

SWBG Briefing

Scottish Government Priorities: Eradicating Child Poverty

Tuesday 11th June

About us

The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) is an independent analysis and campaign group that aims to promote gender analysis in public policy and public finance decisions through budgetary processes. SWBG brings together a wide range of women from across Scotland who have an interest in women's equality and want to achieve better gender equality in our society. We have focused on encouraging active gender analysis in the Scottish Budget process since 2000.

Introduction

In his address to the Scottish Parliament on 22nd May 2024, the First Minister outlined his four priorities for his Government:

- Eradicating Child Poverty.
- Growing Scotland's Economy.
- Tackling the Climate Emergency.
- Improving Scotland's Public Services.

In order to achieve these the SWBG would contend that it is essential to understand how Gender Inequality impacts on each of these priority areas, ensuring that policy interventions are designed to address and eradicate gender inequality.

Eradicating Child Poverty

Child poverty is inextricably linked with women's poverty and inequality¹. If we are to eradicate Child Poverty, intersectional gender analysis is core to the design and delivery of interventions.

Policy coherence and intersectional gender analysis

Child Poverty will not be adequately addressed without improved policy coherence across all levels of Government. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Fairer Scotland impact assessments need to evolve to consider the impact that decisions will have on different policy areas. Our work with Glasgow Disability Alliance has highlighted the effect that charges for non-residential social care are having on disabled households. There appears to have been no consideration of how this policy affects households with children despite them being identified as a priority group in relation to addressing child poverty. The policy, which in many areas starts to recoup money from households at a lower level for under 60s than for over 60s, does not seem to consider the consequences of these practices on poverty levels in disabled households. Further information on this work can be found [here](#).

In addition, understanding the link between child poverty and women's inequality (and the causes of this) is key if attempts to address child poverty are to be successful. **Gender neutral policymaking means that often women are disadvantaged because their circumstances are unseen.** In 2004 Diane Elson and Alisa McKay carried out an analysis of the New Deal for Lone Parents and found that while

¹ [1---Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf \(closethegap.org.uk\)](#)

participation rates for men and women weren't much different, the factors which impacted on their ability to participate in the labour market were heavily gendered. 'Female lone parents tend to have younger children and are much more likely to be never married or divorced, to have less education and training and less labour market experience than male lone parents, majority of whom had become lone parents after the death of their wives and have older children.'² The design and delivery of the New Deal failed to recognise these gendered differences which meant that the programme had limited impact.

Intersectional gender disaggregated data must be collected and used to develop and design appropriate policy interventions, linked to clear outcomes. This data must also inform monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes at the local and national levels.

Use of intersectional gender budgeting analysis

Budget decisions need to support the policy aspirations at all levels of government ensuring that how we raise money and how we spend money link to policy outcomes. **There needs to be clear assessment of how budget allocations impact on inequality and poverty and achieve the Government's priorities.**

While the Scottish Government publish the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement along with the Budget, there is a need for greater clarity on the way equality evidence has been used to drive policy and budgetary decisions and the expected impact on inequality and poverty.

In this year's budget, there were several decisions made which will likely impact on the achievement or otherwise of Scotland's Child Poverty targets. **These include cuts to further and higher education funding, reductions in employability funding, reductions in the affordable housing supply programme and standstill funding for School Age Childcare.** It is unclear whether the Scottish Government assessed the consequences of these changes (or lack thereof) in budget lines. For further exploration of these issues see our Analysis of the Scottish Budget 2024-25 [here](#).

Similarly, as part of their budget process, Local Authorities have made decisions to stop provision of out-of-hours childcare, to make changes to early years provision and to reduce the provision of school transport. Yet, very little analysis has been carried out in relation to how these decisions will impact on unpaid care, who carries this out and how this impacts women's ability to undertake paid work and how this might increase child poverty.

The role of social infrastructure in addressing poverty

Lack of affordable and accessible childcare is a major barrier to women being able to take on work, or to move to better paying, more secure work. **The Scottish Government needs to be clearer about who the expanded offer of childcare will be available to by providing a robust definition of 'low-income families' and establish how this fits with Universal Credit conditionality requirements.**

Our recent [childcare survey](#) found that for 55% of the women who responded the challenges of managing childcare was impacting their ability to do paid work. This figure increased to 67% for single parents and 71% for disabled women. While 4% of respondents stated that they had given up work, which increased to 10% for women from minority ethnic communities.

² <https://www.caledonianblogs.net/wise/2022/05/12/aisla-mckay-memorial-lecture-presentation/>

In addition, the survey revealed that 16% of those who were eligible for funded childcare were unable to access the hours due to lack of flexibility in provision. For example, women working evening shifts explained that the funding does not cover evening childcare. For these women, often working in hospitality, retail, or the care sectors, this increases their risk of experiencing poverty.

*'Nursery place is condensed to two long days per week post covid. Would benefit us to have full weeks back in place as it provides more flexibility for finding suitable work.'*²

The answers to our survey expose the extent to which the current system does not fully support parents and penalises women who are more likely to reduce their working hours to manage childcare responsibilities and/or to absorb the financial costs linked to it. 44% of women told us that their partners did not have to make any changes to their work arrangements to manage childcare, while only 10% of women said they didn't need to change their working arrangements. Similarly, only 9% of respondents said their partners had to reduce working hours to manage childcare, in comparison to 33% of survey respondents who made this change. In addition, single women and disabled women were more likely to report difficulties managing childcare costs, which indicates the precarious socio-economic conditions these households experience.

As set out in our recent [blog](#), it is also essential that the requirements of families of multiples are considered in policymaking, particularly in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) policy.

Addressing child poverty must therefore consider the role of a more comprehensive childcare system that supports parents, and particularly mothers, into the labour market.

In relation to this, the Scottish Government needs to support providers of childcare services in the recruitment and retention of staff by ensuring a fair deal for all staff across care services.

Addressing in-work poverty

In many households where children are in poverty there will be family members in work. **Identifying and addressing issues that can create a poverty trap is essential, particularly where this is related to the tax and benefits systems and how this can disproportionately impact on lone parent households.**

Our recent work with Fa'side Women and Girls Group highlighted the impact that not reviewing the thresholds at which people are no longer able to access support (i.e. school uniform grants) has had on them, particularly for lone parents.

*'I don't get school clothing grant as to qualify it's a low amount of income although I work 27.5 it's still part time. Paying for school milk isn't cheap depending on how many weeks there are in a term and only open so many weeks before a new term.'*³

Employers have a role to play in ensuring that they pay the Real Living Wage and that parents are supported through the provision of flexible work arrangements at all levels of organisations. The Scottish Government should consider how it can help incentivise flexible working.

A Caring Social Security System for All

³ <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/SWBG-FWGG-Briefing-final.pdf>

Women are more likely to rely on social security. This stems from women's economic inequality, which is rooted in the undervaluation of care work across our economy. After 14 years of austerity the welfare system is in serious need of reform to provide the safety net required when people need it more.

Research by the Women's Budget Group found that women and children have been pushed into poverty by real-terms welfare cuts and that this has disproportionately affected those who have been identified as priority groups in Scotland (disabled households, lone-parents, larger families, BME households).⁴ In addition, research by the End Child Poverty Coalition found that the two-child benefit cap is a key factor in children growing up in deprivation.⁵ While the Scottish Child Payment has helped mitigate some of the effects of this in Scotland it has not fully compensated for the eradication of the safety net provided by the UK welfare system. Ensuring these issues are addressed will be paramount if child poverty is to be eradicated.

Taxation

Taxation is an important part of the puzzle if we are to create the transformational change needed to eradicate child poverty. Fair tax reform will be an essential tool if the First Minister's policy programme is to be achieved.

The Scottish Government have taken some small steps in this area through the Scottish income tax system, but further reform is needed to finance public investment and reduce poverty, supporting a more prosperous economy for all. This reform must put gender equality at its heart, addressing the imbalance within our current system head on, by, for example, exploring the introduction of wealth taxes within the current devolved setting and/or by addressing local taxation.

Conclusion

In light of the above, it is easy to see the link between women's inequality and child poverty, and how policy decisions in wide range of areas intersect with child poverty. It is crucial that an intersectional gender analysis informs any interventions aimed at tackling child poverty.

⁴ <https://www.wbg.org.uk/publication/who-bears-the-brunt-intersectional-analysis-of-social-security-cuts-since-2010/>

⁵ <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>