

WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy

In February 2019 the Women's Budget Group launched an eighteen-month Commission to develop policies to promote a gender equal economy. The Commission will build on our work analysing the gender impact of UK economic policy and allow us to develop and promote alternatives.

Background

The Women's Budget Group understand economic policies as mechanisms through which a just society can be realised. In contrast to traditional approaches to economics, we see the economy as encompassing everything that human beings need to survive and flourish, which includes unpaid care work as well as labour market activities. At the heart of a new economic system would be the principle that the economy works for people, instead of vice versa.

Women in the UK still experience structural inequality throughout their lives. While unpaid care and domestic work are essential to the pursuit of paid work, and more broadly, a fundamental part of human wellbeing, due to existing gender norms, women are still more likely to have responsibility for labour. This gendered division of labour means women are less available for paid work and earn less than men. This not only perpetuates women's roles as carers rather than breadwinners but also gender stereotypes about the relative interests and abilities of men and women. Gender roles and norms then reinforce and are in turn reinforced by women's under-representation in decision making-positions.

Inequalities based on gender intersect with other forms of inequality based on race, disability, income, age and so on, meaning that some groups of women, particularly poor women, Black and Minority Ethnic women and disabled women face intersecting disadvantages across their life course.

These structural inequalities are not only unfair, they undermine the UK's economic well-being. More gender equal economies perform better and are more resilient. The challenges that the UK faces including low productivity, lack of public investment, increased automation and an aging population and related social challenges such as low pay, in-work poverty and a crisis in public services, are both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. These challenges are only compounded by the economic uncertainties facing the UK as it prepares to leave the European Union. They require policy solutions that take account of gender and actively seek to promote equality if they are to be sustainable. Given the urgency of a transition to a green economy, it is also essential that the policies proposed are environmentally sustainable.

We have repeatedly called on the government to carry out their own comprehensive analysis of the gender impact of all policies, as well as carrying out analysis of our own. However, analysing government policies on an individual basis is not enough. Gender inequality is a structural problem, requiring structural solutions. This requires not only reactive analysis but the development of an integrated suite of alternative policies that reinforce each other in transforming gender inequalities.

The Commission

The Commission is made up of policy experts with a background in gender equality, economics and/or our areas of policy focus. It will take written and oral evidence from academics, civil society organisations, think tanks, trade unions and representatives from the public and private sector. The Commission, in partnership with the secretariat provided by WBG, will:

- Map existing gender inequalities and how they interrelate with each other and how they intersect with other forms of inequality. This map will also be used to prioritise a range of policy areas on which to focus.
- Review and appraise existing and new potential policy proposals which aim to further social and economic justice for their gender equality implications. These will be gathered by calls for evidence and ideas sent to organisations and individuals with expertise in our areas of focus as well as research carried out for the Commission.
- Consult with stakeholders including grassroots and front-line organisations through seminars and focus groups, to ensure that policies will work in practice for those they are intended to benefit.
- Take evidence on our analysis on the (intersectional) gender and other impacts of policies individually and their cumulative impact.
- Draw on this evidence to produce a final set of recommendations
- Disseminate and promote these recommendations.

The secretariat, provided by the Women's Budget Group, will support the work of the Commission.

Commission Objective

Our objective is to demonstrate that an alternative economic approach focused on gender equality is not only desirable, but economically feasible and, indeed, necessary if we are to have an economy that is fair, sustainable and resilient. The ultimate aim of the project is to change policy. Work to promote our proposals to policy makers and opinion formers will therefore be central to this project.

If you would like to know more about the Commission, please email Marion Sharples, the Commission project manager, on marion.sharples@wbq.org.uk, or Emma Williams, the Commission administrator, on emma.williams@wbq.org.uk