking action on commitments made already, including those from the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls.

We do not know the depth and duration of a recession; we do not know whether there will be further disruption to attendance at schools and workplaces. We cannot ignore these unknowns, however. The data shows that women were busier than ever during lockdown with additional care, schooling and domestic work, while conversations about 'reopening the economy' failed to take into account the ways in which women's unpaid work props up its functioning. We have seen decision-making that has ignored this reality of women's lives, leading to policy incoherence that threatens women's wellbeing, safety and incomes.

We have estimated that the impact of mothers' lost earnings or productivity during the first lockdown equated to £15,082,320 per day in Scotland as women were working part time or leaving paid work altogether to care for their children. These estimates are informative but also show that a gendered data analysis is lacking within the existing recovery planning.

At the same time, we cannot allow uncertainty to stall or prevent actions that are fundamental to achieving women's equality with men.

The immediate responses to Covid-19 and the long-term reforms it requires of Scotland's economy and public services must centre the evidence and experiences of women. We must learn the lessons from the crisis so that recovery means better outcomes for women and so that women are not forgotten in future crises.

**ONE**

**A SOCIETY  
THAT VALUES  
AND REWARDS  
THOSE WHO  
CARE FOR US**

Care is as vital to the functioning of our economy as roads and bridges, and yet our economic strategy fails to recognise investment in care and childcare as infrastructure enabling women to take on paid work. This ensures that women remain in lower paid and part-time work and prevents many women from seeking promotion or taking up spaces in public life. Investing in care and childcare can therefore further our economic recovery.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic many of the consequences of a lack of flexible and wraparound childcare have been even more visible to many. Single parents, over 95% of whom are women, are facing almost insurmountable challenges as lockdown measures combine with unsustainable, low paid work and the dearth of flexible childcare to push families deeper into poverty.

Scotland has some of the most expensive childcare in the world and there is a lack of consistency in available places. The pause to the delivery of 1140 hours of funded childcare last March in light of Covid-19 has exacerbated this regional inequity and it is already the case that the funded entitlement is often insufficiently flexible to offer wraparound care that is compatible with women's jobs or full-time work.

It is clear that the delay to the rollout of 1140 hours of childcare is compounding the pressure on women's labour market access but also that even more is needed to enable women to access better jobs, pay and conditions.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Expand funded childcare to 50 hours of universal, flexible, culturally competent childcare per week.
- Pilot targeted support for lone parents subject to conditionality in the 'welfare' system increasing their access to flexible, wraparound childcare.
- Develop a national campaign targeted at fathers to encourage equal distribution of childcare, building on proposals for use-it-or-lose-it paid paternity leave.
- Invest in an early-years workforce with appropriate CPD and wages set at (at least) real living wage as part of a commitment to invest in care infrastructure, as recommended by the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery.

Scotland's social care sector is facing unprecedented levels of challenge from multiple directions. Decades of underfunding and understaffing are now leading to a service unprepared for not only existing demand, but problems including the aging population and the unknown Brexit impacts on staffing availability. The Covid-19 period has seen cases of reductions to social care packages as the service has offset increased demand and staff shortages onto unpaid carers, creating crisis for the rights of disabled people and carers. Vital support - from income to PPE supplies - has been lacking.

As a result, the number of unpaid carers in Scotland is increasing and nearly 80% have reported that their care work has intensified since the coronavirus outbreak. Disabled women have had to rely on neighbours, relatives, or simply go without support.

All too often it appears that choice and control are diminished by practical considerations focused on utilising limited resources. The values at the heart of self-directed support are not being realised because of severe pressures throughout the system.

The long-term sustainability of the sector can no longer be ignored. Social care policy and practice in Scotland are heavily gendered. Women account for a majority of service users, represent the vast majority of social care workers and the majority of unpaid carers, especially those on low incomes who are also in paid work, have multiple or 'sandwich' caring roles, and/or care for over 35 hours per week. As women have less access to resources and are overrepresented in low paid employment and among social security claimants, there are gendered inequalities in connecting care with income. Understanding women's needs and experiences of particular groups such as older women, Black and minority ethnic women, disabled women, LBT women, women with insecure immigration status, and those in rural areas must be integral, but have thus far not been central to system reviews.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Increase support for unpaid carers including financial and wellbeing support that properly values care, such as access to breaks in care, social security and employability support.
- Address low pay and working conditions in the social care sector through public sector wage setting powers, explore a £15 an hour minimum wage for social care workers and proactively address the undervaluation of care as 'women's work' which props up our economy.
- Ensure unpaid carers have dedicated access to decision-making processes and establish an independent social care tribunal to protect the rights of carers and those to whom they provide care.



# TWO

AN ECONOMY  
THAT WORKS  
FOR WOMEN  
AS WELL AS IT  
DOES FOR MEN

Scotland's economic model is reliant on women's unpaid and underpaid care work for its very functioning just as much as it relies on physical infrastructure such as transport networks. However unpaid care, like other forms of reproductive labour, is rarely (if ever) recorded in national accounting systems, despite being worth an estimated £1.1 trillion, or around 56% of GDP, in imputed economic value. This undervaluation is not an accident, but is caused by and maintains women's inequality, poverty and poorer wellbeing, and contributes to the invisibility of women's skills and emotional labour.

Scotland's commitment to inclusive growth has been operationalised by different agencies and governments in different ways but has not led to a focus on gender inequality. A focus on paid employment ensures that women's work is often excluded, uncounted and unrecognised. It distorts investment away from sectors dominated by women such as health, hospitality and care, and ensures the maintenance of gendered economic outcomes that benefit men.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Support the Scottish National Investment Bank to invest in women-led businesses and projects which can be shown to have measurable net benefit for women's jobs, equality and living standards.
  - Require all public sector agencies working on economic development to develop gendered indicators and maintain a gender equality strategy.
  - Integrate intersectional Gender Budget Analysis into the Scottish Budget process, and to give this a statutory footing.
  - Fund pilots for Minimum Income Guarantee schemes with mandatory assessment of impacts for women's poverty, labour market inequality, safety and access to resources and paid work and which include an individual payment appropriate for individual need.
  - Measure the economic value of unpaid work and include its value in national accounting frameworks.
- Develop a Commission on Gender and Economic Development with a focus on combining gender and place-based economic development, such as community wealth building.

# THREE

A SCOTLAND THAT  
ERADICATES MEN'S  
VIOLENCE AGAINST  
WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women is a human rights violation and a cause and consequence of women's inequality. At least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime and an average of three rapes is reported per day, yet even this shocking figure masks the true extent of sexual violence due to underreporting.

Harassment permeates almost every aspect of the lives of women and girls, constraining choices and the ways we think about ourselves throughout our life courses, from childhood to old age. The ubiquitous nature of harassment and violence includes physical and online spaces, public and private, education settings and workplaces.

Sexual harassment and misogynistic hate speech re-create women's subordination and communicates to women and girls that they do not have equal access and rights to safety, public space, and physical autonomy through unwanted touching, defamation and disruption to women's professional lives and girls' education, and sexually objectifying concepts and materials.

Violence against women prevents women and girls from living a good life, by inflecting our daily reality. Where to go, what to do, whether to speak in class, and what to work as are all decisions that are constrained by the threat and reality of men's harassment. A constraint on women and girls' freedom on this scale demands a credible and appropriate criminal justice response.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Support the work of a Misogyny Working Group to explore targeted and novel responses to gaps in the law around violence against women.
- Explore national guidance (including the PSED review and Scottish specific duties) on responding to sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Work with violence against women organisations to address gendered digital abuse.
- Implement the recommendations from the Lord Justice Clerk's review on Improving the management of sexual offence cases.

Effective and consistent service responses are crucial to keep women, children and young people (WCYP) experiencing violence and abuse safe across Scotland. To continue to see the principles of Equally Safe implemented in the everyday practice of the Scottish workforce, training and workforce development approaches must highlight the need to eliminate the systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Currently there are no nationally agreed requirements or guidance for the level or quality of VAWG training staff receive, the national picture is inconsistent and not all training adopts an Equally Safe-aligned, gendered analysis of VAWG.

Collectively, we need to continue to equip and invest in our workforce to meet the needs of WCYP. We need to embed and strengthen knowledge, skills and practice at all levels in gender and why a gendered approach is crucial in understanding VAWG as both a cause and consequence of women's inequality.

## **WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:**

- Protect funding for women's organisations and support services, including ring-fenced funding to resource VAW advice and support services.
- Support development of an Equally Safe framework to strengthen the knowledge, skills and practice of the Scottish workforce.
- Support local and national commitments that prioritise workforce development to strengthen local practice.
- Commit resources for local specialist agencies to develop and deliver programmes of training that are accessible and will lead to greater consistency in practice across Scotland.

**FOUR**

**A SCOTLAND THAT  
GUARANTEES  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or 'women's bill of rights' is the UN's human rights treaty devoted to women. It spells out in detail women's human right to equality and non-discrimination, which states that have ratified it must then act to realise. CEDAW contains 30 articles, which include minimum standards for women's rights in work, politics, marriage, education, the economy, and other areas.

While the UK ratified CEDAW in 1986, the rights it contains are not currently incorporated into Scots Law or domestic law in other parts of the UK, which means women's ability to challenge abuse of their rights under CEDAW is significantly limited. They cannot take a case to Scottish courts on the basis of a breach of their rights.

While the Scottish Government has committed to incorporating international human rights, including CEDAW but also other vital rights for women such as those in ICESCR, CERD and CRDP, this has not yet materialised into firm commitments on extent or timescales.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Set out a firm commitment, including timescales, for the incorporation of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into Scots Law as part of a comprehensive programme of incorporation of international human rights.
- Press the UK Government to complete the process for ratification of the Istanbul Convention.
- Create a Commissioner tasked specifically with promotion and protection of Women's Rights, leading work to ensure women's international human rights are realised in Scotland.

**FIVE**

**THE HIGHEST  
STANDARD  
OF WOMEN'S  
HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING**



When it comes to their healthcare, women consistently raise their experiences of being not listened to, taken seriously or actively involved in treatment planning or prescription choices. They wait longer for pain medication than men, wait longer to be diagnosed, are more likely to have their physical symptoms ascribed to mental health issues, are more likely to have their heart disease misdiagnosed or to become disabled after a stroke, and are more likely to suffer illnesses ignored or denied by the medical profession. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety than men, and once that diagnosis is present - or even assumed - research shows that women have an even harder time being taken seriously by a healthcare professional.

In terms of individual decisions and patient care, there is a need to integrate an awareness of the wide variety of factors that influence women's health into training and guidance. These include education, media, violence against women, social security, caring responsibilities and childcare.

There is a clear need to ensure that sex and gender differences in health and healthcare are understood, not only in 'women's health', and that any analysis of social determinants of health differences is intersectional.

The Women's Health Plan represents a starting point, but must be expanded upon in the next parliament.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Expand the Women's Health Plan beyond the existing areas of focus, with new streams considering LBT and disabled women's specific sexual health needs, the impact of racism and structural inequality, chronic pain, mental health and chronic conditions including emerging evidence around 'Long-Covid', including working with the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity.
- Support the development of a new Scottish Institute for Women's Health to drive changes to policy, guidance and medical training on the basis of sex and gender medicine as well as provide funding to dedicated research into women's health.
- Ensure that the Covid-19 inquiry includes an expert-led review of maternity services and sexual health services.

Covid-19 has provoked extensive discussions about the impacts of the national response on collective mental health and wellbeing; conversations that are likely to continue until public health measures are no longer necessary. Women and men experience mental health differently; more women experience anxiety disorders, and depression in women is significantly higher among those with caring responsibilities. Both conditions are likely to be exacerbated by uncertainty, fear and long periods of isolation.

As a significant majority of frontline workers, women providing care in home and clinical settings seem highly likely to be exposed to extended trauma, with consequential depression and lower levels of wellbeing during and after the crisis. Carers tell Engender consistently that they feel under intense pressure as a result of the challenges of caring in conditions where they have limited practical support, an inadequacy of information, a lack of clarity about how national and local processes are supposed to work to ensure access to food and other necessities, and the loneliness of having to shield to protect their loved ones.

## **WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:**

- Refresh the National Mental Health Strategy with specific consideration of Covid-19 on mental health and including specific commitment to all women's mental health during the pandemic.

Women's reproductive and maternal health and rights must be recommitted to. 2020 has seen changes to sexual and reproductive care that were unimaginable less than a year ago, such as restrictions on having birthing partners present during labour and other appointments, or limited access to contraception because of restrictions in clinical appointments. Remote healthcare has its benefits too, expanding access and privacy to women whose ability to travel to sexual health clinics may be weaker, such as women who live in rural areas

and women on low incomes. For victim-survivors of domestic abuse, choice in models of access to reproductive care can be a safety concern.

Inequalities in access to reproductive health and choice are not an invention of Covid-19. Black women are five times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts. Women in rural Scotland or those who require later abortion still must travel for vital abortion care or to access a full range of contraception options. Young women still too frequently report judgement and stigma around their choice of contraception. Disabled women's reproductive rights remain almost entirely missing from health policy and guidance.

## **WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:**

- Decriminalise abortion and develop progressive abortion laws and policies which enable women to access care when they need it without stigma, harassment, coercion or intimidation, including improved access to Early Medical Abortion at Home.
- Develop a national framework to standardise access to abortion services, ending the requirements on women to travel long distances for abortion care.
- Create a Ministerial Working Group to lead improvements to ensure disabled women's access to vital healthcare and reproductive rights.

# SIX

A SCOTLAND  
WHERE WOMEN  
HAVE EQUAL  
ACCESS TO  
DECISION  
MAKING

Women's historic exclusion from political life and decision-making processes have left a long shadow, with women accounting for just 35% of MSPs and 29% of Scottish MPs. While Scotland was once ranked fourth in international rankings of women's representation it has now dropped to 20th place. Women's access to power remains lesser across almost all sectors. Of 3115 positions of power in Scotland across our political institutions, public sector, media and cultural bodies, and corporate world, women hold just 996 of these positions - less than a third of the total.

There is significant evidence that gender and other equality focuses are impeded by a lack of participation and representation. Women need to be around the table as decisions are made about the post-Covid economic and social recovery, but unpaid care responsibilities remain a huge barrier to participation in public life, media and politics. Women are less able to be involved in important decisions about how gendered concerns should be integrated into short and medium run planning while they are having to undertake increased levels of childcare and other domestic work.

Making substantive progress towards gender equality will continue to require political commitment and dedicated strategy and resources. Gender mainstreaming is a global strategy to this end, which proactively embeds gender

analysis in all policy and legislative development and elevates gender concerns within the policy hierarchy. However, over 25 years since the Beijing Programme for Action recommended it, analysis of gender mainstreaming in practice reveals mixed and largely disappointing results. These include a startling lack of intersectional models that take account of the discrimination women face as a result of race, disability and other inequalities.

In Scotland, the public sector equality duty (PSED) is one such tool that, in its entirety, is intended to drive gender mainstreaming in public policy. Analysis from Engender along with the women's sector and wider equalities sector concludes that PSED has resulted in a diluted focus on the specific needs of women and those of other groups in favour of a homogenised approach to tackling inequality that fails to address specific needs.

Improving the quality of gender mainstreaming and policy coherence will require robust and properly resourced mainstreaming strategies, increased accountability and stronger institutional mechanisms to enforce and enable the consideration of gender across the public sector. Scotland has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in representational and cultural gender equality by supporting initiatives widening participation in decision-making across political, media, business and creative sectors.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Advocate for the devolution of equality law to the Scottish Parliament, including the power to set quotas for elected office, and create a new Scottish equality regulator.
- Create a dedicated Cabinet Minister solely responsible for equality, including a cross-functional leadership role on women and girls.
- Undertake the long-promised review of PSED and establish a clearly specified process that enables public bodies to fulfil their legal obligations towards equality.
- Develop a strategy to get more women from diverse backgrounds into public life at national and local levels through an intersectional approach and push the UK Government to enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 to require political parties to publish diversity data on candidates standing in elections.
- Require all public bodies to update their communication policies in line with ASA guidelines to eradicate the use of gender stereotypes likely to cause financial, physical or emotional harm.

# SEVEN

A SCOTLAND  
WHERE WOMEN  
HAVE EQUAL USE  
OF PUBLIC SPACE

Women experience and navigate public space very differently to men. Women's lives dictate their patterns of movement. Employment opportunities, especially those that are well-paid, tend to be distant from residential areas as well as the services and amenities that women need for caring and household management roles. This limits women's access to the labour market and contributes to time poverty for those juggling paid and unpaid work.

The needs of women are currently marginalised in planning of the built environment and development of the public realm. This leads to decisions which create poorly lit spaces, a key safety issue for women, and inaccessible streets and public buildings.

Understanding the ways women navigate public spaces is a vital component of a planning system which takes gendered patterns and realities into account. Decisions about land-use projects such as office, retail and housing developments, health and childcare facilities, parks and entertainment venues must consider the impact of location, cost and facilities on women's social, cultural and economic equality. Yet existing planning policy and guidance is wholly gender-blind, and there remains a gender gap in women employed in the built environment sector. While women are often at the heart of community or regeneration initiatives to improve their built environments, their own concerns are absent from statutory planning.

The next National Planning Framework must include a statement on advancing equality and non-discrimination

through development at the national level. Actually embedding equality will require detailed guidance to be developed and delivery will be dependent on local planning officials and inclusion in local development plans.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Commit to the development of national guidance on women's equality in planning frameworks including guidance, planning policy and national, regional/city and local spatial plans.
- Support a pilot 'physical space safety audit' to gather data about women's experiences of navigating streets and public spaces, including accessibility, experiences of harassment and intimidation and violence.
- Develop gendered policy regarding transport routes, timetabling, safety, service standards and pricing.

Women experience housing very differently to men, including their pathways into and out of homelessness and their interactions with housing services, their access to adequate standards of living and the private market – and recent literature shows a multitude of ways in which gender can shape, define and influence the experience of housing instability. Women are also more likely to be reliant on social security to cover housing costs, and pay a greater share of their incomes on rent than men.

Certain groups of women are more likely to experience housing instability, poor housing, homelessness or negative treatment by housing services, such as BME, disabled and refugee women, women who have been in the criminal justice system, LBT (particularly transgender) women, older and younger women, women who sell sex, lone parents and women with other caring responsibilities.

These issues are poorly studied and understood. However, a growing body of analysis is addressing women's 'invisibility' in housing policy and women's 'hidden' homelessness. Overall, UK-focused literature suggests that women's housing situation is generally less good than that of men, that they are more likely to have housing affordability problems, and that their specific needs are neither well understood nor appropriately met.

Women's access to safe and adequate housing is particularly impacted by women's economic inequality and by men's violence against women. In Scotland, domestic abuse has risen from the fourth to the third most common reason given for a homeless application, and is the main reason given for women applicants. However, these figures are still likely to significantly underestimate the scale of the problem. Women may not disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse when making a homeless application, or may not present to services as homeless at all.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Develop housing and homelessness systems that work for women.
- Incorporate all elements of the right to housing into Scots Law.
- Expand protections for women who rent, including action to ensure that rents are affordable and consider the impacts of women's lower earnings for their access to quality housing, including a gendered review of existing rent control mechanisms and living rent approaches to housing policy.
- Protect access to services and public utilities including leisure facilities which were cut during austerity and have now experienced disruption due to Covid-19.

Digital access is a gendered issue, with women comprising around 58% of internet non-users in the UK. Women face myriad barriers to digital access, including possessing fewer digital skills and less digital confidence than men and being more likely to have insufficient resources to afford digital equipment. Where women and girls do have digital access, experiences of online misogynistic harassment and abuse severely impact freedom to make full and equal use of online spaces.



Covid-19 has demonstrated the importance of internet access for participation in education, work and leisure and many of the changes we have seen are likely to be irreversible. Equal access to reliable, quality and affordable digital access can no longer be seen as a luxury. Living in poverty is strongly correlated with possessing few or no digital skills, and makes it much more difficult to afford IT equipment and resources like mobile phones, laptops and broadband, especially when devices are needed by multiple household members throughout the day. Domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are very likely to affect women's digital access, with technology increasingly used to facilitate stalking and other forms of abuse and privacy may not be guaranteed when a perpetrator can gain access to women's devices.

Women are less likely to possess digital skills than men, and this gap is particularly wide amongst older people. Gendered norms around technology and digital skills play a role in early subject choice, generally funnelling men and boys into higher-paid sectors that are prioritised for investment, such as ICT. These gendered norms contribute to occupational segregation and the gender pay gap, whilst simultaneously leaving women and girls under-prepared for increasing reliance on digital products in all areas of life.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Work with the UK Government to secure protection for women online through the Online Harms Bill.
- Ensure a Government Digital Strategy that is gender competent, and responsive to women's distinct needs, and explicitly linked with Equally Safe and the gender pay gap action plan.
- Commit to investing only in technologies that demonstrate a commitment to promoting the equality and rights of women and marginalised groups.

# EIGHT

**A SOCIAL SECURITY  
SYSTEM THAT  
ENSURES THE  
DIGNITY AND  
SECURITY OF  
WOMEN**

The UK 'welfare' system consistently fails women in a number of ways, working instead to maintain and exacerbate women's economic and social inequality. As the UK enters into an inevitable recession amid its Covid-19 response, women's financial security is even more at risk than ever before. Even before the current crisis, a decade of austerity has seen 86% of cuts to tax and spend come from women's incomes and women are twice as likely to rely on social security than men. The answer to the current crisis can never be 'austerity 2.0'.

Women juggling increased care and childcare responsibilities - especially lone parents - and those working in women-dominated sectors such as retail and hospitality are at serious risk of falling out of the labour market. Many will be exposed for the first time to the 'welfare system'. The UK 'welfare system' is not fit to meet their needs; the two-child limit pushing women further into poverty and denying them an appropriate level of income to preserve their and their children's safety and dignity and presenting serious abuse of their rights such as the 'rape clause'.

Universal Credit itself presents an abuse of women's rights by mandating a single payment which divorces the payment from individual needs, denies women an equal right to an independent income and acts as an enabler of domestic abuse. The five-week wait exacerbates this risk of poverty and can make it even harder to leave an abusive partner.

While Parliament and the current Scottish Government have committed to introducing single payments of Universal Credit

within the parameters of the devolved Scottish choices, action to implement has been slow and further delayed by increased demands on the system. With more women than ever relying on Universal Credit, they should not be required to wait any longer without access to vital sources of income.

The new Scottish Child Payment will offer much welcome security at this moment of hardship. However, in its current form the payment replicates many of these problems because it is attached to Universal Credit and other legacy benefits. As a result, families may fall in and out of eligibility if their income from paid work fluctuates or they separate and need to make a new Universal Credit claim. Because eligibility is so closely connected to the household's income, it is impossible to target women and primary caregivers.

## WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:

- Commit to delivering individual payments of Universal Credit within the first two years of the next parliament.
- Review and commit the Scottish Child Payment to primary legislation within the next parliament to ensure it is better targeted to women's needs.
- Use powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament to create new entitlements for women that have experienced domestic abuse which reduce their exposure to poverty and insecurity when leaving an abusive partner.

- Support families and local childcare providers to manage Universal Credit childcare cost approach.

Unpaid carers have been at the sharp end of the pandemic response, picking up additional care where social care providers have been unable to respond. Survey data published for Carers Week 2020 suggests that there are now as many as 1.1 million unpaid carers in Scotland, of which 61% are women. This is an increase of 392,000 since the start of the crisis, with 78% of carers having to provide more care than they were prior to the coronavirus outbreak.

Women are more likely to provide unpaid care than men, are four times as likely to give up paid work due to multiple caring responsibilities, and are more likely to be in low-paid part-time employment than male carers. More than 2.5 times as many women are eligible to receive carers allowance than men. This unequal distribution has major impacts on women's access to work, career progression, training and learning, as well as on their physical and mental health.

## **WE ARE THEREFORE CALLING ON PARTIES TO:**

- In the short term, bring forward proposals for Carer's Assistance within the first year of the next Parliament which is sufficient to meet additional needs identified during the Covid-19 pandemic and expand access to support.

- Develop new forms of support for carers that are fully flexible, can be combined with paid work, education or training and which are paid at (at least) the level of the real living wage to recognise unpaid care as work.

**ENGENDER**

**10 OLD TOLBOOTH WYND**

**EDINBURGH**

**EH8 8EQ**

**+44 (0) 131 558 9596**

**INFO@ENGENDER.ORG.UK**

**WWW.ENGENDER.ORG.UK**

**TWITTER: @ENGENDERSCOT**

**FACEBOOK: /ENGENDER**

**APRIL 2021**