



Engender submission of evidence on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

Engender welcomes the introduction of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, which ambitiously sets targets to eradicate child poverty by 2030. The introduction of the proposed legislation signals a commitment by the Scottish Government to continue to implement measures to build a fairer Scotland. Though we welcome the Bill, we wish to highlight the importance of understanding the gendered dimension of poverty, as it is our firm belief that understanding and tackling women's poverty in Scotland will be central to the success of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.

Women and Poverty

- 1.1. Women are more likely to be living in poverty than men, and there is a particularly high risk of poverty among black and minority ethnic women, disabled women, and refugee and asylum-seeking women.¹ In this section, we explore some of the reasons why women are more likely to be living in poverty than men.
- 1.2. On average, women in Scotland earn £182.90 per week less than men. As explained in the literature, the gender pay gap can be explained by both occupational segregation and 'the fact that jobs which are predominantly done by women tend to be lower paid'.² Further, children and caring responsibilities 'result in many women having an interrupted profile of labour market activity, and much higher rates of part-time work than men'.³ In Scotland, women account for 75 percent of the part-time workforce, and earn 33.5 percent less than men working in full-time employment.⁴
- 1.3. There is a lack of flexible, high-quality and affordable childcare in Scotland. Childcare costs in Scotland are amongst the highest in the UK, and the UK costs are among the highest in the world. Access to affordable childcare is a major barrier to women being able to work, study and access vocational training. Due to the high cost of children, 25

¹ Bradshaw, J., Finch, N., Kemp, P., Mayhew, E. & Williams, J. (2003). *Gender and Poverty in Britain*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

² Bradshaw, J., et al.

³ Bradshaw, J., et al.

⁴ Close the Gap. (2016). *Gender Pay Gap Statistics*.

percent of parents living in absolute poverty in Scotland have given up work, a third have turned down employment due to inaccessible and unaffordable childcare, and a further 25 percent have not been able to take up education or training.⁵

- 1.4. Lone mothers are most likely to experience poverty, and tend to be more disadvantaged than parents in couple households. In 2015, 141,400 lone parents with dependent children were living in Scotland. Nine out of 10 lone parents (91 percent; 128,400) were women. Lone mothers have a lower rate of employment; are less likely to report they are managing very well/fairly well financially; and less likely to report that they are in good/very good general health.⁶ As reported by the Scottish Government, poverty rates after housing costs for lone mothers fell in 2010-11, but have increased since, reaching 37 percent in 2014-15.⁷ Women make up 95 percent of lone parents receiving Income Support.
- 1.5. Further contributing to women's poverty is the distribution of finances within households. Access to resources is a fundamental aspect of gender inequality. Income and other resources are often not controlled or shared equally within the household.⁸ Literature on poverty in Britain has captured this reality for women. One study explains that in households where men are 'the sole breadwinners, their partners may not get equal access to earnings entering the household, which appears to be the case in some low-income families...In some low-income households, parents, but especially mothers, forego their own consumption to meet the demands of their children'.⁹
- 1.6. Economic dependency is particularly acute in households where women experience domestic violence. 'Mothers experiencing domestic violence are more likely to become lone parents, less likely to be earning independently, and more likely to report their families getting into financial difficulties, with family incomes sometimes withheld from the victim and child as part of a pattern of abuse. All of this...places their children at greater risk of suffering poverty'.¹⁰ Scottish Women's Aid reports that on one day in 2013, 341 women and 257 children and young people were living in a Women's Aid refuge.¹¹
- 1.7. Systemic barriers to economic resources are amplified for black and minority ethnic women, disabled women and refugee women. Many of these women experience racism, discrimination and stereotyping in the labour market.¹² Refugee and asylum-seeking women trying to enter the labour market face barriers ranging from lack of information on available employment services, racism and discrimination, lack of affordable childcare, and caring responsibilities.¹³

⁵ Save the Children. (2017). *Soaring Childcare Costs Push Parents out of Work in Scotland*.

⁶ NHS Health Scotland. (2016). *Lone parents in Scotland, Great Britain and the UK: health, employment and social security*.

⁷ Scottish Government. (2015). *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland*.

⁸ Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (2014). *Poverty through a gender lens: Evidence and policy review on gender and poverty*.

⁹ Bradshaw, J. et al.

¹⁰ Women's Budget Group. (2005). *Women's and Child's Poverty: Making the Links*.

¹¹ Scottish Women's Aid. (2013). *Facts and Figures*.

¹² Engender, Inclusion Scotland and SDEF disabled women's discussion forums, 2013-2015.

¹³ Scottish Refugee Council. (2011). *The Struggle to Contribute*.

1.8. Women are twice as likely as men to be dependent on social security. Social security reforms – or ‘reforms’ – and the UK Government’s wider austerity agenda are having a disproportionate impact on women’s access to resources, as well as their safety, security and well-being. Over the decade of austerity (2010 to 2020), 86 percent of net ‘savings’ raised through cuts to social security and tax credits will come from women’s incomes.¹⁴

2. Women’s Poverty and its Implications for Child Poverty

‘The well-being of children cannot be divorced from that of their mothers’.¹⁵

2.1. In 2005, the Women’s Budget Group drafted a report titled ‘*Women’s and Children’s Poverty: Making the Links*’. The report was a response to the UK Government focus on child poverty, which the Women’s Budget Group viewed as lacking ‘a gendered dimension to poverty’.¹⁶ The organisation wrote that ‘without recognition and analysis of the links between women’s and children’s poverty, the [UK] Government will struggle to meet its target to eliminate child poverty’.¹⁷

2.2. The Women’s Budget Group is an independent UK organisation, which brings together economists, researchers and policy experts from academia, non-governmental organisations and trade unions to form a network of experts to promote gender equality through appropriate economic and social policy.¹⁸ Engender strongly recommends that the Social Security Committee examine the report by the Women’s Budget Group, which has been included as part of our evidence to the Committee. While the report provides an in-depth analysis of the gendered dimensions of poverty, our evidence below provides a few key points made by the Women’s Budget Group.

2.3. Research shows that poverty increases ‘the risk of parenting difficulties and parenting breakdown’.¹⁹ Studies on the impacts of poverty on parents and parenting has shown that parents ‘don’t see themselves as having ‘problems with parenting’ as much as having problems with poverty’.²⁰ For parents living in poor environments, the cause of their problems was poverty.

2.4. The literature on parents living in poverty demonstrates that mothers are trapped in a vicious circle. The ‘stress of managing poverty can have a damaging impact on mothers’ physical and mental health, which in turn adversely affects their morale and overall well-

¹⁴ Women’s Budget Group. (2016). *The Impact on Women of the 2016 Budget: Women Paying for the Chancellor’s Tax Cuts*.

¹⁵ Women’s Budget Group. (2005). *Women’s and Children’s Poverty: Making the Links*.

¹⁶ Women’s Budget Group. (2005).

¹⁷ Women’s Budget Group. (2005).

¹⁸ Women’s Budget Group. (2017). <http://wbg.org.uk/>

¹⁹ Ghate, D. & Hazel, N. (2002). *Parenting in Poor Environments*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

²⁰ Ghate, D. & Hazel, N. (2004). *Parenting in Poor Environments: Stress, Support, and Coping, A Summary of Key Messages for Policy and Practice*. London: Policy Research Bureau.

being'²¹ and leads to a 'struggle to do their best by their children and to protect them from the worst effects of poverty'.²²

- 2.5. Living in poverty builds barriers to employment. Poor health and low morale impact the ability of mothers to find and maintain paid employment. As one researcher explains 'many out-of-work lone parents experience a malign spiral of hardship, poor health and low morale. There is something about this experience that builds up its own barriers to work....It is quite hard to contemplate work if you are that demoralised and hard up'.²³
- 2.6. Some of the arguments put forward by the Women's Budget Group focus on what actions can be taken to support mothers living in poverty. These included developing a gendered employment strategy; improving the provision of childcare 'in terms of its affordability, accessibility and quality'²⁴; and focusing on improving and better funding social security programs for mothers and mothers-to-be.

3. Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill

- 3.1. Engender supports the four income based targets in the Bill, which are well-known and understood amongst stakeholders. Consideration, however, should be given to including interim targets in the Bill. The inclusion of interim targets would provide a measure by which to gauge the success of the Bill or to identify gaps in the plans and/or service delivery to meet the 2030 targets. We recommend, as have Child Poverty Action Group and End Child Poverty, that the Scottish Government include interim targets in the Bill.
- 3.2. The proposed legislation places a responsibility on each local authority to prepare and publish a report describing the measures they have taken. We are aware that the Committee has received submissions already highlighting that this requirement may be difficult for local authorities to achieve, given existing budget pressures and constraints. We wish to echo these concerns.
- 3.3. We believe that the success of the Bill will hinge on the delivery plans developed by the Scottish Government. Similarly to evidence given by other third sector organisations, our view is that the delivery plans should focus on policy areas targeting the risk factors associated with child poverty. Moreover, the plans developed by the Scottish Government must be gendered for reasons elaborated above. It is our firm view that failing to tackle gender inequality in poverty will jeopardize the Scottish Government's ambition to eradicate child poverty in Scotland.

²¹ Women's Budget Group. (2005).

²² Women's Budget Group. (2005).

²³ Women's Budget Group. (2005).

²⁴ Women's Budget Group. (2005).

4. CONCLUSION

Over a decade ago, the Equal Opportunities Commission wrote ‘poverty in Britain is highly gendered’²⁵, and warned that policies which neglect to consider the realities of women living in poverty were destined to fail. Given reports and forecasts by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on living standards in the UK, lessons must be learned from the consequences of failing to gender poverty strategies. It is our view that the proposed delivery plans by the Scottish Government must be gendered to help achieve a fair and equal society in Scotland.

For Further Information

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About Engender

Engender has a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm. Engender is a feminist organisation that has worked in Scotland for 20 years to advance equality between women and men.

²⁵ Bradshaw, J. et al.