

GENDER AUDIT OF THE SCOTTISH BUDGET 2024-2025

Introduction:

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Shona Robison MSP on the 19th December 2023 highlighted that the Scottish government is committed to equality and will focus on key areas like social security, healthcare, public services, and cost-of-living support, despite financial challenges. In the 2024-2025 proposed budget an investment of £6.3 billion on social security benefits, supporting over 1.2 million people and tackling inequality; record funding for NHS and frontline services- £19.5 billion for health and social care, £13.2 billion for frontline NHS boards, and additional investments in police (£1.55 billion) and fire services; £14 billion for local government, including £144 million to freeze Council Tax rates.

This gender audit examines the proposed Scottish Budget for 2024-2025, analyzing its potential impact on women and gender equality. We employed a qualitative approach, identifying measures explicitly targeting women or those likely to have a significant impact on them, considering factors like lone parents and caregiving responsibilities, since 92 percent of lone parents are women (Scottish Government, 2023).

Measures Directly Benefiting Women:

- Scottish Child Payment (SCP): Increase to £26.70 per week (£457.3 million allocation) directly supports over 323,000 children under 16, with a vast majority of recipients being women.
- Best Start Food: £18.1 million allocated to support around 51,000 people, primarily low-income families with children, often headed by women.
- Free School Meals: Expansion to all children from primary 1-5 and special schools (£43.8 million) and eligible children in P6 and P7 (£40 million) benefits families significantly, disproportionately impacting women due to their higher caregiving roles.
- Child Disability Payment: £450.1 million allocation provides crucial support for disabled children, often benefiting their mothers as primary caregivers.

- Funding for Cancelling School Meal Debts: £1.5 billion provides immediate relief to families struggling with debt, benefiting those headed by single mothers disproportionately.
- Targeted Device and Connectivity Provision: £10 million capital investment tackles digital exclusion among the most deprived learners, many of whom come from families led by single mothers.
- School Clothing Grants: £13.9 million allocation alleviates financial pressure on families, particularly single-parent households with limited resources.
- Whole Family Well-being Program: £32 million investment strengthens support for care-experienced children and young people, benefiting many individuals raised by single mothers.
- Childminders Recruitment and Retention Pilots: The expansion of this program by 2026-2027 increases childcare options and potentially reduces reliance on informal care arrangements, often borne by women.
- Early Learning and Childcare (ELC): £73.5 million allocation enhances accessibility and affordability of childcare, promoting women's participation in the workforce and education.
- £12 per Hour Real Living Wage for Care Workers: Funding supports workers in adult and children's social care and ELC, predominantly female-dominated sectors.

Measures with Broader Impact:

- Discretionary Housing Payment: £92.7 million available in 2024-2025 assists larger households and lone parents, a significant proportion of whom are women.
- Adult Disability Payment (£3.23 billion) and Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance (£420 million): These vital supports empower disabled individuals, including women, to live independently and access necessary resources.
- Increased NHS and Frontline Services Funding: This £19.5 billion investment improves healthcare access and quality for everyone, including women, addressing inequities in healthcare utilization.
- Employability Services (£90 million): This funding targets individuals facing structural barriers to employment, including many women due to caregiving responsibilities or motherhood.

- Affordable Housing Supply Program (£556 million): This investment increases access to affordable housing, potentially benefiting female-headed households disproportionately due to their higher vulnerability to housing insecurity.
- Local Government Council Tax Freeze (£144 million): while intended to offer broad relief during the cost-of-living crisis, may not achieve equitable outcomes. Research suggests that such measures can disproportionately benefit higher-income households, a demographic typically skewed towards men (SWBG, 2023). Conversely, households led by women, often falling within lower income brackets (SWBG, 2022), may face increased financial pressure due to ongoing service reductions triggered by the freeze. This raises concerns about the potential exacerbation of existing inequalities.

- **Overall Impact:**

While calculating a precise percentage is challenging, it's evident that a significant portion of the 2024-2025 Scottish budget indirectly or directly benefits women. Measures targeting vulnerable groups, social services, and economic development hold particular promise for promoting gender equality. Additionally, improved public services offer general benefits that ultimately impact everyone, including women.

Future Considerations:

Further gender-disaggregated data analysis could provide deeper insights into the budget's specific impact on various demographics, including women. Additionally, exploring future policy initiatives with stronger gender lenses could further promote equality and improve the lives of women across Scotland.

This gender audit highlights that the proposed Scottish Budget holds considerable potential for advancing gender equality and empowering women. By continuously monitoring and analyzing future budget allocations with a gender-sensitive approach, Scotland can move towards a more equitable future for all.

References

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