



Engender Parliamentary Briefing: An Implementation Plan for Economic Recovery

12 August 2020

BACKGROUND

1. About Engender

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to secure women's political, economic and social equality with men. Our aspiration is for a Scotland where women and men have equal access to rights, resources, decision-making and safety.

Over the past six months Engender has, alongside other women's organisations, sought to highlight the multitude of ways in which Covid-19 and our response to it will impact on women's lives, rights and equality with men. We are especially cognisant of the mounting evidence around women's rising economic inequality due to the pandemic and national and devolved response planning. In calling for an effective economic response, Engender launched our paper 'Gender and Economic Recovery' alongside gender and labour market experts Close the Gap, in which we set out nine principles for a gendered economic recovery which expand on Scotland's existing commitment to inclusive growth.¹ These principles have informed our advocacy around the economic recovery.

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. Women, the economy and Covid-19

The impacts of Covid-19 are being felt against the backdrop of an economy already experienced very differently by women and by men. For example, Scotland's gender pay

¹ Engender and Close the Gap (2020) Gender and Economic Recovery. Available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery---Engender-and-Close-the-Gap.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

gap remains 13.3%² and women are significantly over-represented in insecure, part-time or precarious work and more likely to rely on casualised jobs and zero-hours contracts.³

This crisis has the potential to be even more severe than 2008. Its worst impacts are already manifesting in **services, hospitality, retail, tourism and care sectors** that are dominated by women and dominated by Black and minority ethnic workers.⁴ Young women are also likely to be employed in these most at-risk sectors.⁵ Many women **working in childcare, domestic cleaning, and hospitality are likely to be self-employed**, as are increasing numbers of women in the social care workforce, and therefore have limited or no access to statutory sick pay and other employment rights.

On top of this, **77% of the 3,200,000 workers in "high risk" roles** in the management of the pandemic are women and yet over a million of these are paid below 60% of median UK weekly wages, and of these, 98% are women.⁶ Although these workers are essential to successful pandemic response, they are undervalued, underpaid, and under-protected.⁷

Engender has also drawn attention to the impacts of women's unpaid care work and the risks that disruption to women's labour market position poses to women's long-term economic outlook. During lockdown, **mothers have reduced the paid work they do** compared with fathers and are already 1.5 times more likely than fathers to have lost their jobs or to have quit their jobs over lockdown.⁸ **In our report *Gender and Unpaid Work*, we estimate that the impact of mothers' lost earnings or productivity as a result would equate to £15,082,320 lost to the economy per day in Scotland.**⁹ Even before

² Close the Gap (2020) Working Paper 21: Gender Pay Gap Statistics. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Working-Paper-21-Gender-Pay-Gap-statistics-2019.pdf>.

³ Close the Gap (2018) Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know. Available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1---Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

⁴ Close the Gap (2020) Disproportionate disruption: The impact of Covid-19 on women's labour market equality. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/DisproportionateDisruption---The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-labour-market-equality.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

⁵ UK Women's Budget Group (2020) Crises Collide: Women and Covid-19. Available at <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

⁶ UK Women's Budget Group (2020) Crises Collide: Women and Covid-19. Available at <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

⁷ UK Government (2020) 'Guidance for schools, providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision'. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

⁸ A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.

⁹ Engender (2020) Gender and Unpaid Work: The Impact of Covid-19 on Women's Caring roles. Available at https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/1594974358_Gender--unpaid-work---the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-womens-caring-roles.pdf [Accessed 11 August 2020]

Covid-19, women were four times more likely than men to give up employment because of multiple caring responsibilities¹⁰ and according to Scottish time-use data, women did approximately **68% of the housework and 68% of the childcare**.¹¹

The features of the Covid-19 economic crisis mean that the traditional approach to stimulus will work even less well than usual. We do not need spend on a narrowly defined set of infrastructure projects that will create ‘jobs for the boys.’ We need to invest money in creating demand for goods and services by spending on health, childcare, and social care services.

2. How does the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery consider women’s lives during the pandemic?

Engender and Close the Gap have issued multiple briefings making the case for a gendered response to Covid-19,¹² advocating for the use of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data in developing policy interventions,¹³ and analysing the impact on women’s labour market participation.¹⁴ We also worked with other national women’s organisations to develop our nine principles for a gender-sensitive economic recovery,¹⁵ and published a paper exploring how Covid-19 might be an inflection point in gendering Scotland’s approach to inclusive growth.¹⁶ We submitted all of this information to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (AGER).

Despite this advocacy, and widespread media coverage of some of the gendered issues around Covid-19’s economic effects, AGER’s report was not gendered. Despite the profoundly gendered nature of the crisis, which has impacted female-dominated sectors and substantially increased women’s unpaid work, the report barely mentions these as

¹⁰ Carers UK and Employers for Carers (2012) Sandwich Caring: Combining childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives.

¹¹ Scottish Government (2019) Centre for Time Use Research Time Use Survey 2014-15: Results for Scotland. Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/centre-time-useresearch-time-use-survey-2014-15-results-scotland/pages/5/> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

¹² Engender (2020) Women and Covid-19. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-Briefing---Women-and-COVID-19.pdf> [Accessed April 15, 2020].

¹³ Engender (2020) Covid-19: Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women’s equality and rights. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Covid-19-Gathering-and-using-data-to-ensure-that-the-response-integrates-womens-equality-and-rights.pdf> [Accessed May 20, 2020].

¹⁴ Close the Gap (2020) Disproportionate disruption: The impact of Covid-19 on women’s labour market equality. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Disproportionate-Disruption---The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-labour-market-equality.pdf> [Accessed May 20, 2020].

¹⁵ Engender, Close the Gap (2020) Gender & Economic Recovery. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery---Engender-and-Close-the-Gap.pdf> [Accessed July 10, 2020].

¹⁶ Thomson E (2020) Making inclusive growth work for women in Scotland. Engender & Close the Gap.

concerns. Its analysis does not integrate these gendered issues and nor is there any evidence of them in the recommendations it has produced.

We do not doubt the creativity and commitment of the individuals who were commissioned to form AGER. However, the fact that its report contains an exhortation that recovery plans be informed by gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data while simultaneously ignoring its own advice is indicative of a profound gap in capacity and focus. **The policy areas the report touches on are unquestionably gendered:** employment, skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship, education, care, macroeconomics. If women are not to be pushed behind by economic recovery then their different experiences of work, skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, education, and care will need to be part of Scottish Government's thinking and action.

3. How can the Scottish Government better respond to women's economic situation?

We set out some key proposals that Scotland Government should consider when developing its response. **Although it includes a handful of welcome commitments, including a Centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights to work across the Economy portfolio within Scottish Government, the Economic Recovery Implementation Plan acknowledges women's disproportionately negative experience of Covid-19 and then ignores it.** Most of the proposals for spending and action do not mention women or gender, and do not take account of the profoundly different experiences women have of care, skills, work, and the economy.

The Scottish Government needs to go further to ensure that economic recovery also closes the gap between women and men. We urge Scottish Government to scale up its ambition and the necessary action to deliver a meaningful economic (and social) recovery for women that not only responds to the threat of deeper inequality as a result of Covid-19 but actively realises women's economic rights and revalues women's work.¹⁷ Alongside Close the Gap, we have developed a list of recommendations for the Scottish Government's response:

- **Infrastructure spending should include childcare and social care.** We welcome the re-affirmation of the commitment in the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan, but it must now be translated into action.

¹⁷ Engender and Close the Gap (2020) Response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery Report. Available at <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/AGER-response-from-Engender-and-Close-the-Gap---FINAL.pdf>

- **Regional and place-based models can exclude women and other protected groups.** Approaches such as community wealth building need to pay better attention to women's specific needs in order to meet them.
- **The care sector review should take place and should also include social care for disabled children.** Engender has long advocated for a living wage for unpaid carers, in lieu of the existing social security entitlements.¹⁸
- **The care sector review should also include developing action to address the undervaluation of the predominantly female workforce.**
- **The acceleration of fair work should also mean fair work for women.** A Centre for Workplace Transformation must be gender competent, take a gendered approach, and prioritise the increasing precarity of women's employment and the undervaluation of women's work.
- **Skills interventions should work to reduce occupational segregation as a central aim.** There should also be sufficient flexible places in colleges and universities to enable women to combine learning with caring roles.
- **In-work training programmes should be informed by women's experiences of training in the workplace.** The expansion of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund should target the effective utilisation of women's under-used skills, reduce occupational segregation, and gather gender-sensitive sex disaggregated data on learner participants including the types of courses undertaken.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact: Eilidh Dickson, Policy and Parliamentary Manager, Engender
 Email: eilidh.dickson@engender.org.uk

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.

¹⁸ Engender (2017) Gender Matters Roadmap: Towards Women's Equality in Scotland.