

Scottish Women's Convention Response
The Scottish Government Call for Views:
Advisory Group on Economic Recovery
May 2020

Introduction

The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery has been established by the Scottish Government to provide independent expert advice on supporting the sectors and regions of Scotland's economy to recover from the impact of Covid-19. In establishing this Advisory Group, the Scottish Government has recognised that it must be prepared to act swiftly to mitigate the long-term economic impacts of Covid-19.

But alongside the enormous challenges brought by Coronavirus there is also a strategic opportunity. Over recent years it has been increasingly apparent that building a greener, fairer and more inclusive society in Scotland, requires a reimagining of our economy. So, the Scottish Government has asked the Group not merely to signpost a return to the status quo, but to set out possible paths towards a better recovery - towards a more robust, more resilient Scottish economy. The Advisory Group needs as wide a range as possible of insights and knowledge to do this.

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. Recently the SWC has undertaken a series of digital roadshows with women throughout Scotland. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

[What are the medium to long-term consequences of the lockdown on businesses, including loss of employees, debt overhang, loss of markets, reduced investment and unemployment?](#)

There are a number of key issues that will incur as a result of the current situation. Women as a whole have been disproportionately impacted by the crisis and are likely to see further increases in financial, employment and social problems. This includes:

- The impact on sectors, such as hospitality and retail, where women tend to dominate in large numbers, often clustered at the lower end of the pay scale. These jobs often carry the extra burden of being low paid, insecure and offer little manoeuvre for collective bargaining.
- Communities in which the economy is heavily tourist-reliant and geared towards the service sector have already been badly hit with many women employees seeing their jobs laid off. These workplaces will most likely be one of the last to see restrictions eased, leaving less scope for employment.
- Issues where seasonal working during the summer months is the norm will more than likely not occur this year, leaving many women business owners and employees at a major financial loss. This is particularly pernicious where businesses are heavily dependent on income over a few months to get them through the full year.
- Financial difficulties for many women, particularly young women, in the hospitality sector where much of the income was heavily dependent on tipping just to make ends meet.

[The crisis will impact differently on different groups in society, and on different parts of the labour market; and, has already revealed some thorny issues about relative wages across key occupations. What will the implications for recovery be on different groups, unemployment and on the nature of work? How is the recovery likely to impact on socio-economic inequality as a whole?](#)

Women's inequality has been further exacerbated by the current crisis. Reliance on social security, unequal distribution of caring responsibilities and the precarious nature of jobs women tend to work in have left them facing many burdens. The socio-economic impact of such has and will continue to have a disproportionate effect on women and their families including:

- Issues around the move to digitalisation of much work may leave many women at a disadvantage where they may not feel sufficiently trained to undertake such roles.
- Fears over the connection between work and mental wellbeing for women when returning to the labour market. This may be particularly acute where social confinement under the current restrictions may have exacerbated existing health issues.

- Concerns over working conditions for women where employers may use the current situation as leverage to cut terms accordingly. This is a particular issue in sectors where women suffer at the hands of insecure contracts and where collective bargaining is extremely low.
- The impact of additional caring responsibilities during this time for women and what this will mean for their working lives in future when returning to employment in terms of balancing both.
- Fears for many women with intersectional characteristics who already faced discrimination in the labour market. With the unemployment level continuing to remain high, there is concerns this will make it doubly hard for them to find work.
- Worries for many women returning to work and how this will balance with childcare needs, particularly when schools will remain closed for the foreseeable time.

How can the wellbeing of the people of Scotland flourish and what are the environmental implications of the crisis?

The saturation of women workers in key sectors that have responded to the crisis has highlighted the invaluable role that they play across all parts of society. Despite this, women as a group stand to be the ones disproportionately hit by the economic fallout. Many have voiced fears covering a range of areas relating to employment in the coming months including job and wage cuts, contract changes and continuing high unemployment. A major lesson it is felt going forward is the chance that this crisis has given to not only restart the Scottish economy but also refresh it in a way that ensures equality is at the forefront. This includes:

- Ensuring all economic recovery in whatever form it takes protects and generates financial and social wellbeing for women and recognises the unequal impact that the situation has had on them.
- Placing greater value financially and as a society on the social care sector, including recognising the work that is undertaken within this profession.
- Committing to ensure any strategies for the economy do not disproportionately impact on women. This includes an awareness of what the consequences of a decade of austerity and public sector cuts has had for many women in terms of pushing them into poverty. It is crucial this does not repeat itself.
- Ensuring return to work and retraining programmes take account of all age groups, including older women, and digital skills abilities. Investment in skills and development for women to ensure high quality employment, particularly in sectors where they are under-represented is key.

- Committing the economic response to take account of the cost of living as well as inflationary and employment issues with appropriate safeguards in place for those at high risk of poverty.
- Placing mental health and wellbeing at the heart of all economic strategies in order that profitability in monetary terms is not the sole factor for Scotland's recovery at the expense of women's equality.
- Making provisions and funding available for key workers whose mental health may be impacted as a result of the pandemic.
- Ensuring that initiatives delayed by the onset of Covid-19 are restarted as soon as is feasible. The planned expansion of Early Learning and Childcare provision and the roll out of social security benefits such as the Child Disability Payment, for instance, has the potential to help many women out of poverty.
- Planning for localised strategies to maintain levels of support as we transition through the current restrictions for community groups to continue working with women and providing valuable services.
- Placing emphasis on the need for greater food security for many families living in poverty including a commitment to universal strategies such as free school meals for all school children.
- Effective restarting of health checks that have been put on hold as a consequence of Covid-19. This includes delays to screening programmes such as mammograms and cervical smear tests. Women have voiced that this must be coordinated at localised levels as a priority to prevent unnecessary backlogs and ensure that those who have been delayed already do not suffer as a result.
- Ensuring strategies to transition children back into the school environment continue to take account of what the current situation has meant for the widening of the attainment gap and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

[How do we ensure that we learn from the impact of the crisis and respond accordingly?](#)

The unpredictability of the current situation has left little room for a concrete plan on which to build recovery. We can, however, begin to establish the remit for strategic planning in terms of equality and wellbeing that will mitigate the impacts that have been felt during this crisis. Policies and guidance relating to this should be considered for any inequality impacts that they possess.

One of the major issues that must be tackled is the significant impact on women who faced several obstacles previously but have seen these exacerbated. For many, the return to some semblance of normality will be doubly hard. Whilst this is a pressing issue, it is also an opportunity for Scotland as a nation to learn to understand and respond to these disadvantages to bolster equality for many women. This includes:

- Ensuring that whilst technology is used to the best of Scotland's advantage in terms of employment and healthcare, this does not hinder women who lack access to it or who may feel excluded.

- **Committing to securely housing women representing as homeless as has been done during the current situation. Women across Scotland have commended the Scottish Government for their response in this area. It is hoped that this will be taken forward so that women in these situations do not end up regressing back through any progress made.**
- **Ensuring opportunities, education, and potential career paths for women, particularly BAME, disabled women, and those from lower socio—economic backgrounds are further promoted.**
- **Committing to continue working with businesses and trade unions to further promote the real living wage across all sectors.**
- **Enabling accessible frameworks for women into decision making roles is crucial to best formulate policy for those that need it most. Women must be seen in decision making roles within Government Advisory Groups and other key management positions. There must be 50/50 representation to ensure that women’s voices are heard and acted upon.**
- **Committing to evaluating the use of Universal Basic Income as a means of bolstering the economy post-lockdown and the equality impact of this.**
- **A wide scale review into the impact of both the private and public social care sector including the undervaluation of the work of employees, exposure during the current outbreak and implementation of higher wages.**

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government Economic Advisory Group call for views regarding Scotland's economic recovery from the current Covid-19 pandemic. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to the pandemic and the effect of this on equality at both a reserved and devolved level.

For further information, please contact
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