

[00:00:20.970] - Alys Mumford

Hello and welcome to On the Engender, The Briefing, I'm Alys Mumford, and I'm delighted to be bringing you season three of Scotland's feminist policy podcast, along with my co-host, Amanda Stanley. Hello.

[00:00:31.350] - Amanda Stanley

Yes, it's so great to be back recording. I hope you'll have the chance to listen to our wrap-up episode looking back at 2020 today for our first "official" episode of the year, we're going to be looking at some policy news you may have missed over the winter break, as well as taking a look forward to some things coming up for feminists in Scotland.

[00:00:48.630] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely, and this year, while we'll still be offering you longer, deep dives into particular bits of policy on the podcast, we're going to be continuing with a shorter briefing episodes more regularly to bring you the latest news on feminist policy. So if there's anything you want us to cover, something you're not sure about or that you think isn't being talked about elsewhere, please do get in contact with us via our website or socials.

[00:01:09.840] - Amanda Stanley

And for today's episode, we are joined by Engender's Policy and Parliamentary Manager Eilidh Dickson. Hello, Eilidh.

[00:01:16.560] - Eilidh Dickson

Hi.

[00:01:17.490] - Amanda Stanley

As ever, we're going to kick off this podcast before we get into stuff, with something good, which we were trying to think of just before we began recording, and however you may interpret that Eilidh, what is something positive that's happened recently for you?

[00:01:31.740] - Eilidh Dickson

So I'm looking forward to the weekend because it's going to be longer. It's my friend's birthday, so we have one of these dinner in-a-box things coming and will have a party over Zoom. And then on Sunday, I'm celebrating Valentine's Day with an IKEA order we've been waiting about six months for, so I'll finally have all the storage. [laughter]

[00:01:51.760] - Alys Mumford

That is so romantic

[00:01:52.860] - Eilidh Dickson

isn't it?

[00:01:54.240] - Amanda Stanley

Do you have things to build?

[00:01:56.010] - Eilidh Dickson

Yeah, so a whole day of IKEA flat-pack furniture

[00:02:00.750] - Alys Mumford

Wow.

[00:02:00.930] - Eilidh Dickson

The dream

[00:02:01.590] - Amanda Stanley

Building a stronger relationship [laughter]. Alys what about you?

[00:02:11.880] - Alys Mumford

Good thing...We had a meeting last week Engender with the sort of comms -communications - people from all the other women, national women's organisations in Scotland, and it's always just a really lovely chance to hear what other organisations are up to and there's just loads of exciting stuff coming up for women's organisations this year. We've got International Women's Day in March. Lots of folk will be doing things around that, but lots of other exciting things planned as well, some of which we'll be telling you about in coming weeks as we have colleagues from other organisations on. So, yeah, that was very cheering. There's loads of cool feminist activism coming up over the next few months. How about you, Amanda?

[00:02:51.240] - Amanda Stanley

Well, you know what I'm going to say? I'm going to say sports, Alys.

[00:02:55.980] - Alys Mumford

I am shook.

[00:02:58.890] - Amanda Stanley

For Christmas Alys sent me in the post a little embroidered sports badge. I guess like sewe-non patch. I've not put it anywhere yet, but that is one lovely thing that I received. But also I was going to say yesterday was the Super Bowl and Sarah Thomas became the first women to officiate a Super Bowl last night. So I thought, although sometimes when it's like celebrating these firsts, it feels like a bit redundant, but also I thought that was some positive news.

[00:03:23.640] - Alys Mumford

That is positive!

[00:03:24.060] - Amanda Stanley

Thank you.

[00:03:25.230] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely. Amazing, lovely. So we're going to go from those lovely positive things to some maybe-not-so-positive things. We're recording this on the 8th of February, so just last week, we heard that the lockdown in Scotland is going to continue at least until the end of the month, although there is a phased return to school for young people planned. But obviously things still tough for a lot of folk. Eilidh obviously, lots of the podcast in 2020 talked about how the response to Covid needs to be gendered. Now, in 2021, we're still in 'Covid world', Is there any indication that this is happening?

[00:04:01.890] - Eilidh Dickson

So I think there's a bit of a mixed picture, but on the whole, we definitely aren't seeing enough consideration of women and gender equality. Just thinking back to when we first all started thinking about Covid and what it would mean for women's equality, we were highlighting things at Engender, we were highlighting concerns about frontline workers, for example, who are mostly women. Ill-fitting PPE the impact, obviously, as you've mentioned, of school closures and women's labour market access. And so many of these issues have, I think, received wider appreciation since March, but actually very little action. I was reflecting that, for example, when furlough was introduced back in March/April time, it very clearly, temporarily at least, stabilised the labour market. But it wasn't designed for parents who were unable to work from home, at their paid work, and provide childcare and home-schooling. And it took the UK Government several weeks to clarify that employers could use furlough where employees weren't able to do their paid work because of childcare reasons.

[00:04:58.380]

But then the data even now, is showing that 70 percent of working mothers who asked to be furloughed for childcare reasons since the schools were shut have been refused. And as this crisis has gone on I think we've seen plenty of examples like that. Other things, social care provision, lack of support for unpaid carers or the lack of appropriate PPE in care homes, school closures and reopening, court restrictions, restrictions on women's health care such as screening and maternity care, all of which were decisions that significantly affected women, the decisions are being made and

the solutions to problems arise because of the gendered impact have to be tagged on unsatisfactorily afterwards.

[00:05:37.650]

So we've also noted that equality impact assessments, especially when we're looking at kind of critical decisions around the first lockdown and then the reopening last summer, which was all moving very, very quickly the equality impacts themselves were delayed quite frequently until after decisions have been made or provided a very cursory consideration of women and other protected characteristics. And it's, I think it's fair to say we still have a long way to go with Covid. The sectors that women work in are the ones that have been most affected by social distancing. And we still don't really know what will happen when furlough eventually ends or how women's labour market access will be impacted in the medium to long term. I saw recently that UN Women was estimating just before Christmas that the Covid-19 pandemic could set women's equality back by twenty five years globally.

[00:06:20.730] - Alys Mumford
Cool [sarcastic]

[00:06:23.790]

[laughter] There were also real reasons to be concerned about what's being increasingly termed 'long-Covid' because the figures are suggesting that women could be twice, even more than twice as likely to have long-lasting symptoms than men. And so what's that going to mean for women's health and their incomes even once we get through the lockdown? And so while focus has been on vaccine rollout in recent weeks, we also need to be expanding access to other support. But I also think it's fair that we had to say that we have witnessed some high level commitments to women's equality and rights, even if that's not being followed through in some of the detail. And I think that's particularly true around recovery work that's been taking place over the last few months. So recently, the Social Renewal Advisory Board published a report which includes some significant calls to action as we, kind of, think into the next few months and years, things like moving towards a minimum income guarantee, extension of free early learning, childcare and social care, action on public sexual harassment and the incorporation of human rights, including CEDAW, so the picture is more negative than positive. [Laughter] But there have been kind of [unclear] of recognition about the big things we need to tackle coming out of this crisis.

[00:07:37.650] - Alys Mumford

Sure. And that is encouraging to hear. And listeners can access Engender's Gender Edit of the budget as well, which cover some of those things that Eilidh mentioned there. Thank you as well, Eilidh for bringing EQIA into the podcast after only six minutes. I think that might be a 2021 achievement. So I think that's really interesting looking at the sort of long term impact, both looking at long-Covid, but also looking at how we move forward as a as a country, economic recovery, these sorts of things, because I certainly get the impression that there has been more focus on some of these issues, but then they have faded back into the background again as it as it becomes: "well, you know" so you mentioned like maternity health care. So, you know, "yes systems have sort of been changed. Now, partners are allowed often into the delivery suite. Those things have changed." But we're still seeing new parents not getting the regular home visits, you know, not getting all these things. And I think there's - obviously which affects women more than men in terms of numbers of parents in Scotland - and I think there's still that sense of 'we sort of shouldn't be complaining', you know, that that idea that both on a personal level and when we're looking at these big issues, just like, look, we just need to get this stuff done and it's like, yes, we need to get this stuff done but recognising the gendered impact of that. So it is good to hear that some of those sort of chunkier longer term bits of policy are beginning to think about about women, maybe a little bit?

[00:09:06.510] - Eilidh Dickson

I think maybe I think it's fair to say they give us some space to to bring women into the conversation.

[00:09:12.960] - Alys Mumford

Mm hmm. That's a nice way of looking at it. [laughter] And as we've seen, the new restrictions, sort of

restrictions come back and lots of these issues not going away for people say people who have lost jobs or had reduced hours, people who are suffering from health care conditions, we we continue to get submissions to WomenCovidScot on Twitter and on our website. Please do submit - we want to gather the experiences of women in Scotland, how they're finding Covid. So do please submit to that and also have a look through some of the submissions, because it does cover lots of the things that you've talked about there Eilidh around. Many people now feeling that they are..leaving their jobs is the only option, with child care. Many people struggling with the stress, the additional stress and strain of Covid and caring. So do take a look at look at those, although take care of yourself as you do so. And also, please let us know how you are finding Covid, because all of that experience helps make the case often to policymakers about the stuff we all know is true, about how women are impacted. But it does help to put a story behind it as well.

[00:10:24.220] - Amanda Stanley

I'm just going to add to that, that when we were doing our sort of first Covid piece of policy work and at that point it was pretty speculative. Back in March, just before lockdown I think so the twenty third of March, some of the research we were looking at showed that failure to consider women's needs within the pandemic response had long lasting consequences and was directly connected to a lack of women in decision-making roles. And that need for - when things are moving really quickly and rapidly- it's not kind of good enough to leave the equalities considerations to the end or to assume that it can be picked up in the sort of longer term pieces. When you kind of compare the first lockdown to last year to to the one we're currently in, I'm not sure that there's been a significant amount of change - all the things that were problems with childcare, there's been some tweaks, but I'm not sure that the the sort of emergency crisis planning has necessarily done the work here.

[00:11:27.040] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:11:29.020] - Amanda Stanley

And I mean, obviously, Covid has taken up a lot of our time at Engender, but there's also been a few other bits of policy work that's been going on. Eilidh, could you talk to us a wee bit about the abortion consultation that Engender has been working on?

[00:11:42.970] - Eilidh Dickson

Sure. So Engender with the support of BPAS, Amnesty International, and Abortion Rights Campaign Scotland, just before Christmas, we created a template consultation asking members of the public to use it to help them to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on maintaining the, currently temporary, permission to have an early medical abortion at home. The Scottish Government was consulting on whether it should keep the rules they brought in last spring to ensure that women could have an early medical abortion at home, didn't need to come into clinics and could instead have an appointment over phone or video call and then be posted out both pills needed for a medical abortion, to take place in the safety of their own home. Women who are unsure of their gestation date or who would prefer to be seen in-person or who have other health concerns have still always been able to go in and be seen in-person. But it's created more choice and it's allowed for clinics, I think, to reorientate themselves to operate safely during the crisis. And we think it's vitally important to keep this service once we come through the other side of the pandemic, whenever that is because the pre Covid rules required women to attend clinic or hospital and sometimes for women in rural and island communities, requiring them to travel considerable distances, sometimes for more than one appointment. And telemedicine instead provides them with a safe, effective and accessible abortion care option and increases the choices that they have available to them and their specific needs. So for women who need additional privacy or for whom attending a long appointment in a clinic would be noticed or really difficult because of childcare, and so removing that option would mean a reduction in those options available for women. And it also means that telemedical abortion has meant that women can access abortion earlier, which reduces some of the risks to their health that are infrequent anyway, as well as increasing the availability of in-person appointments for people who need or want them. We, as I was saying at the start, we produced guidance on how to respond to the consultation. And we submitted our own response because we think it's important to signal that this is something that actually has worked well within the kind of crisis planning that we've had to put in

place around Covid. Providing more choice available to women in abortion care, but also creating some opportunity for clinics to meet women's individual needs in different ways.

[00:14:05.770] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely, and I'm sure lots of lots of listeners hopefully also filled out that consultation. And thank you to those who did. It was certainly talked about a lot on social media at the time, even though it was closing on the, what was it the 5th of January? A good Hogmanay break for folk filling out the government consultation. But yeah, lots of folk sharing their personal stories of how this makes a difference. And it does it does feel like it's one of the - obviously for people that advocate women's right to choose, it seems a little bit like a no brainer - but also lots of people expressing surprise that now we've figured out how to do this, how to make sure that we, women can access safe legal abortion at home, then roll it back, which just seems pretty nonsensical. And when will we find out the result of that consultation, Eilidh do we know?

[00:14:55.400] - Eilidh Dickson

No, we don't. I don't know that we could even put a date on it. [laughter]

[00:15:01.910] - Alys Mumford

But I just I guess just for listeners, like what happens after someone has put in a consultation response, what does the government then do?

[00:15:09.050] - Eilidh Dickson

So the government will now go away and analyze the consultation responses and they tend to do that within kind of three to five months and then sometimes a little bit earlier, but I think that's unlikely given Covid in the election. And they'll produce a kind of an analysis of what the responses said and some options for going forward.

[00:15:27.890] - Alys Mumford

Great. And obviously, we'll keep you updated when when when the government releases releases that information and those documents. Along with the other pro-choice work that's happening in Scotland, obviously, we're sending our solidarity to women in Poland at the minute with that very restrictive abortion law coming into force. And we'll do what we can to share information about that with folk when it comes through. So that's one example of the sort of policy work that happened in the over the winter break, which folk might not have heard about and you can find all of the information on our website, of course, including other submissions that we've put in on Social Security, on sexual harassment. fair rents, the digital economy, all of your other favourite feminist policy topics. So it really has been a pretty diverse range of things we've been talking about over the past couple of months. And one thing I'm keen just to talk briefly about on this, this episode of the podcast is the consultation response we've just submitted on Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council. Please forgive me, Eilidh, and all other policy lovers, but it sounds on the face of it a pretty dry subject. But as I was, I was reading our consultation response, in order to proofread it, and I find it totally fascinating, which is often the way with these areas of feminist policy. Eilidh can you just say briefly what the consultation was and why Engender responded to something which a lot of folk might not think is instinctively a sort of 'feminist' topic.

[00:16:52.670] - Eilidh Dickson

So this was a consultation for a private member's bill from the Labour MSP, Mark Griffin. A private member's bill for anyone who doesn't know, is a bill in this parliament that's drafted and introduced by an individual MSP rather than the Scottish government or a committee. This was what Monica Lennon's period poverty bill that passed last year was as well. So to introduce the bill, the MSP has to undertake a consultation on their proposal. And so that's what this response was. We responded because it cuts across several things that we work on: Social Security, Covid, health, aspects of women's inequality in the labour market, such as occupational segregation and sexual harassment, but also because Mark Griffin's research in developing his proposal had picked up on a really clear gender gap, we thought it was important to explore further. So the bill proposes to create a Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council, which would advise on new Social Security payments for people who have been disabled or who are unable to work because of workplace injury or illness. The

power to create these new entitlements was devolved in 2016 and forms part of the Social Security Scotland Act. But Scottish replacements haven't been created yet. So the consultation paper has gone through ten years of data and found that just thirteen and a half percent of UK industrial injuries disablement benefit, which is the payment that we would be looking to replace in Scotland at some point, were made to women and under the 'prescribed diseases' route, which is the payments that exclude accidents at work, but instead pay because of an illness that was contracted through workplace activity, just 6.8 percent of those were made to women. So first of all we looked a little bit at why that is, and we posited that the list of diseases was drafted when women were much less likely to undertake paid work, and focuses on the types of risk that occur in traditionally male-dominated sectors, like construction. But this list hasn't kept pace with the changing type of risks that we see in workplaces. And there's no body that's directing research into what workplace risks and hazards look like in other sectors, like social care, which is where a Scottish Advisory Council could have a role to play.

[00:19:00.720] - Eilidh Dickson

And the European Agency for Safety and Health at work is one body that has looked at some of the gender differences in accidents and illnesses at work. And they've highlighted things that were never really considered harms before, like injuries associated with repetitive work, chemical exposures to cleaning products, contact with infected linens, vocal problems from being on the phone a lot, the risk of experiencing violence from members of the public and emotional distress from the front line work that women do. And I think all of this is additionally really timely when we think about Covid-19, again, adding this additional layer of change to the workplaces that we've been living in. Seventy seven percent of workers in frontline high risk roles are women. So those are social care workers, cleaners, teachers, nurses, for example. And I already mentioned at the start that women are reporting long-Covid symptoms in much greater numbers than men. So I think it's a really important time to look at what we think of as risk and how employers have to take responsibility for that risk. For example, the kind of ill-fitting, ill-designed PPE that was available to women at the beginning of the crisis.

[00:20:12.330] - Alys Mumford

Like I say, I just I find it really fascinating. I think particularly that that 6.8% figure about diseases contracted in the course of work I think is so stark. Obviously, it's it's a really stark figure in itself. But it made me think about the way when we talked about homelessness last year, housing and homelessness, that there are certain things that we as a society tend to see as a sort of male-dominated problems. But actually, maybe the problem is the way that we define what those problems are, so we talk about rough sleeping and homeless and very visible sort of homelessness. Yet when we look at diseases, you know, when I hear employment injuries or tribunals, all those sorts of things, I think about miners inhaling coal dust. I think about construction accidents with heavy machinery because that's that's what has been spoken about. And, yeah, just even just thinking about those things like, you know, working in cleaning roles, in salons with these these chemicals and so breathing that in every day was just a very sort of eye-opening read. So thank you for doing that work, Eilidh, and to Mark Griffin for raising it and we'll obviously again share that on the website and keep you updated on where that goes.

[00:21:29.460] - Amanda Stanley

Most definitely. I think that's so interesting as well that you said in light of Covid and PPE and even just thinking back to the beginning of the pandemic with the death of Belly Mujinga to now seeing this happen, I think it would be really interesting to see how this does unfold for the future. As we kind of get towards the end of this episode, what's going to be coming up in terms of feminist policy stuff Eilidh in 2021?

[00:21:53.910] - Eilidh Dickson

So the big thing coming up for us is obviously the Scottish Parliament elections on the 6th of May, and so that's the main thing that I'm working on at the moment, and hopefully we'll have some things to announce and publish over the next few weeks. Just finalising things like manifesto asks that we would like parties to pick up and some activity around the election. We have a briefing for this week's debate on women, the economy and covid-19 that's happening at the Scottish Parliament on Thursday, which I think should be available on the website by the time this goes out. And we'll also be

focusing on some areas of work that we would expect to tie up around the election date, such as work on hate crime, women's health and some of the activity that's happening in Scotland around human rights.

[00:22:32.410] - Alys Mumford
So not much?

[00:22:35.130] - Eilidh Dickson
We're obviously still working on Covid, so we'll be looking back at some of the things that have happened and see what lessons we can learn from equality considerations or lack thereof in the public health response.

[00:22:47.700] - Alys Mumford
Amazing. Thanks, Eilidh. And of course, we'll be keeping listeners updated on all of this on the podcast. And as I've said, you can check out our website to find all of the documents mentioned, we'll put some links in the show notes as well.

[00:22:58.890] - Amanda Stanley
Yes. And so to close up, as always, we would like to finish in these dark times with a final recommendation from everyone - some further reading on one of the topics mentioned or an upcoming virtual event or perhaps just a thought for the day or something fun to share that you think listeners might enjoy. And who wants to start?

[00:23:21.200] - Alys Mumford
I'm going to go first because mine isn't any of those things, but it is a cracking recommendation, so I've been listening to the audiobook of Men Who Hate Women by Laura Bates who started the the Everyday Sexism Project, so obviously it's tied in, generally, to the idea of misogyny and feminism and smashing the patriarchy. And it is, it's a really, really great book, so she sort of spent a lot of time delving, God bless her heart, into 'incel' forums, men's rights activist groups on Facebook, looking at the rise of the alt-right. And this book is all about that. I'm listening to audiobooks and it's very stark because a lot of it is just verbatim reading out of things men have posted. So, around domestic terrorism, around all sorts of misogyny. So do do think carefully before listening, because it's a bit of a toughie, but it is really powerful work. So yep that's my recommendation.

[00:24:22.740] - Amanda Stanley
Great, Eilidh what about you?

[00:24:25.350] - Eilidh Dickson
I'm currently reading a book called Can't Even by Ann Helen Peterson, which I'm sort of actually following on from the industrial diseases work, I suppose, is an exploration of the changing nature of work, workplace cultures and precarity in the labour market, and the impact on millennial generation's health, well-being, incomes and their careers more generally. It is written from a US perspective, but I still am starting to think that it should be prescribed reading from anyone whose been in a workplace over the last 20 years because it's looking at law and culture and technology and economics and how all of these things have changed the very idea of work.

[00:25:02.200] - Alys Mumford
Nice. Amanda. I hope you have something slightly more irreverent for us, because those are both very...

[00:25:09.370] - Amanda Stanley
I had I had three things.

[00:25:11.190] - Alys Mumford
Wow.

[00:25:11.620]

One that was very quick was I was going to say, seeing as how you both mentioned books; I had an Audible subscription that I completely forgot about. So I had like eight tokens to use. So I just cancelled that, obviously, and spent them all. But one of the ones that I got, which I've read before as a physical book but I thought I'd get the audio book version of Rebecca Solnit's Hope In The Dark, just thought, it would be quite nice to revisit at this time of complete, em, yeah like...

[00:25:37.465] - Alys Mumford
[laughter] When you need some hope in the dark?

[00:25:42.430] - Amanda Stanley
When you need some hope in the dark, yeah. So Obviously the book traces the history of activism and social change over decades and decades and and how, you know, like, yeah, like the book title says alone - in the deepest darkness, there's, there can still be hope and kind of how things bounce back again. And so I thought I'd maybe start listening to this again just as I'm doing my morning walks or when I'm having a bath and stuff. And it's been really enjoyable. My other thing I was going to say was I made candles this weekend, and if you if you really want to kill half a day, get a candle making kit.

[00:26:16.190]
[laughter]

[00:26:16.190]
It really, it really does take the entire afternoon and then you've got to clean up lots of wax that you've spilt everywhere.

[00:26:24.490] - Alys Mumford
Oh that's the best part.

[00:26:25.630] - Amanda Stanley
Yeah, that's the kind of things I like to do. You know, like when I tie-dyed everything last year, I think I mentioned that on this, and then had to tidy up tie-dye all over the place. But then I guess, yeah, it's something that's maybe more, whilst you're watching your candles dry, maybe you could go on Twitter and watch Miley Cyrus running on a treadmill and screaming along to Bikini Kill's Rebel Girl just to, you know,

[00:26:46.960] - Alys Mumford
There we are, that's what I was hoping for.

[00:26:47.920] - Amanda Stanley
Yeah, thank you. I knew, I knew. It's not it's not even a cooking-related suggestion this week.

[00:26:54.970] - Alys Mumford
Branching out, I love it. Candles...beautiful.

[00:26:59.650] - Amanda Stanley
But yeah no the Miley Cyrus on a treadmill screaming along to Bikini Kill was very enjoyable to watch and made me feel extremely powerful and highlighted that I could never do such a thing.

[00:27:11.910] - Alys Mumford
Amazing, well we'll put it in the show notes! Great, that's us then. We'll close up here - you'll hear from us again in two weeks time. And in the meantime, thank you to my wonderful co-host, Amanda, thank you to our guest, Eilidh. And stay safe everyone.

[00:27:35.560] - Amanda Stanley
This episode of The Briefing was hosted by Alys Mumford and featured Engender's Policy and Parliamentary Manager Eilidh Dickson. The podcast was produced by myself, Amanda Stanley, on behalf of Engender, and the music featured was written and performed by Bossy Love. To find out more about the work of Engender head to Engender.scot or follow us on Twitter at [EngenderScot](https://twitter.com/EngenderScot). And

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