

The Scottish Women's Convention's  
response to the Scottish  
Government's consultation on:

# The Impact of Human Rights Budgeting



September 2022

## Premise

In December 2022 the Scottish Government will release their budget for 2023-24 which will dictate public policy for the foreseeable future. The Government have aimed to effectively incorporate human rights into budgetary decisions, which will hopefully improve the lives of everyone in Scotland.

They have therefore requested consultation responses to understand if this human rights approach will be adequate to tackle the persistent inequalities across Scotland. This approach has been guided by 'The Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement' which sets out nine key opportunities and challenges for the upcoming period. They have then asked that organisations consider whether this aligns with the budget process and budget content that they hope to implement.

After this consultation has been closed, the Scottish Government will take the information provided and decide if they have made the correct commitments, alongside making changes where relevant.



## The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

## **Budget Process**

### **What data and information is needed to assess whether budget decisions are helping to progressively realise human rights?**

Currently disaggregated gender-based data is not collected across public services, which greatly hinders the ability to realise human rights within budgets. It would be valuable for the Government to consider splitting data to a higher degree, allowing effective monitoring to take place. By incorporating this methodology into budgetary considerations, the Government would be able to track the intersectional elements of disadvantage across services: limiting their impact.

### **What needs to change to increase meaningful participation in the budget process, particularly for marginalised groups?**

Marginalised groups feel consistently left behind with regards to social service provision. Many feel that their specialised needs are not being met, with ethnic minority women telling us that they feel that they are seen as 'lesser' than their white counterparts, while disabled women feel that able-bodied people see them as a burden. These thoughts and opinions are the result of years of systemic failures which have worsened individuals' life quality. In order to tackle the deep-seated distrust felt by minority groups, it would be valuable for the Government to incorporate a participatory approach. This would enable marginalised women to be consulted and included in policy creation giving them a voice, empowering them to explain what issues are most important to them. Not being listened to has consistently come up across conversations with women in Scotland. They have explained that they feel that they are not included within decision-making to a good enough extent, and that a perfect system would include more participation and collaboration between policy makers and the general public.

- "White is the default privilege setting in Western society, and white people hate admitting that. Take all the issues women have to deal with and multiply trauma and gaslighting for women of colour."
- "Able-bodied people see disabled people as an inconvenience at times and we have to shout so hard to have our needs met. This pandemic has shown how little so many people think of disabled people. We have been told to stay in and suck it up... like we matter less."

### **What can be done to make budget information more transparent and accessible?**

There are multiple methods to make budget data more transparent and accessible, as well as increase awareness. It would be helpful if the Scottish Government utilised social media to a

higher degree to improve knowledge surrounding budget information: this would only be achievable however, by simplifying jargon and complicated language. By utilising a participatory approach with members of the public, this may become a natural process – with data being created by a range of women, rather than exclusively experts. It would also be helpful if the Government developed helpful visuals and easy-to-read graphs, to make it simpler to understand how budget decisions directly impact individuals. This could also be furthered within schools, by including budgetary considerations within relevant class discussions.

### **Budget Content**

#### **Do the Resource Spending Review or previous Scottish fiscal documents demonstrate a commitment by the Scottish Government to realising rights over time?**

Clear in some instances but not in all.

#### **For example, is it possible to look at Budget documents and decipher if expenditure on realising rights is increasing or decreasing?**

When considering the most recently released budget, there have been many commitments made which do demonstrate that the Scottish Government are attempting to realise human rights over time. For example, there is a large focus on reducing child poverty, which we at the Scottish Women's Convention welcome. However, when considering the economic policies suggested, there appears to be a focus on entrepreneurship rather than care. Women have explained to us that they feel that certain industries are continually invested in (STEM or finance), while others (care and health) are forgotten. They went on to say that they feel that this is likely because the health and social care industry is dominated by women, whereas STEM and finance is seen as a 'male profession'. This consistent belittling of women-dominated professions has resulted in lower job satisfaction with some choosing to leave these industries. Therefore, we recommend a gender budgeting strategy be adopted alongside participatory methods to consider the lived experience of men and women, making current inequalities more visible.

- “So many people working in the caring and service sector get paid so low compared with anyone working in IT or STEM jobs, but so much responsibility goes into caring for someone?”
- “For me, the issue is that there is a lack of economic value typically demonstrated towards majority female professions – when I worked in nurseries (early years) the pay was dismal and not at all comparative to other skilled professions which also require qualifications.”

## **Is government funding directed to the right areas to enable the public sector to meet its human rights obligations?**

Across current funding decisions, women and girls are being forgotten and pushed aside. This group face an increased risk of poverty and violence, as well as lower economic and social opportunities. The Scottish Government must make further commitments within the upcoming budget to improve life conditions for the women and girls of Scotland. There are many possible changes to public policy that could be made, for example encouraging employers to create flexible work patterns, providing more affordable childcare, and improving education surrounding violence and healthy relationships. By implementing policies such as these, Scotland could become a more equal and fairer place for women and girls to live – ensuring Scotland's commitment to human rights provision.

## **What is the distributional impact of budget decisions? Do budget decisions have a discriminatory impact on different groups of the population? Do budget decisions help reduce structural inequalities?**

There are obvious impacts made by budgetary decision-making, which are not always for the betterment of all. Unfortunately, some groups are more likely to experience negative effects when certain choices are made – with those that are consistently silenced or ignored being the most likely to fall into this category. These groups can be called 'hard-to-reach' or 'seldom-heard' when in fact they are 'seldom-listened-to'. Individuals from marginalised groups regularly feel that their issues and concerns are seen as 'lesser' and not prioritised by UK Governments. As a result, large-scale decisions tend to not include their voice and can cause continued hardship and ultimately maintain social inequalities.

One such group can be women. Women are more likely than men to experience poverty in their lifetime and are therefore directly impacted by budgetary decisions. Some women have explained that current financial assistance is difficult to access and can push them into further poverty. This has a direct impact on their children, continuing the cycle of poverty and furthering structural inequalities. In order to adequately tackle these disparities, the Scottish Government must be guided by good principle and by the opinions of women that they are most likely to help. Therefore, incorporating women's voices, as well as other marginalised groups, into policy is of the utmost importance and should remain a key element of the public consultation process. By viewing issues through a gendered lens, the Scottish Government will be able to assess whether approaches taken will effectively tackle issues women face.

- "I worked two jobs to pay my bills but this had a detrimental effect on my health, I had to give up work and wasn't entitled to this benefit or that benefit till nobody was keeping me and I didn't have any money coming in... This was embarrassing and made me depressed and certainly put me off claiming benefits."
- "I have found it very hard to get any help that I desperately needed... so I have been stuck fending for myself and watching all my money go"

## **How can human rights be fully incorporated into the impact assessment process?**

Women have regularly told us that they believe they are currently not listened to and ignored. They propose that in order to effectively reduce social inequalities, the Government should speak directly with those affected by certain issues – as they can provide a lived-experience approach. This method can be guided by empathy and an intersectional outlook that encapsulates the wide array of life in Scotland.

## **The Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement**

### **Do the 9 key opportunities and challenges identified in the Equalities and Fairer Scotland Statement correctly identify the key opportunities and challenges around building a fairer Scotland?**

The proposed opportunities and challenges identified by the Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement are admirable. They outline a Scotland that is based around reducing inequalities across society, as well as improving services for residents and improve life-quality. However, a key omission is 'safety'. The right to be free from violence is incredibly important to an individual's mental and physical health and is unfortunately not guaranteed for all women in Scotland. Women have told us a variety of stories, centred around male perpetrated violence, that have demonstrated fear, intimidation, and anxiety. These stories come from a range of women and girls and are existent in different settings: from schools to public transport. We believe that the current rates of violence and abuse faced by women and girls in Scotland is unacceptable and would highly recommend that the Government commit to preventing, and ultimately ending, VAWG.

- "...there's so much bullying, verging on sexual harassment, boys towards the girls. They're pinging bra straps from the back, undoing their bras, grabbing and groping in the corridors, so that's all going on."
- "I have overheard conversations and heard how they [boys] speak about women, especially in school... it makes me feel unformattable and unsafe."
- "My biggest fear is the normalisation of violence, and not just violence in action but also in language and in word, and how that's become second nature."
- "When I'm around guy friends, I do hear really misogynistic comments about women, their bodies, what they look like, and how a woman only has value if she is sexually attractive."

Additionally, women who have survived domestic abuse have explained that the constant pressure they are under results in poor mental health and difficulty in adjusting to their new life. They have explained that it has had effects on their children and how they view relationships – continuing the cycle of abuse. Sadly, not all women and children survive

domestic violence, and it is our recommendation that the Scottish Government strive to reduce the risk of violence women and girls.

- “As a female that comes out of abuse, you’re left with certain behaviours. After you’ve been isolated with one person for so long, you become withdrawn in yourself, but you also become angry. That anger sits inside you for so long, and it’s got to come out in some way. If it’s not dealt with in a healthy manner, you can end up projecting abusive behaviours that have been put onto you without even realising it, that’s what’s happening. You become very mentally unwell.”
- “By coming forward I am now in the firing line. I walk out each day waiting for a knife or a bullet behind me because he has threatened it.”

There have also been consistent reports from women that they are receiving abuse via online sources, either through dating sites, sharing of intimate images or general insults. The result of this has been a rise in misogynistic abuse that is going unchecked on unregulated sites and making spaces unsafe for women and girls.

- “Because of social media, and how women are told about their bodies, I think that abuse has taken a different form.”
- “This kind of peer pressure is taking a different form now, this societal pressure of what we have to look like, and the abuse is not just direct anymore but also on Facebook, all kinds of abuse.”

### **Can progress against these priority areas be tangibly measured?**

Progress can be measured across the suggested priority areas, with some being simpler than others. Those that are dependent on fiscal policy will have inevitable economic implications and as such tracking the finances will create tangible data. However some, for example mental and physical health delivery, will be more complicated and require qualitative data to understand how women access these services, and what progress has been made. As an organisation which prioritises lived experience, we believe that by speaking directly with those affected, public policy can become a collaborative, empowering process.

### **Has the Resource Spending Review given the voluntary sector the funding certainty it was hoping for?**

From speaking to women, those who access services and those who provide services, it is clear that the voluntary sector does not currently receive adequate funding. They have explained to us that current financials result in stress and uncertainty surrounding pay, and the provision of good services: particularly relating to domestic abuse support. This was further worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, with some third sector organisations unable to provide the support they had given previously. Therefore, a commitment from the Scottish

Government to give increased budgets to these organisations, which support women across the country would be welcomed.

- “I think the Scottish Government has a great opportunity. The networks are there, the people working with people on the ground are there, so give them the resources... we need the resources, and we can't do that on a shoestring. We can't do it on small pots of money because you spend your whole time trying to find funding that enables posts to continue.”
- “Somebody was talking about the impacts on staff and not knowing if you're going to have enough money for their salaries or to increase their salaries or take into account the increase in cost of living, so infrastructure is what will support people and the relationships so that all needs can be fed with resources and money... give us the resources to make that infrastructure even stronger and then we'll do it even better.”
- “There was quite a bit of funding at the beginning, but I don't feel there was any real strategy... they never thought about what is happening to the staff in all this, they're just thinking about the services, but never about the staff. What about the additional hours they need to provide a service?”
- “...the services are so overwhelmed and overstretched, and the demand for the services is just increasing.”
- “During both lockdowns, we had a decrease in referrals which is quite unusual for us as we normally have quite a lengthy waiting list. But once the restrictions ended, we got quite significant spikes in referrals, around a 30% increase. What survivors are telling us was that during the restrictions often they had no safe space to actually access support”

### **Are funding arrangements for the voluntary sector fit for purpose?**

As discussed above, the current funding arrangements for the voluntary sector are not fit for purpose. Some women have sadly explained to us that they have known other women to have died due to reduced support over the Covid-19 pandemic. This loss of life is simply not acceptable and must be a priority for the Scottish Government during any post-Covid planning.

- “I've had several friends who have sadly passed away because they have committed suicide because they couldn't live with the pain, and obviously no-one listened to them when they were complaining.”
- “My worry is that we're setting people up for failure because people are under this naive impression that we're out of covid, we're fine, we're not in lockdown anymore. However, as we all know, it's the actual effects of covid that are causing us the most harm. People are really very mentally ill because of what has been going on and sadly most of that extra funding we had has been whipped back again and we can't put on some services anymore.”



## **Conclusion**

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- The current financial provisions given to the voluntary sector are not fit for purpose, and therefore require reconsideration to give the women of Scotland the support they deserve.
- Safety is not currently considered as a key element of making Scotland equal and fairer – we believe that this is a major oversight and should be included within the Government's commitment.
- More must be done to include the voices of the marginalised within budget decisions through a participatory approach, which will help to increase trust and ultimately reduce disparities in social service provision.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on **The Impact of Human Rights Budgeting**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

For further information or to share your views, please contact:

Email - [info@scottishwomensconvention.org](mailto:info@scottishwomensconvention.org)

Telephone - 0141 339 4797

Website – [www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)

Facebook, Twitter & Instagram - @SWCwomen



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