

## About us

The Women's Economic Empowerment Project is a joint project between Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA), Scottish Women's Budget Group, the Wise Centre for Economic Justice and the Women in Multiple Low-Paid Employment Project (University of Glasgow).

This project brings women from GDA and the Women in Multiple Low Paid Employment Project to develop an understanding of the Scottish Government Budget and economic policymaking processes and the role they can play in these. Along with asking the question 'do you see yourself and your needs reflected in these processes?'

As part of this work, we held a workshop with participants to help understand their views on Scottish Government priorities and what this means for them and their lives.

### **1. Are these the right priorities for the Scottish Budget 2025-26 and, if not, where should the Scottish Government focus its attention?**

The general consensus of the group was that, on first reading, there is nothing in the 4 priorities that you could disagree with. However, on unpicking what the group felt each of these priorities meant, there was agreement that they were all very nebulous and could be interpreted differently and that they were unsure how these would actually make a difference in the lives of disabled women.

#### **Eradicating Child Poverty**

The focus on child poverty was seen as understandable, yet the group felt that it left many people who experience poverty and don't have children 'out in the cold'. JRF's 'Poverty in Scotland 2023' showed that there were 490,000 people living in very deep poverty in Scotland and that 'women, disabled people and minority ethnic people in particular are at the eye of a storm of persistent low pay, unreliable and insufficient hours and a struggle to make ends meet.'<sup>1</sup> In addition, in their report 'Deepening Poverty in Scotland: no one left behind?' JRF found that single households made up nearly half the increase of those in deep poverty, while the number of disabled households in deep poverty had increased from 1 in 4 to 2 in 5.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Growing the Scottish Economy**

In relation to growing the Scottish Economy, the group recognised the importance of a successful economy if we are to have the resources to be able to improve people's lives and provide the services they require across the life course. While there was agreement that this should be a priority for the Government, there were questions about what this meant in practice and how this could be done in a way which was about sustainable growth which would benefit the people of Scotland.

There were also concerns raised about what this would mean for disabled people specifically, given the rhetoric in the UK context around work being the route out

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-scotland-2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/deepening-poverty-in-scotland-no-one-left-behind>

poverty without recognising that for some this is not possible. This rhetoric has caused undue fear for some disabled people and has created a context in which those who rely on benefits are demonised.

### **Tackling the Climate Emergency**

The group could see the need to tackle the climate emergency, but they were alive to the fact that decisions taken to address this could negatively impact on disabled people. Often there is little consideration of the needs of different groups when action to address climate change is considered, i.e. decision to ban plastic straws, moving to LED street lighting. While the negative impact of decisions was highlighted there was a recognition that there was the potential for some approaches to addressing climate change to benefit those on low incomes such as reducing energy prices through investment in renewable energy. However, this needs to be caveated with the fact that many disabled people live in unsuitable and inaccessible housing and do not have the means to undertake some of the improvements and adaptations that would enable them to take advantage of more environmentally-friendly measures. Most could not afford to upgrade to more modern and efficient boilers, heating systems or double glazing for instance, without financial support or incentives.

### **Improving Scotland's Public Services**

Focusing on improving Scotland's public services was felt to be an important priority, particularly given the impact of austerity and reductions in real terms funding, which has resulted in cuts being made to services by local authorities and health and social care partnerships which has an impact on addressing child poverty and growing the economy through embedding existing inequalities. Given that disabled people, and women, are the single biggest users of adult social care, investing in and improving provision is of vital importance to the group.

The group also highlighted that while the Scottish Government may set the priorities, other organisations such as local authorities and health and social care partnerships actually deliver services and that there is a lack of effective scrutiny and oversight of the way in which they implement policies and how this impacts the Government's priorities.

Too often public bodies work in silos or deal with things in isolation. The focus on child poverty can often fail to see the wider context within which this poverty occurs and that we can't address child poverty without understanding the underlying causes of poverty and family situations. The group also felt it is unhelpful to single out child poverty, as this fails to take account of household situations, and misses the opportunity to address poverty and inequality more widely. Children are not isolated units, but live in households with others, and families with a disabled member are more likely to be in poverty than those without. The relative poverty rate for children in households with a disabled child was 27%, compared to 30% for households with a disabled adult. Furthermore, the risk of 'deep' poverty is 60% higher in families where someone is disabled than families where no one is disabled.<sup>3</sup>

Failing to address child poverty in the wider context is a missed opportunity to concurrently address disabled people's poverty.

SWBG and Glasgow Disability Alliance's recent work 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 at <https://www.swbg.org.uk/gda-project/>

Overall, it was felt that the four priorities would likely do little to help disabled adults with the current information available.

## **2. What taxation and spending decisions should the Scottish Government take to make most progress against each of the First Minister's four priorities, within the current financial climate?**

The Women's Economic Empowerment Group is made up of women who receive social care and who provide this on a paid and unpaid basis and they are well aware of the impact the invisibility of care has on individuals and communities. As such, the group felt strongly that if the Government is to successfully achieve its priorities that there is a need to make Care visible within a policy and societal context, ensuring that the required investment in Social Care is absolutely fundamental to achieving all these priorities.

The proposal to include a care outcome into the updated National Outcome Framework along with the Government's commitment to recognising the important role that social care plays in the wellbeing of both individuals and wider society as set out in the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill are welcome, but there is an urgent need for this to be followed through in the budget decisions made at all levels of government.

Scotland's social care sector is in a fragile state:

- services are understaffed with recruitment and staff retention difficult at current pay levels as those who work in care are undervalued and underpaid;
- people are unable to receive the care packages they need and those who have them are scared to ask for reassessments based on the changes local authorities have made to social care charging policies;
- wider unmet needs are extensive, resulting in additional caring pressures being pushed towards unpaid carers and the NHS;
- Third sector organisations are having to do more and plug gaps in statutory services, but are usually operating on short-term, inadequate funding.

Prioritising investment in care and ensuring this investment addresses the structural issues related to paid and unpaid care are key from a gender equality and poverty

perspective. The Scottish Government's own figures suggest unpaid care is currently saving £13.1 billion per year<sup>4</sup>, while the economic and health situation of unpaid carers (the majority of which are women) is overlooked and unrewarded, with many living in, or being on the brink of, poverty<sup>5</sup>. Investing in social care is also a key requirement if the Scottish Government are to grow the Scottish economy. SWBG's recent modelling showed that investing in social care will generate about 43,000 new jobs created by the increase in care workers. In addition, 8,000 jobs would be generated through indirect jobs in industries supplying the care sector, as well as over 24,000 jobs through induced employment due to newly employed workers spending in the Scottish economy<sup>6</sup>.

The women involved in the group spoke directly about how the inability to access social care put barriers in the way of those who would be able to work if appropriate support was available and how reliance on benefits meant they often struggled to afford basic essentials. Combating this through appropriate investment would bring benefits to individuals as well as helping grow the economy by increasing labour market participation.

Investing in the care sector can also help Scotland meet their climate targets. Women's Budget Group research shows that the average job in health and care produces 26 times less greenhouse gas emissions than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than agriculture jobs and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in oil and gas<sup>7</sup>.

Disabled people want to make a contribution to addressing and mitigating climate change, but often find it difficult to take the necessary actions due to lack of support. For example, those with reduced care packages may not be able to make fresh meals from scratch and have to rely on pre-chopped ingredients, ready-meals or takeaways, all of which are heavily packaged. Recycling at home is made difficult by councils providing heavy bins that disabled people cannot access and use alone and so, without support, more waste ends up in rubbish bins and landfill. This, again, could be avoided if adequate, flexible care support was in place to help do whatever tasks are required, such as disposing of recycling.

Finally, investing in care can improve Scotland's public services. Research by the Nuffield Trust, the Health Foundation and The King's Fund in England shows that social care is a vital support to other public services like the NHS. Their evidence shows that greater availability of nursing and residential care is associated with fewer hospital admissions and readmissions, fewer delayed discharges, reduced length of stay, and reduced expenditure on secondary health care services. There is also evidence that interventions like re-ablement have the potential to prolong people's ability to live at home and reduce or even remove the need for care, if that is appropriate and in

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-carers-strategy/pages/2/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policy-research/living-without-a-lifeline/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Towards-a-transformative-universal-adult-social-care-support-service-for-Scotland.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/A-Green-and-Caring-Economy-Report-FINAL.pdf>

accordance with the individual being given choice and control<sup>8</sup>. But delayed discharges from hospital caused by social care increased by 84% between 2010 and 2017. To ensure that social care supports other services such as the NHS, it is essential.

As part of any decisions around how we raise and spend money and how we achieve these priorities it is essential to understand how gender inequality impacts on each of these priority areas and how they interlink to ensure interventions address and eradicate gender inequality and they we make the best use of scarce resources.

### **3. What are the potential impacts of focussing budget decisions on these four priorities on those groups of society who traditionally experience inequality?**

As highlighted above, the focus on child poverty without understanding the context within which that poverty exists could risk entrenching and exacerbating women's experiences of poverty, particularly for those who don't have children and are already experiencing deepening levels of poverty in Scotland.

There are also the additional costs of being disabled that need taken into account, which can include higher:

- Food Costs: e.g. food corresponding to specific dietary requirements; relying on pre-prepared meals/ingredients, take away/microwave meals if no support to cook from scratch.
- Energy Costs: e.g. health conditions which require the heating on even in warmer weather; charging essential equipment such as power chairs, nebulisers, ventilators, mechanical hoists and hospital beds.
- Transport Costs: e.g. reliance on taxis due to inaccessible public transport.
- Social Care Costs: e.g. Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership and Glasgow City Council's decision to charge up to 75% disposable income for non-residential care costs.

Research by Scope shows that, once factors such as these considered, on average, disabled households (with at least one disabled adult or child) need an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households.<sup>10</sup> Scope refers to this as the 'Disability Price Tag'.

The group were clear that for disabled people without children the focus on child poverty could leave them 'out in the cold'. The group felt that there was often a lack of recognition that disabled people often have these additional expenses/costs which often go unseen and invisible. These additional costs exacerbate the impact of the current cost of living crisis, and people have had to make choices to manage their finances which impact on their health and wellbeing, which has costs for the individual as well as for services.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/social-care-briefing-final.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/social-care-briefing-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Scope, The Disability Price Tag Technical Report 2023.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/SWBG-GDA-BriefingPaper.pdf>

It was feared that the siloed approach that is prevalent across the public sector could result in poorer outcomes. The group had a lack of confidence that there would be a joined-up approach across public bodies to addressing these issues and that we would continue to see budget decisions negatively impacting on the most vulnerable. This group are particularly cognisant of the impact that the failure of health and social care integration is having on their lives and those of other disabled people.

If the Scottish Government is to ensure that focusing on these areas does not negatively impact on groups within society, is it essential that intersectional gender analysis is core to the design and delivery of interventions and that we understand how work in one area impacts on the other priorities.

It was also felt as essential by the group that the Scottish Government track and monitors the impact of its spending decisions and how these are being implemented at local level ensuring that public bodies responsible for delivering policies are accountable for the outcomes being achieved, as they are aware and have been impacted by the post-code lottery which is prevalent due to different approaches.

## **7. What elements should a new draft tax strategy include to achieve such a tax system?**

In line with gender budgeting principles, a tax strategy should be:

- Transparent: parliament, civil society and the public should have accessible information about tax decisions.
- Participative: there should be meaningful engagement in the development of a tax strategy.
- Outcome-focused: a tax strategy should be clear about how it will support the implementation of policies and the delivery of services to achieve the Government's goals as set out in the National Performance Framework.
- Advances equality: the strategy will support the development of a progressive tax system that puts 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

The group felt that at present there was a need to better communicate how taxes were used and the benefit that individuals and society get from the taxation they pay. That the link between taxation and public services needed to be clearly made by Government.

They also believed that there was a need to ensure that any taxation was progressive. The group felt strongly that new or increased taxes should be targeted at those who can most afford to pay. Measures they suggested included the introduction of a wealth tax; comprehensive reform of property taxes; measures to tax capital income at the same level as income from labour; and closing loopholes in the system which allows businesses and individuals to avoid tax were closed, while they recognised not all of these sat within the powers of the Scottish Government they felt that the Scottish

Government should be working with the UK Government to ensure changes to the overall system were enacted and that this should be part of the tax strategy

### **9. What actions should the Scottish Government take to grow the tax base and increase labour market participation, productivity, and Scotland's economic growth?**

The Scottish Fiscal Commission recently highlighted the challenges faced by the Scottish Government as the result of a declining and ageing population due to a low birth rate.<sup>12</sup> Given these challenges it is essential that the government supports those who can work but are currently excluded because of the barriers they face.

Having a gendered understanding of what the barriers are for different groups entering the labour market and sustaining employment opportunities is required. There has been a great deal of research and work already undertaken into the way systemic and structural barriers impact on employment. The group felt we now need to see investment that actually addresses these things in a holistic way, and which leads to positive outcomes for those furthest away from the labour market.

There is an urgent need to invest in disabled people's employment and to address the systemic barriers that prevent disabled people from accessing employment.

As of September 2022, half of disabled working-age adults (53%) in the UK were in employment, compared with eight in ten (82%) non-disabled working-age adults. This disability employment gap, of 29.8 percentage points, is one of the main reasons for the higher level of poverty among disabled people than non-disabled people. Furthermore, when disabled people are in employment, they are more likely to be in part-time and poorly paid work. This means they need to rely on income-related benefits to supplement their income.<sup>13</sup>

To reduce the disability employment gap the group felt that the recent recommendations made by Glasgow Disability Alliance on this should be implemented.

There is a need to:

- Provide accessible, disability focused employability support for those most distanced from the labour market.
- Increase focus on 'employer-ability' i.e. supporting employers to recruit, develop, promote and retain more disabled people.
- Increase availability of accessible childcare for disabled children and social care for disabled parents to enable access to the labour market.
- Make Disability Equality Training mandatory for all public sector employers.
- Recruit, develop, promote and retain more disabled workers across Scottish Government and public bodies ensuring the necessary support is in place

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<sup>12</sup> <https://fiscalcommission.scot/publications/fiscal-sustainability-report-march-2023/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://gda.scot/resources/gda-manifesto-2024/>

- Increase investment in Access to Work
- Enable and resource 'softer' pathways into work e.g. lifelong learning, volunteering, peer support and role models as first steps to build confidence and aspirations.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, there is a need to enable women to enter and return to the workforce, if we are to increase the numbers of people who are able to work in Scotland. This means further investing in childcare and investing in social care as well as addressing issues related to employability support, public transport systems which can prevent women from being able to secure and sustain quality, well paid work.

The Women's Budget Group recently estimated that barriers to paid work for women including underemployment and lower pay mean that £88.7bn of Gross Value Added is lost to Britain's economy every year, equivalent to the annual contribution of the financial services sector.<sup>15</sup>

To enable this, Government (at all levels) need to really analyse how the way in which they deliver services are either addressing or embedding and exacerbating inequality. Using gender budgeting approaches means asking the question about whether money can be used differently to improve outcomes for all in society.

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<sup>14</sup> GDA, Manifesto 2024: Action for Disabled People's Equality & Human Rights

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wbg.org.uk/article/wbg-response-to-the-kings-speech-2024/>