



Factsheet #21

Women and public spending cuts

The government's claims to be fair, yet the planned cuts will impact hardest on women – particularly low paid women and their families.

The impact on women's earnings

- 65% of public sector workers are women, and almost a quarter of working women are in public sector jobs
- job cuts and pay freezes in the public sector will therefore inevitably impact more on women than men
- the government has yet to announce any effective measures to force employers to take action to close the gender pay gap (17% full time, 36% part time) – and has not taken the opportunity presented by the Equality Act 2010 to change the currently unworkable legislation
- budget-squeezed local authorities are likely to be even more resistant to negotiating fair pay, including the back pay women are entitled to

A “fair” budget for women?

Benefit cuts announced in the budget will impact directly on mothers – who already suffer disproportionately from the gender pay gap:

- child benefit has been frozen for the next three years
- the health in pregnancy grant will be abolished from April 2011
- the Sure start maternity grant will only be paid for the first child
- child tax credit changes will cut the income of many families

But even taking out the impact of the cuts on mothers, a recent gender audit of the budget shows that two-thirds of the revenue raised will come from women:

- fewer women than men will benefit from the increase in the personal tax allowance
- housing benefit restrictions will impact on hard working households, facing rising housing costs, particularly in the rental market
- changes to state and public sector pensions will disproportionately affect women – who already make up 2/3 of the UK's poorest pensioners

“£5.8 billion of the £8 billion of cuts contained in the budget will be taken from women, who will also be worst affected by the coming cuts to public services – 65 per cent of public sector workers are women.”

– **Paul Chubb (Director, Careers England), *Children & Young People Now***

The hidden impact of the cuts

- the combined average loss in income and services (including tax and benefit changes), will equate to almost 22% for the poorest households in the UK, compared to just 1.6% in the richest
- although the tax cuts were billed as helping the lower paid, the corresponding loss of services to fund those cuts mean that the poorest households will actually be worse off as a result
- one in five women act as unpaid carers for adult family members. Cuts in services mean this figure is almost certain to rise, with women’s caring responsibilities being one of the major causes of the gender pay gap
- cuts have already been announced in daycare centres, and increased care charges are being planned in many public authorities
- around half of lone-parent families are defined as low-income – more than twice the rate for couples with children. Women head nine out of ten of these lone-parent families
- services used primarily by women and children are already being targeted for cuts – libraries, leisure centres, children’s centres and out of hours school clubs
- voluntary sector and community projects supporting women will be particularly vulnerable to cuts, including women’s advice centres and refuges – the majority of which are also staffed by women
- past evidence has shown that where services are contracted out, women have suffered disproportionately as their pay and conditions have been cut
- 30,000 women lost their jobs in 2009 as a result of being pregnant. Pregnant women are unfairly selected for redundancy, despite laws to protect them
- low incomes increase the risk of violence: women in households with an income of less than £10,000 were 3.5 times more likely to experience domestic violence than those living in households with an income of over £20,000

Add your voice

We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign:

- talk to your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours about these issues
- raise these issues with your employer, local media, and political candidates
- take the campaign to workplace or community meetings – or organise your own – we can help with materials and speakers
- visit our website for more information, more campaign ideas and to tell us what you’ve been doing

We have a million voices for public services – to add yours go to
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