

**Scottish Women's Convention response to:**

**The Scottish Government:**

**“Replacement of EU Structural Funds”**

**February 2020**

### Introduction

In the absence of further information from the UK Government, the Scottish Government is keen to develop their own thinking on how any replacement funding vehicle for EU structural funds can best meet the needs of citizens, businesses and communities. Whilst lessons can be learned from the past, there is recognition that this is an opportunity to do things differently and design a programme that meets Scotland's specific economic and social needs. Scotland has its own framework for driving inclusive economic growth in the National Performance Framework, and needs to be clear about how this new policy development can align to and help meet these objectives.

### The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

## Strategic Aims

Scottish Ministers want to take this opportunity to design a flexible source of additional funding that drives inclusive economic growth and makes a measurable and significant difference to the lives of people, businesses and communities across Scotland. With this in mind:

### What are the main aims that this funding should seek to achieve?

Whilst the full impact of EU Withdrawal is still unknown, there are many key equality questions that remain unanswered. This will not only impact on what future domestic legislation may look like but leave many of the most vulnerable at risk if current funding is not levelled up to vital social programmes. It is crucial that support remains for those who need it most.

Ensuring that all sources of funding seek to achieve maximum inclusivity for the most vulnerable across Scotland is key. This includes establishing that outcomes such as economic growth take account of the significant barriers that women continue to face in terms of employment, education and equal representation. Highlighting the interlinkage of such barriers and the contribution they play in ensuring women's inequality continues to dominate should be a key aim.

Funding streams should take into account where socio economic inequality deprives women of equal opportunities. It is therefore imperative that any new design models of funding should provide pathways to significantly correct this imbalance alongside full and rigorous accountability procedures for doing so.

### How could funding be used most effectively to address spatial inequalities between areas and communities in Scotland?

Spatial inequalities continue to act as a severe inhibitor in terms of many women's quality of life. Whilst we commend the Scottish Government's use of such innovative methods such as the National Islands Plan and Community Impact Assessment when designing policy, further methods to alleviate inequality should be implemented accordingly. This includes highlighting the connection between socio economic deprivation, vulnerability and inequality within all areas and communities in Scotland. The most effective way of doing so would arguably be to ensure funding is coordinated at local levels by individuals and organisations who can target where this is needed most.

Further issues for consideration should include:

- Taking robust account of the specific inequalities placed on women, particularly those with multiple protected characteristics, and seek to challenge this. This

should also pay heed to women's unique barriers in a number of other areas including health, employment and political representation.

- An overarching analysis of spatial inequality within Scotland including the unique challenges faced in both urbanised and rural areas.
- Ensuring that indicators of inequality and socio economic deprivation take into account the significant differences in particular areas of Scotland. For instance, using car ownership as an indicator of poverty despite it being essential in more ruralised communities.
- Ensuring resources take into account funding disparities between local authority areas with ongoing cuts and austerity.
- Recognising the opportunity within the design of a new system to take account of modernising workplace strategies such as green job creation and upskilling to deal with automation threats.
- Ensuring appropriate promotion of funding opportunities and active education for inclusivity with a strident determination for equal representation.
- Committing to ensure rigorous Equality Impact Assessments for the implementation of all funding streams.
- Ensuring all key stakeholders are consulted, including those from a range of areas with lived experiences of current funding systems.

#### Geographically, at what level would the priorities for funding be best set?

As mentioned previously, priorities should be set at localised and community-based levels wherever possible. This not only accounts for challenges within particular areas, but allows for processes where those that are in receipt of funds can best consult with those setting priorities and feedback to them. A main issue for many organisations may be that specific indicators of success are often time-sensitive whereas their own stated goals may have a much longer time span for delivery of outcomes. Challenges such as this may be best identified at local levels where partnership working can ensure indicators do not fall short of an organisation's stated aims or put them in jeopardy.

#### Alignment with Scottish Policy and Other Funding Streams

Scotland has a set of high-level strategic documents that guide the direction of our policy development and spend. These are focussed on inclusive economic growth and include our National Performance Framework, our Economic Strategy, our Programme for Government and our new Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board approach.

#### How could the use of future funding add value to other sources of funding focussed on similar objectives in Scotland?

Ensuring all sources of funding in the future are subject to Equality Impact Assessments - EQIA's - should be the norm as well as collecting both quantitative and qualitative data for the assessment of priorities. A main caveat, however, is ensuring that the design of

funding applications takes account of small organisations within communities who may stand to lose out on funding due to lengthy application processes. In these scenarios, there should be particular accountability to ensure that those doing this grassroots work are given a level playing field. Or, alternatively, relevant persons should be appointed whose main priority is to target smaller, community-based organisations.

In addition, all current and future sources could be best assessed on their merit of adding value by incorporating analysis of the gender pay gap, women's representation and equal opportunities. This should include requiring all objectives, aims and outcomes to have a clear equality duty with a robust collection of data at a national level to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses when targeting funds.

### Alignment with UK and EU Policy

The UK Government has said that the SPF will be aligned with its Industrial Strategy and will focus on increasing productivity. At the same time, the European Union is evolving its Cohesion Policy with a structure of 5 themes: A Smarter Europe; A Greener, carbon free Europe; A Connected Europe; A More Social Europe; and A Europe closer to citizens, to create a more tailored approach to regional development in order to drive EU investments.

### What practical value would you see in future funding in Scotland being aligned with the UK Industrial Strategy and other spatially-differentiated UK economic policies such as the City and Regional Deals or the Industrial Strategy's sectoral approach?

The importance of ensuring alignment with UK policies cannot be underestimated given that this is where the design and implementation for such a funding system will occur. It is important, however, to stress the unique differences Scotland holds such as regional variations and geographical localities.

Whilst the UK Government has committed to ensuring that any funding falling under current EU streams will be maintained, it is not clear how this will work in future. Alignment of funding with UK economic policies will thus be dependant on the way in which the UK Government proposes to coordinate the design of systems for allocating future funds.

With this in mind, however, the Scottish Government should use the opportunity to take account of approaches used by the UK Government to tackle specific inequalities. For instance, coordination of any new funding stream with the UK Government's Industrial Strategy sectoral approach should have specific accountability for the changing nature of modern work. This could include upskilling, education for women workers, dealing with the threat of automation and creation of environmentally sustainable employment.

### What practical value would you see in maintaining alignment with EU Cohesion Policy?

Alignment with the themes set out within the EU Cohesion Policy incorporates many of the levers as demonstrated within Scotland's own National Performance Framework for a more equal and inclusive country. This should thus be looked upon as a source of best practice in adhering to outcomes for maximum effectiveness. In addition, this provides potential to identify where issues could be better handled and seek to fix this problem within the new processes. Measurements should also take into account disparities between the current European funding system and the proposed Shared Prosperity Funds. This should effectively target and highlight specific areas that need to be addressed as potentially at high risk following EU Withdrawal.

### **Evaluation and Monitoring Progress**

#### **How could we best evaluate the success of this new fund?**

In order to ensure that any new fund is achieving its aims and objectives, it is important that an equal evaluation approach is developed in parallel to the design of new funding. This should include:

- Ensuring continuous consultation and open feedback processes with organisations in receipt of such funds.
- Appointing accountable persons to represent such funding streams. A requirement for local scoping to deduce where resources are best targeted within communities is a crucial component within a new system. This should include identifying equality issues, as well as places at high risk of deprivation.
- Exercising the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders right to autonomy over funding streams for the country in order to highlight inequalities.
- Ensuring a full consultation process when more plans are released by the UK Government pertaining to the prospective Shared Prosperity Fund.

#### **What relevant parts of the National Performance Framework (NPF) should this funding be targeted towards?**

Women's inequality occurs at both an individual and societal level in all areas of life. As displayed within the NPF, all eleven stated outcomes involve Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality, amongst others which directly affect women. For such a reason, this requires an all encompassing approach to all parts of the NPF and include a definite equalities strategy. In this regard, implementation of a new system should be coordinated to take account of protected characteristics, vulnerabilities and inequality when targeting funding to recognise complex needs and vulnerabilities for women within Scotland.

## Conclusion

The SWC commends the Scottish Government for consulting on the proposed design of a new system of funding after the end of the EU Regional Development Fund and the EU Social Fund. Ensuring support for the most vulnerable women within society who are most at risk of inequality is crucial. This must take into account individualised needs and the complexities of targeting funding where it is most acutely needed. A national strategy which highlights women's issues and takes this into account when designing a fair and inclusive system is key.

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