



Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Government Debate on Opportunity in Programme for Government 2023/24

September 2023

Close the Gap is Scotland's policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. For more than two decades, we have been working with policymakers, employers and trade unions to influence and enable action to address the causes of the gender pay gap.

1. INTRODUCTION

Close the Gap welcomes the focus of Programme for Government on tackling poverty and inequality, and creating a greener, fairer economy. **Women's economic inequality drives women's and children's poverty and Scotland's persistent gender pay gap, constraining women's choices and limiting their outcomes in employment and in life.** Economic policy needs to take a gendered approach if ambitions to realise the wellbeing economy are to also include women. This means reframing economic policy to recognise childcare and social care and critical social infrastructure necessary for a wellbeing economy and good society. Close the Gap welcomes the Programme for Government commitments on childcare policy but more action is needed to elevate childcare to a key sector of Scotland's economy.

A focus on realising a greener, fairer economy through the creation of green jobs will not necessarily mean a fairer economy for women. In order to transform the economy so that it is both greener and fairer for women, tackling occupational segregation and women's wider inequality at work must be central to economic policymaking. **It will not be a just transition unless women and men are able to equally benefit from this labour market shift.** This requires targeted action to tackle the structural barriers women face in entering green jobs. **Close the Gap has called for Scottish Government to take a gender-sensitive approach to green jobs in our advocacy around the National Strategy on Economic Transformation.**¹ Sectoral just transition plans must also take account of women's experiences of the labour market with strong action to ensure women's access to green jobs while also tackling the causes of gender inequality at work. It is essential that the Scottish Government

¹ Close the Gap and Engender (2021) *Submission to the Advisory Council: Development of the National Strategy on Economic Transformation*, available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-and-Engender---Evidence-for-the-Advisory-Council-on-Economic-Transformation-August-2021.pdf>

prioritises this focus so that the transition to a net zero economy does not leave women behind.

2. WHERE ARE WOMEN IN GREEN JOBS?

Occupational segregation is a defining feature of the energy sector and its sub-sectors, and it characterises existing, new and emerging green jobs. Women comprise less than a third (29%) of those working in electricity, gas steam and air conditioning, and less than a fifth (17%) of those working in mining and quarrying². **By the definition of green jobs adopted by Skills Development Scotland, women account for just 28% of workers in these roles³. They are also vastly under-represented in the most in-demand green jobs such as engineering where they comprise just 13%⁴.** Despite overwhelming evidence of women's under-representation in all energy sectors and green jobs, the draft energy strategy and just transition plan are not gendered. Women were only mentioned once, and gender is not mentioned at all. **Key policy frameworks such as the new energy strategy, just transition plans, and the green industrial strategy must prioritise reducing occupational segregation if women are to benefit from the green jobs revolution.**

Scottish Government acknowledges that the move to a green economy requires the realignment of Scotland's investment in education, training and work-based learning towards green jobs.⁵ **Skills policy and interventions designed to promote green jobs and skills must be informed by evidence on women's access to skills acquisition and in-work training and development.** Gender-blind skills initiatives entrench the occupational segregation that characterises Scotland's education and skills pipeline, funnelling women into low-paid, undervalued jobs and sectors.

The current range of commitments, strategies and actions plans to deliver green upskilling and reskilling have largely failed to consider gender and specific mechanisms of support the transition of women into green sectors. The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan does include action on tackling occupational segregation as a core aim of skills and training programmes, promoting inclusive workplace practices, including flexible working in target sectors, and developing upskilling and reskilling measures informed by barriers faced by under-represented groups, including women. However, it is unclear how these actions have been

² NOMIS, workforce jobs by industry (SIC 2007) and sex – unadjusted (Dec 2022)

³ Rubio, Jeisson Cardenes, Chirs Warhurst and Pauline Anderson (2022) *Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis*, Warwick University, available at: https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/49856/green-jobs-in-scotland-report_final-4.pdf

⁴ Annual Population Survey – Employment by Occupation (SOC2020) by sex, engineering professionals (Jan 2022 – Dec 2022)

⁵ Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland (2020) *Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025: Key issues and priority actions*

implemented, exposing a stark implementation gap. The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan is to be refreshed later this year, and implementing these actions need to be prioritised to realise Scottish Government ambitions on the wellbeing economy and closing the gender pay gap. **Without targeted action, women’s access to green jobs will remain constrained their under-representation in priority green sectors will be entrenched.**

3. CARE JOBS ARE GREEN JOBS

The definition of green jobs adopted by Skills Development Scotland is described as being “inclusive”, but it is clear that green infrastructure continues to be understood by Scottish Government and its delivery agencies in traditional terms, focused on physical infrastructure such as transport and housing. Caring jobs are low-carbon jobs, and work by Dr Jerome De Henau and Professor Sue Himmelweit for UK Women’s Budget Group⁶ finds **that investment in the care sector is 30% less polluting than the equivalent investment in construction, and would also produce 2.7 times as many jobs.** However, there has been little consideration of the importance of, and opportunities around, implementing large scale investment in all forms of green social infrastructure, including childcare and social care. There is also no mention of the care economy in the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan⁷ and the similar omission of the care economy from the National Strategy for Economic Transformation⁸ is a critical weakness.

4. INVESTMENT IN CHILDCARE NEEDS TO BE SEEN AS NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A SUSTAINABLE WELLBEING ECONOMY

Close the Gap welcomes the commitments to increase the pay of private, voluntary and independent ELC workers to at least £12 an hour, which is a positive step towards addressing the economy-wide undervaluation of “women’s work”. Work that is seen as “women’s work”, such as care, cleaning and retail, is systematically undervalued in the labour market because this work is done by women. The concept of undervaluation underpins gendered experiences of low pay, occupational segregation and the gender pay gap.⁹ We also welcome commitments to recruit 1000 childminders and the pilot expansion of ELC in six local authority areas.

⁶ Women’s Budget Group (2020) *A Care-led Recovery from Coronavirus: The case for investment in care as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in construction*, available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

⁷ Skills Development Scotland (2020) *Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan*, available at: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47336/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

⁸ Scottish Government (2022) *National Strategy for Economic Transformation*, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/documents/>

⁹ Grimshaw, Damien and Jill Rubery (2001) *Undervaluing Women’s Work*, Equal Opportunities Commission

If more men are to work in the sector, which is a prerequisite to meeting staffing needs, reducing occupational segregation and closing the gender pay gap, there needs to be an economic imperative to do so. This requires appropriately remunerated jobs with clear progression pathways as evidence that it is a good career choice.

Childcare is the most immediate barrier to women being able to work, study and train. Women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid childcare drives their propensity to work in low-paid, part-time work, women’s and children’s poverty, and the gender pay gap. The evaluation of No One Left Behind found that **women accessing employability support were five times more likely than men to say childcare responsibilities prevented them accessing training or work, and single parents, 90% of whom are women, were ten times as likely as men to report this.**¹⁰

Close the Gap and One Parents Families Scotland published a vision for a childcare system that works for all in Scotland.¹¹ Delivering quality, flexible, affordable childcare services need to be central to Scotland’s childcare offer, and is critical to ensure that low-income women can access the services they need. A necessary step in developing a high-quality childcare system is recognising that investing in childcare is good for the economy. Care is as essential to our economy as bricks, steel, and fibre optic cable. **Spending on childcare and care should be viewed as infrastructure investment as it is an enabler of paid work, but also supports the realisation of women’s equality and rights, and children’s rights.**¹² It is of particular economic and social benefit to the poorest families, including those headed by single mothers.¹³ **Designating childcare and social care as key growth sectors would drive the policy focus and investment needed to grow these sectors. It will also address the systemic undervaluation of “women’s work” by reorientating strategic focus to women’s position in the economy, as workers and as carers.**

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2023) *No One Left Behind and the Young Person’s Guarantee: Implementation evaluation*

¹¹ Close the Gap and One Parent Families Scotland (2023) *A Childcare System for All: A vision that puts gender equality at the centre of Scotland’s childcare strategy*, available at:

<https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/CtG-and-OPFS---A-childcare-system-for-all-FINAL.pdf>

¹² See: De Henau J, Himmelweit S, Lapniewska Z, Perrons D (2016) *Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries*. International Trade Union Confederation. Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf and Lapniewska Z (2016) *Growth, Equality and Employment: Investing in Childcare in Scotland*. WiSE Research Centre, Glasgow Caledonian University. Available at:

<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/wise/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/centresprojects/wise/98178%20WiSE%20BRIEFING%20PAPER%204%20August.pdf>

¹³ Women’s Budget Group (2020) *2020 WBG Briefing: Childcare and gender*. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/2019-wbg-briefing-childcare-and-gender/>