




Annual Statement on Gender Policy Coherence

June 2025



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Key Achievements



We published a **Women's Health Plan** and appointed Scotland's first Women's Health Champion



We are investing **£522 million** in 2025-26 to deliver three **benefits to support unpaid carers**. 73% of carers in the 2023-24 census were women



We invested over **£17million to support** a Sexual Assault Coordination Service (**SARCS**) in every health board area



We are investing **£155 million** in 2025-26 to **increase the pay of eligible care workers** from £12 to £12.60 per hour. **Women are at least 70% of the eligible workforce**



We have invested around **£1 billion** in high quality funded **early learning and childcare** every year since 2021



We are developing two new **strategies** – Scotland's first Equality Strategy for Women and Girls and Scotland's first Gender Strategy for Agriculture

8 of our 10 Cabinet Secretaries are women.



Since 2018, we have passed five Acts and introduced four Bills which will improve equality for women and girls

Acts:



The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 created a specific offence of domestic abuse that covers physical and psychological abuse



The Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 sets an objective that 50% of a public board's non-executive members are women



The Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Act 2021 provides a statutory basis for health boards to provide person centred, trauma informed forensic medical services for people who have experienced rape or sexual assault



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 requires public authorities to act compatibly with children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 requires local authorities and education providers to make period products free and easily obtainable

Bills:



The Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill (passed by the Scottish Parliament and awaiting Royal Assent) will remove restrictions preventing charities, law centres and citizen's advice bodies from directly employing solicitors to provide certain legal services to some of the country's most vulnerable citizens



The Criminal Justice Modernisation & Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill includes provisions to create the statutory framework for Scotland's first national multi-agency domestic homicide and suicide review model



The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill is intended to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses in Scotland's justice system and to therefore improve access to justice for women and girls experiencing men's violence



The Housing (Scotland) Bill includes a proposed duty on social landlords to have a domestic abuse housing policy

Inequalities Remain



Women working full-time earn on average **£4,437.00** less per year than men

Women are underrepresented in positions of power and influence



MSPs **45.7%**



Council leaders **26.6%**



Public boards **36.9%**



Senior police officers and judges **24.1%**



Newspaper editors **11.8%**



One in ten women reported experiencing stalking and harassment and around **3%** had experienced partner abuse in the previous 12 months (2018-20)



Women report more mental health issues than men. **In 2021, 20% of women aged 16-24 reported a mental health condition** compared to 11% of men



The burden of **unpaid labour** disproportionately falls on women



24.1% of economically inactive women report that **'looking after family and home'** was the reason they are economically inactive compared with only **6.5%** of inactive men

Foreword First Minister



John Swinney
First Minister

I am very pleased to introduce the Scottish Government's first annual statement on gender policy coherence. Improving equality for women and girls in Scotland is a priority for me, as it has been for previous First Ministers.

This annual statement has arisen in response to a recommendation from the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG). The NACWG was appointed by the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, in 2017. The NACWG was asked to 'be bold' in championing gender equality and challenging thinking around how we can make Scotland a more equal country for women and girls, today and in the future.

In many ways, the context today, in 2025, is much different to 2017. We have lived through a series of major events, including Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the cost-of-living crisis. The impact of these events have been felt deeply by all of us in Scotland – but we have not all been impacted equally. We know that such events have a disproportionate impact on certain groups, including women, people

from minority ethnic communities, older people and disabled people. Of course, many people share a number of these characteristics in combination, often with deprivation as an additional aggravating factor.

Inequality existed before the crises of the last few years. But the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis exposed and worsened this inequality. In times of crisis, it can be easy to downplay the importance of equalities work, to see it as something that can wait until less tumultuous times. But our recent crises have shown the urgency and necessity of putting equality and human rights at the centre of our policies and decisions, across all areas of government.

That is why promoting gender equality and protecting the rights of women have remained top priorities for me in my first year as First Minister. The needs and rights of women are central throughout my government's four priorities of eradicating child poverty, growing Scotland's economy, tackling the climate emergency and improving Scotland's public services.

We know that women's poverty and child poverty are intrinsically linked; that women experience barriers in the labour market including discriminatory practices and the gender pay gap; that women globally feel the impact of the climate emergency most acutely; and that women are more likely to

use and work for public services. Getting our policies right for women, and for the most disadvantaged women, means better outcomes for everyone.

And we really are making progress for women in many areas.

Our ambitious Women's Health Plan has brought real change for Scotland. We launched our women's health platform on NHS Inform to give women and girls access to comprehensive and reliable information about their health. We are now working on Phase Two of the Women's Health Plan and we are just as ambitious as in Phase One. For example, we want to see cervical cancer eliminated – and we believe that this is something that can be achieved in our lifetimes.

We have strengthened the law in relation to violence against women and girls. Equally Safe, our strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, is informed by the experience of survivors and by the expertise of professionals working in the field.

Scotland is the only part of the UK that already offers 1,140 hours of high-quality early learning and childcare to all three and four year olds and around a quarter of two year olds. This is regardless of whether their parents are working or not, because we are committed to promoting equality for all Scotland's children, putting their interests first. Supporting families through high quality, affordable and accessible childcare is critical to supporting women in work and to keeping families out of poverty.

We are also taking some really important action internally and behind the scenes.

For example, our work on gender budgeting is helping us to improve how we think about how our spending and revenue raising impacts men and women differently, and if we can better use our budget process to reduce gender inequality.

We're also strengthening the architecture in place to deliver on NACWG recommendations. And we have begun work on our Equality Strategy for Women and Girls. This will be co-designed with the NACWG and their Empowering Women Panel, putting women's voices at the heart of our work.

I want to thank all Council members for sharing their time, expertise and vision, especially over such a turbulent few years. Special thanks go to Phase One Co-Chairs, Louise Macdonald and Ima Jackson, and to Phase Two Co-Chairs, Talat Yaqoob and Anna Ritchie Allan and all the NACWG members, throughout its lifetime. I am also grateful to the members of the Empowering Women Panel who have co-designed and supported the NACWG's Phase Two work.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that this feels like a very precarious time for equality and human rights. It can feel like the political headwinds are trying to undermine the hard-won progress that has been made. But we remain very much committed to advancing equality for women and girls. Gender equality is at the heart of the Scottish Government's vision for a fairer Scotland.

Foreword Cabinet Secretary For Social Justice



Shirley Anne Sommerville
Cabinet Secretary For Social Justice

As Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, it has been a privilege to work closely with the NACWG to advance equality for women and girls in Scotland. This annual statement is an opportunity to take stock of the progress made, as well as looking forward to the work to come. I want to highlight two important pieces of future work here.

We are developing an Equality Strategy for Women and Girls – a first for Scotland.

This was one of the Calls to Action from the NACWG in their Phase Two scrutiny and accountability report. They recommended a 'national gender equality strategy' that 'should be intersectional, prioritising women who experience compounding, multiple inequalities, and should complement wider mainstreaming work.'

The strategy will do a number of positive things. It will support greater policy coherence across government, raise the profile of work already underway, reduce duplication and help identify additional policy measures. This in turn will accelerate our pace of progress, meaning effective and meaningful change for women and girls. It will also give us evidence of progress, ensuring greater monitoring and accountability of the Scottish Government and public bodies.

We want the voices of women and girls to shape the strategy in tangible and meaningful ways. This is why the strategy will be co-designed with the NACWG and the Empowering Women Panel, with evidence from women and girls with diverse lived experience from across Scotland and organisations that represent them. This is also part of our wider commitment to use more participatory approaches to shape our policies.

We know we need a combination of short and long term actions to make long-lasting change. The strategy will set out our vision, goals and actions to advance gender equality over the next 5-20 years. It will also include commitments made to the NACWG that have not yet been delivered to ensure lasting legacy for their work.

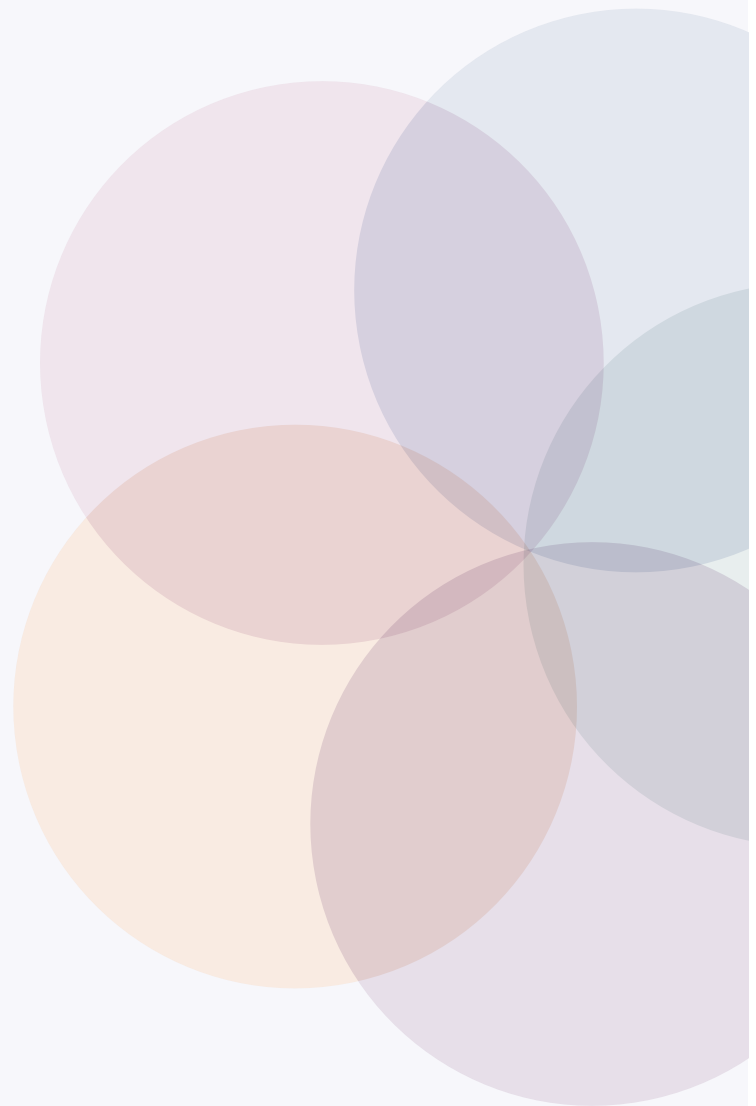
We're also strengthening the architecture in place to deliver on NACWG recommendations through our cross-government programmatic approach.

Women make up over half of the Scottish population and experience wide-ranging and intersecting inequality. We need the whole of government working together to make significant, long-lasting change. A robust cross-government programmatic approach will help us to deliver on our commitments to women and girls in Scotland.

The aim of this approach is to accelerate progress in delivering on the NACWG recommendations and to ensure that the right mechanisms are in place to support the Strategy. It will also help us to better measure and communicate our progress in delivering gender equality.

There is already a lot for us to be proud of and a very strong base to build on. But we know that we have more work to do. Women have faced inequality for generations. Long lasting, meaningful change requires us to rethink how our institutions are run, how our policies and budgets are decided, as well as requiring a societal and cultural shift in attitudes.

Sometimes the task can seem overwhelming and the pace of change can feel frustratingly slow. But real equality for women and girls in Scotland is possible. I am sure that the work highlighted in this statement will move us closer to the systemic change we all want to see.



Introduction

We want women and girls to be empowered to exercise equal rights and opportunities, have equitable access to economic resources and decision making, and live their lives free from all forms of violence, abuse and harassment.

Gender inequality is complex and harmful. It affects everyone – not just women and girls – but all of us, collectively as a country.

While there has been considerable progress in Scotland, gender equality remains an unwon cause.

For example, women remain less likely to be in contractually secure jobs, more likely to be segregated into low-paid sectors culturally stereotyped as 'female,' less likely to be in senior positions and earn less than their male counterparts including when they have comparable educational qualifications. These issues are further compounded for women with intersecting protected characteristics, low socioeconomic backgrounds for women from rural and island areas.

One in ten women reported having experienced stalking and harassment and around 3% had experienced partner abuse in the previous 12 months (2018-20). It should be noted that these statistics may underestimate the incidence of partner abuse as some women may not feel comfortable disclosing their experience.

While women may have a longer life expectancy and healthy life expectancy than men, the proportion of their life that is spent in good health is notably and consistently lower than men's.

Women remain considerably underrepresented in positions of power, constituting only 26.6% of Council Leaders, 24.1% of senior police officers and judges and 11.8% of newspaper editors.

We continue to take forward work to protect, promote and improve gender equality, recognising intersectional inequality, in Scotland. The NACWG was appointed in 2017 to consider actions to improve gender inequality.

Over Phase One (2018-2020), the NACWG delivered an ambitious and challenging package of 21 recommendations that they believed would make systemic change if taken forward collectively and with energy. We accepted all of the NACWG's recommendations, while acknowledging that the task of realising them in practice would require more detailed consideration and a 'whole government' approach to achieve meaningful and long-term system change.

One of these recommendations was that Scottish Ministers deliver an annual statement on gender policy coherence, followed by a debate in the Scottish Parliament. This report is our first annual statement.

This annual statement is the result of cross-government work, spanning several ministerial portfolio areas and requiring input from multiple Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries. This is reflective of the whole-government commitment to tackling inequality, with a specific focus on the inequality faced by women and girls. The intention of this Statement is to make visible the action being taken across the government to address the barriers women face in a coherent way.

Future statements will provide a progress report on this action, and will sit alongside the forthcoming Equality Strategy for Women and Girls that is currently being developed.

The chapters on 'leadership', 'accountability' and 'creating conditions' give updates on the original 21 NACWG recommendations. The statement then discusses women in our Four Priorities: eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and ensuring high quality and sustainable public services. The final chapter then shows how our domestic policy aligns with our feminist approach to international relations and international development.

Definitions

Policy Coherence

Policy coherence refers to how well government policies work together to achieve desired outcomes, such as equality for women and girls. Achieving policy coherence requires potential conflicts between policies to be resolved, so that one policy does not undermine another.

Intersectionality

As set out in our 2022 evidence synthesis paper, '[Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland](#)', intersectionality can be understood in the following ways:

- A recognition that **people are shaped by their simultaneous membership of multiple interconnected social categories**.
- The interaction between multiple social categories occurs within a **context of connected systems and structures of power** (e.g. laws, policies, governments). A recognition of inequality of power is key to intersectionality.
- **Structural inequality**, reflected as relative disadvantage and privilege, are the **outcomes of the interaction between social categories, power relations and contexts**. As a result, an individual's experiences of inequality can be chronic or transitory, creating unique lived experiences.

This definition is used when referring to intersectionality throughout this report, noting that this term has several different definitions due to growing awareness of the concept in academic and policymaking contexts.

Gender Competence

According to the [NACWG's 2019 report](#), gender competence 'refers to the skills, knowledge and analytical capability to develop policy that is well-gendered, and which takes into account the socially constructed differences between men's and women's lives and experiences'.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming means putting equality and human rights at the core of our business.

In practice, this means that equality and human rights are integral to how:

- decisions are made;
- policies are designed and developed;
- services delivered, and;
- money is allocated and spent.

Leadership

Gender inequality is an enduring issue because institutions, systems and structures continue it. Our systems were often built by men, for men, with little thought about the needs and experiences of women and girls. Hidden discrimination can be built into these systems and drive gender inequality. To make significant and long-lasting changes, we need to rethink the way our systems work, so that the needs of women and girls are met.

The Scottish Government shares the NACWG's vision for Scotland to be recognised as a leading nation in the pursuit of gender equality. We recognise that this ambition requires those from across the public, private and third sectors to lead by example in supporting equality and challenging organisations and practice to change. The Scottish Government is pleased to take a role in leading this change.

This section looks at progress made on the NACWG recommendations around leadership. It shows how we are making changes to the Scottish Government's internal systems, structures and processes, to make these more gender competent. These are wide-ranging, from the way we make policy and measure success, to the way we allocate budgets. This section also shows work to change external systems, such as supporting women running for election.

We would encourage other organisations and individuals from across Scotland to consider how they, through their choices, actions and words, can lead the change to the attitudes and culture within their organisations and communities.

Create a 'What Works?' Institute

Recommendation: 'Create a "What Works?" Institute to develop and test robust, evidence-led inclusive and representative approaches to changing public attitudes in Scotland to girls and women's equality and rights.'

We funded Zero Tolerance to research potential models for the What Works Gender Institute. The [report of their findings](#) offers three models, including a recommendation that a foundation model for the Institute be adopted for at least one year to test the model in practice. We committed in the [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#) published in 2024 to commission a grant scheme to progress this work. This grant scheme will be established in the 2025-26 financial year.

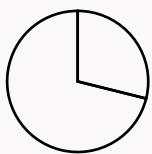
Candidate Quotas

Recommendation: ‘Legislate for local and national candidate quotas for all parties by the 2021 election.’

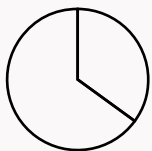


46% of MSPs were women in the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary election

Women are underrepresented in local government



29% of councillors in 2017



35% of councillors in 2022



We are committed to achieving fair and equal political representation. We accepted the ambition behind the NACWG recommendation to legislate for local and national candidate quotas for all parties, however this power is reserved to the UK Parliament so legislation to do this could only be introduced by the UK Government. This means that the Scottish Parliament cannot legislate for local and national candidate quotas for political parties.

Scottish Ministers wrote to the former UK Government in 2018 to seek a meeting to discuss women’s political representation and participation. The UK Government declined the invitation, indicating that they did not believe that quotas were required to deliver increased representation of women in politics. Scottish Ministers continue to call on the current UK Government to introduce gender quotas themselves or give Scotland the power to do so.

In the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary election, we had a historic high of 58 women elected as MSPs (46% of MSPs). This is the highest proportion of women MSPs since the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. We now have two women MSPs of minority ethnic background for the first time in history and our first MSP who is a permanent wheelchair user. However, minority ethnic and disabled women are still unacceptably underrepresented. In local government elections, the percentage of women councillors in Scottish local authorities increased from 29% in 2017 to 35% in 2022. While this is welcome progress, we need to do more to get more women, from all backgrounds, into politics, on both a national and a local level.

Given that the powers to deliver this recommendation from the NACWG are reserved, we are taking action to deliver the ambition of the recommendation within the boundaries of the devolved powers we do have to increase women’s representation in politics and in leadership roles:

Creating change in elected office

- We fund [Elect Her](#) to deliver workshops, coaching and peer support for women entering politics or in office. Elect Her also offers resources designed specifically for women of colour, and for d/Deaf and disabled women. In the 2022 Scottish local authority elections, the organisation supported 54 women to stand as councillors of which 27 were elected.

- We fund Engender to progress the [Equal Representation](#) project. The project postholder works with political parties to increase the representation of diverse women and to progress a second phase of work with the Equal Representation Coalition. The Coalition have developed a [Toolkit](#) for political parties to assess their diversity and policies around inclusion.
- We published our response to the 2024 report by the [Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee](#) (SLARC) that highlighted particular barriers for women, younger people and disabled people when seeking or holding office as a councillor. These include remuneration, childcare, the reputation of politics as a whole, bullying and misogynistic behaviour within councils, personal safety (particularly on social media), and working patterns that are difficult alongside caring responsibilities. New salary levels were accepted and Scottish Ministers will lay regulations early in 2025.
- We fund a Policy Officer post to support the work of COSLA's Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group (BEO SIG). The BEO SIG addresses barriers to elected office for groups currently underrepresented amongst councillors. In 2024, the group focused on delivering SLARC recommendations, disability and accessibility, caring responsibilities, rural councillors, gender, and safety.
- Retention is just as important as the number of women elected. We warmly welcome the work of the Scottish Parliament to complete a [gender-sensitive audit](#) of its rules, practices and culture. The audit, published in 2023, included 34 short, medium and longer term recommendations, focusing on the action it could take to become a gender-sensitive Parliament.

Data collection

- We are working with stakeholders to improve data on the diversity of election candidates and elected representatives in Scotland, to inform and monitor progress on diversity. For example, the [Local Government Candidates Survey 2022](#) examined diversity data of candidates standing at the May 2022 Local Government elections. Further consideration will be given to how this project can be built upon and how a more representative set of data can be gathered in future years. We are working with partner organisations and stakeholder groups to discuss findings and consider next steps.

Women in leadership

- We delivered the [Gender Representation on Public Boards](#) (Scotland) Act 2018, which sets an objective that 50% of a public board's non-executive members are women. It also requires certain steps to be taken to achieve the objective and to encourage applications from women. In April 2021, 52% of regulated ministerial appointments were held by women. This compares with 42% in 2015. Similarly, the majority of listed public authorities subject to the 2018 Act (65%) have achieved the gender representation objective at the time of the last report.
- We fund [Young Women Lead](#) (YWL), a leadership programme for young women and non-binary people aged 16-30, delivered by the Young Women's Movement. The 2024 cohort explored 'democratic wellbeing', including how to amplify political agency and remove barriers to engagement.

Thematic Gender Review of the National Performance Framework

Recommendation: ‘Carry out a thematic gender review of the new National Performance Framework as a catalyst for system analysis and change.’

The [National Performance Framework](#) (NPF) is Scotland’s wellbeing framework. It sets out the Scottish Government’s long-term vision for collective wellbeing, key outcomes people in Scotland will experience through the framework and indicators to monitor progress in delivering the outcomes. The National Outcomes actively seek to promote equality and to ensure equality groups have equal access to the realisation of the Outcomes. Periodic reviews of the NPF are required by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to ensure the NPF continues to drive increased wellbeing. As part of the latest Review of National Outcomes, we published a [thematic gender review](#) in October 2024, to assess how the needs of women and girls can be better represented in the NPF.

During the National Outcomes review, and Parliament inquiry stakeholders expressed concern that the existing NPF falls short in capturing gender inequality.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic has committed the Scottish Government to a period of reform of the NPF. The DFM said in her response to the inquiry that the Finance and Public Administration Committee’s report

provides an extremely useful contribution to the evidence base on which to build this change. No immediate changes will be made to the NPF, including the National Outcomes and National Indicators until this work concludes. As reporting has paused, the NPF website will not be updated; however, Indicator data will continue to be published. It also means that we will revisit the original proposals made following the Scottish Government’s statutory review and laid before the Scottish Parliament in May 2024.

The current 11 National Outcomes are still in operation as is the duty (Community Empowerment Act) on public bodies ‘to have regard’ to them.

Data availability and disaggregation

Data disaggregated by protected characteristic and intersectional data is needed to properly capture the diverse experiences of women and girls. The Equality Data Improvement Programme is working with analysts to improve all equality data availability. The development of this work and its applications to other intersectional elements in the NPF will be explored throughout the NPF reform project.

We are also working to improve the quality of data on women and girls, to support evidence-informed policy making. [Scotland’s Gender Index](#) (GEI) was developed in 2020 and updated in 2023. The purpose of the GEI is to allow tracking over time and identify trends in the issues facing women and girls in Scotland. The GEI presents gender equality numerically with a score of 1 indicating no gender equality and a score of 100 indicating full gender equality. It covers six domains, developed with stakeholders: work, money, time, knowledge, power and health. Like the NPF, the GEI uses indicators from a range of sources to measure equality.

Create a Culture of Gender Equality Policy-making

Recommendation: ‘Creating a culture of gender equality policy-making in the Scottish Government:

- **The creation of a standalone Equalities Directorate along with the establishment of “Centres of Expertise” created in all Scottish Government Directorates, on intersectional gender competence.**
- **The creation of a senior officials and leaders group.**
- **The creation of “Policy-makers National Standards” to support quality standards and accountability on intersectional gender competence in policymaking, with a requirement that all policy and analytical staff will adhere to it.’**

Equalities Directorate and ‘Centres of Expertise’

We established the Directorate for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights which focuses on rights and equality for all of Scotland’s people, particularly those with specific protected

characteristics, such as women. In May 2022, a Centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights was established in Directorate General for Economy. The Centre was an action in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and responds to similar recommendations from both the [Advisory Group on Economic Recovery](#) and the NACWG. Our learning from this will help us set up further Centres of Expertise across the Scottish Government.

The DG Economy Centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights helps build capability in economic policy officials, including increasing gender competence. In 2022 and 2023, over 220 officials attended foundation training on equality, human rights and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The Centre also hosted training on intersectional gender competence, delivered by the Women in Scotland’s Economy (WISE) Centre for Economic Justice at Glasgow Caledonian University in Autumn 2023. The Centre has created a network of economy officials and representatives of the enterprise agencies for peer-to-peer support and sharing of good practice. Future capability building sessions are intended to focus on disabled people, racial equality and intersectionality.

Senior Officials and Leaders Group

We established the Equality and Human Rights Senior Leadership Group (SLG) with senior officials at Director level, chaired by the Director General Communities. The SLG reports on its progress to the Executive Team.

The SLG focuses on addressing systemic and structural barriers to gender competent policy making and delivery. We are developing a plan to identify actions and resources needed to include equality and human rights across all policy and delivery, and identify the specific actions that relate to women’s equality.

To ensure that the SLG is guided by robust external expertise and operates in collaboration with key stakeholders, we engaged a range

of experts, including the NACWG Co-Chairs, the Co-Chairs of the Anti-Racism Interim Governance Group, and representatives from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The group drew on the contributions of subject matter experts such as Professor Angela O'Hagan. Additionally, a dedicated session with the Minister for Equalities focused on an in-depth discussion around setting PSED-related equality outcomes, which informed the new suite of [Equality Outcomes](#) published on 25 April 2025.

Policy-makers National Standards

We are building equality and human rights into our training and standards for policy professionals. 'Professions' are a way we organise and manage specific skills within Scottish Government. 'Professions' help define job types, encourage skill development and career progression, set standards, and support workforce planning. We include equality in our policy profession standards and training opportunities. This will ensure that equality is threaded throughout the policy making process. The Director of Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights sits on the Policy Profession Steering Group to provide senior leadership on equality and human rights in this work.

We have also taken the following steps to make sure that Scottish Government staff understand equality and human rights and how this should be applied to their work:

1. All Scottish Government staff create diversity and inclusion objectives as part of their performance management.
2. In February 2025 the Equality, Inclusion, and Human Rights Directorate hosted a Development Academy Week for SG staff. Sessions were designed to empower the organisation with the knowledge and tools to make a real difference in the workplace and beyond. There were over 1,000 attendees across the week.

3. We have improved our Equality Impact Assessment training and updated our digital learning content with gender competence resources and tools.
4. We have engaged with stakeholders across Scotland. We consulted on the Mainstreaming strategy to explore further options to improve capability and capacity of public sector staff to ensure equality and human rights are a fundamental aspect of policy making and operational delivery. The strategy will be launched later in 2025, along with the Action Plan and Mainstreaming toolkit.

Intersectional Gender Budget Analysis

Recommendation: 'We call on the Scottish Government to integrate intersectional gender budget analysis into the Scottish Budget process, and to give this a statutory footing.'

We have made notable progress over the past two years to integrate intersectional budget analysis (the process of considering how budget decisions might impact different groups) into the Scottish Budget process over the past two years. We sought the support of the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to help identify opportunities to go further.

A key part of our work is the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement (EFSBS), published alongside the Scottish Budget. The Scottish Government has produced an

equality statement alongside the budget every year since 2009, and latterly an Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement. It responds to our legal duties to assess the Equality and Fairer Scotland impacts of budget decisions. It requires every portfolio to examine the impact of their budget on women and men under the protected characteristic of sex as set out under the Equality Act 2010 as well as assessing the cumulative impact of budget decisions (see [Annex A](#) of the EFSBS).

This year's EFSBS focused on the impact of eight key decisions and case studies to show how equality and socioeconomic evidence fed into budget decisions, and how budgets are delivered. It also explored the distributional impacts of key budget measures, including some areas of public spending as well as tax and benefits, on households. We used [six key questions for policy makers](#) to structure the case studies. These questions were developed in collaboration with the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG).

We also commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to conduct a review of our approach to gender budgeting, and support an internal pilot to learn from international best practice on intersectional gender budgeting. The [findings of an evaluation](#) of the pilot and a summary of the OECD's review was published alongside the Budget in December. The OECD found strong political commitment to addressing inequalities and the supporting role of organisations like the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) and the National advisory Council Women and Girls (NACWG).

The pilot evaluation identified two current impediments to rolling out the gender budgeting approach more widely in the near future:

- the lack of strategic over-arching gender goals and;
- the need to move away from the current portfolio based budget model and towards a more performance-oriented approach. This would require a more comprehensive and longer-term reform programme.

The report also cautions, however, that the OECD's recommended approach will need to be adapted in order to ensure the suitability of any new approach to the country-specific context.

In response to a Call to Action from the [NACWG report](#) published in 2024, we have committed to co-designing Scotland's first Equality Strategy for Women and Girls with gender equality stakeholders and diverse women and girls. This ambitious strategy will include gender goals which will be applied in gender budgeting as recommended by the OECD.

As part of continuing this work, we are now exploring options to test other gender budgeting methodologies. This includes running a further pilot to develop 'gender budget tagging' for the upcoming budget. Until gender goals are available, this will look at a cross-cutting policy area which includes a focus on improving outcomes for women, such as child poverty.

We commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to run pilots to learn from international best practice on intersectional gender budgeting. The goal is to help us improve our capacity to use the budget process as an effective and impactful tool to reduce gender inequality. The project will include training for officials and support in piloting a strengthened approach to gender budgeting, potentially within two Scottish Government Directorates.

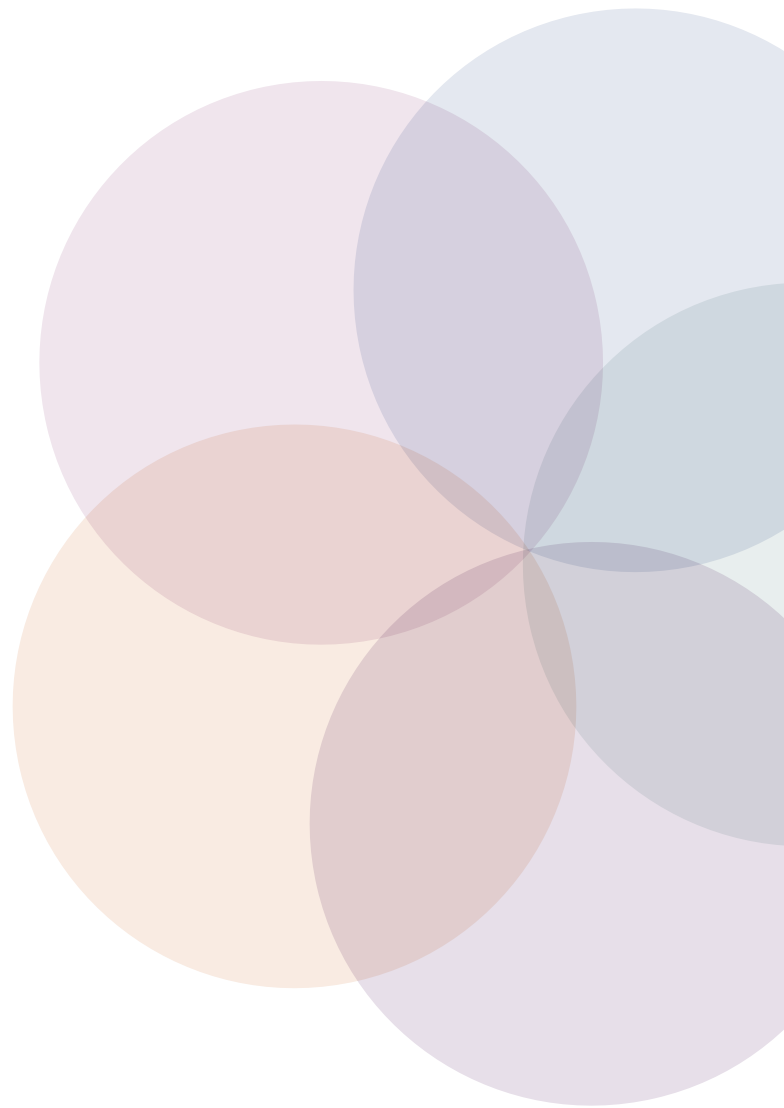
Devolution of Equality Legislation and Policy-making

Recommendation: ‘We call for Scottish Government to advocate for the full devolution of equality legislation and policy-making to the Scottish Parliament.’

We have long called for further devolution of powers to Scotland including on equality legislation.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government wrote to the former UK Government’s Minister for Women and Equalities (Liz Truss MP) in December 2021 drawing her attention to this recommendation and seeking further dialogue on the devolution of equal opportunities. A follow up letter was sent in February. We received a response in March 2022 from Kemi Badenoch, MP and Minister for Levelling Up and Equalities, making clear their position that no further powers relating to equality would be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

We have continued to advocate to the current UK Government the full devolution of equality legislation to the Scottish Parliament to enable us to enact progressive and inclusive Scottish values.



Accountability

Gender inequality is a complex issue. It won't be solved with superficial or one-off changes. Achieving gender equality requires sustained, intentional and collective effort. This is why accountability is important. Developing accountability and transparency is a key driver in the Mainstreaming Strategy, ensuring Scottish Government and the wider public sector are accountable to the public and stakeholders for the way they have carried out their functions. Accountability around gender inequality allows us to identify areas of good practice and maintain high standards. It also helps us identify areas of improvement, and to implement and evaluate changes. Key services must meet the needs of women and girls, and a culture of accountability encourages self-reflection, sharing of best practice and collective ownership of gender equality goals. After all, gender equality is everyone's business.

This section looks at progress made on the NACWG recommendations around accountability. It shows how we are encouraging change in Scotland's media and culture. This includes evaluating Scottish media for sexist and misogynistic content, providing guidance on gender-sensitive media and responsible reporting of violence against women and girls, and supporting equal opportunities and fair work in the media and culture sectors. This section also shows our work to address sexual violence, misogyny and domestic abuse, including the ways we are improving the justice system and support services to better meet the needs of women and girls.



A recent report by the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board found that **22% of articles on women's sport included perceived sexualised content**



17.6% of major newspaper editors are women



No women are political editors of major newspapers



All national broadcasters are **headed by men**

Create a Resourced Media Body on Gender Equality

Recommendation: ‘Create a resourced media body in Scotland to hold the media to account and provide guidance on gender equality.’

The Scottish Government is clear that a strong, free, and independent press is the bedrock of a well-functioning democracy. As well as editorial independence, we believe that media plurality, a diversity of voices, and fair representation, are all key to maintaining and improving the vibrant landscape of news media in Scotland. Media services and the press have the power to challenge gender inequality and norms, as well as the underpinning attitudes that perpetuate and condone violence against women and girls. We also believe women should be fairly and properly represented as professionals within the creative industries.

The NACWG recommended that the Scottish Government create a resourced media body to publicly review media which is sexist, misogynistic or bigoted, as well as to provide guidance on gender equal media and strengthen the intersectional voices of women in media. The media body was intended to evaluate, provide guidance and promote best practice, rather than regulate or censor the media.

As an initial step, we funded a Development Manager post in Engender to develop a long-term vision and identify potential delivery models for the media body, in collaboration with industry experts, academics, campaigners

and the public sector. The [Equal Media and Culture Centre for Scotland](#) (EMCC) then launched in 2023. It conducts research to understand gender representation and diversity in Scottish media and culture. It also monitors progress towards gender equality, such as monitoring the representation in leadership positions, diverse portrayal of women in media content, and the presence of harmful gender stereotypes. Through strategic partnerships, campaigns, and policy advocacy, the EMCC advocates for diverse representation, gender-sensitive content, and equal opportunities in Scottish media and culture.

The media is key in shaping public attitudes towards violence against women and girls (VAWG). Responsible reporting, which does not normalise or minimise VAWG, helps the public understand how pervasive VAWG is, its causes, who is affected, and how it can be prevented. It can also help victim-survivors recognise their own experiences and encourage them to seek support. Tackling gender inequality in the media is an important strand of our work on ending VAWG. Our refreshed [Equally Safe](#) strategy takes a public health approach to ending VAWG and challenges the notion that VAWG is inevitable or acceptable. As a result, our [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#) focuses heavily on developing a primary prevention approach to VAWG, that is, preventing VAWG before it occurs. Our wider work on changing attitudes around gender equality is also part of primary prevention.

Funded by the Scottish Government, Zero Tolerance developed guidelines for journalists and content creators on how to accurately and sensitively report on VAWG ([broadcast edition](#), [national edition](#)). The guidance includes tips for reporting on different forms of VAWG, including rape and sexual assault, domestic abuse and domestic homicide, harmful traditional practices, commercial sexual exploitation, online abuse, and child sexual

abuse. It highlights approaches to avoid, such as excusing, glamourising or sensationalising violence. The guidance also includes best practice on issues affecting specific groups of women, such as covering forms of violence from harmful traditional practices, like forced marriage or female genital mutilation, without stigmatising any ethnic groups or religions. It also highlights how different inequality affect women's experiences of violence. For example, disabled women are twice as likely to experience men's violence as non-disabled women.

The EMCC is also concerned with the experiences of and the opportunities for women working in the media and culture industries, examining workplace policy and culture, as well as boards and leadership teams. Scotland's creative workforce broadly includes groups such as artists, musicians, authors and playwrights as well as those who work in museums, galleries, theatres or historic attractions. However, evidence suggests that there is still a lack of diversity across gender, disability, sexuality, age and socio-economic background in the creative workforce. We need diverse creative voices, reflecting Scotland's diverse audiences. We encourage media providers to be ambitious in addressing diversity and gender equality issues. Below are some examples of projects we support to meet this goal.

We are committed to supporting the creative workforce, and continuing work on making the creative and culture sectors part of our broader Fair Work agenda. Creative Scotland commissioned Culture Radar to undertake a status review on behalf of the Scottish Government, to consider Fair Work, leadership, workforce and skills development. The [Culture Radar Review on Fair Work \(2022\)](#) showed that women, people of colour and those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds are still systematically blocked from entering, remaining and progressing from an early career

stage. Surveys on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also show the significant impact on disabled groups and others facing barriers in the sector.

The [Culture Fair Work Taskforce](#) includes representatives from unions, employers, sector representative organisations, freelancers and government agencies. It will develop recommendations for actions to further implement Fair Work First in the culture sector, including consideration of a sectoral Culture Fair Work Agreement. This aligns with action set out in the Fair Work Action Plan and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) which both commit to developing sectoral Fair Work Agreements in partnership with industry and trade unions, to deliver payment of the real Living Wage, better work security, and wider Fair Work standards. A Fair Work Agreement for Scotland's creative and culture sectors is likely to have a disproportionately positive impact for women including those groups facing intersecting inequality such as disabled women and women of colour.

Screen Scotland launched the British Film Institute Diversity Standards pilot in 2022, which has been extended until 2025, meaning productions must meet those standards to be eligible for funding. The standards apply across protected characteristics, as well as addressing under-representation in regional participation, socioeconomic background, and caring responsibilities. Productions may demonstrate, for example, that a lead character is a woman, or that there is a 50-50 gender balance in crew or minor on-screen characters. While broadcasting is reserved, we continue to advocate for improving diversity, equality and data collection in broadcasting in our communications with UK Government, the broadcasters and the UK communications regulator Ofcom.

Scotland's five National Performing Companies undertake significant outreach work, including school and wider community engagement programmes reaching right across Scotland. These include Scottish Ballet's [Safe to be Me Programme](#) with schools which uses dance and film to introduce topics such as racism, homophobia, ableism, and transphobia. The National Performing Companies are supported by grant funding from the Scottish Government.

Improve Access to Justice against Men's Violence

Recommendation: 'Improve access to justice for women and girls experiencing men's violence by:

- **Creating a world-leading process for complainers of sexual violence.**
- **Criminalise serious misogynistic harassment, filling gaps in existing laws.**
- **Create a consistent and inclusive model to ensure that women experiencing domestic abuse have sufficient access to expert legal advice and legal aid.'**

Sexual Violence

The Scottish Government is determined to improve the justice system to better meet the needs of survivors of rape and sexual assault. We recognise that women experience the

justice system differently from men and that a greater understanding of gender must be promoted.

We set up the Women's Justice Leadership Panel in January 2022, bringing together expert women from all aspects of the justice system to discuss the experience and unique needs of women and what this means for justice processes, including the interaction with trauma. Their findings on [gendered and intersectional approaches to justice](#) are vital in continuing our understanding and awareness of gender and its impact across the justice system.

The Panel examined several themes in which women's experience of justice varies from that of men, including caring responsibilities and 'hidden sentences' (having a loved one in prison); gaps between policy and practice; culture, gender and sexism; victim and offender status; and intersectionality and data gaps. The report and key findings have been shared with justice partners and across the Scottish Government and will be used to inform and complement work being progressed under our Justice Strategy and transformational reforms.

Sexual Assault Response Coordination Services (SARCS)

Creating a trauma-informed process for people who have experienced sexual violence is an important part of improving our justice system for women and girls. The Scottish Parliament passed the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Act in 2021 (FMS Act) which provides a statutory basis for health boards to provide person centred, trauma informed forensic medical services for people who have experienced rape or sexual assault. Ensuring these responsibilities rest with the NHS helps to ensure that an individual's holistic healthcare needs are paramount.

The FMS Act also establishes a legal framework for consistent access to 'self-referral'. This

allows people aged 16 and over, subject to professional judgement, to access healthcare services and a forensic medical examination within a SARCS without first having to make a report to the police. Any evidence obtained from the forensic medical examination is stored securely within the SARCS in accordance with Scottish criminal justice system requirements and is retained for 26 months from the date of the forensic medical examination. This gives someone two years and two months to consider their options around reporting to the police, whilst also ensuring their healthcare needs are met. It also avoids having to make difficult decisions at the same time of year as the rape or sexual assault happened.

We know, from listening to survivors, that access to self-referral is an important aspect of giving people back control. Sandy Brindley, Chief Executive of Rape Crisis Scotland, said that the roll-out of SARCS represents 'a transformation in how we respond to rape in Scotland.' (Holyrood Magazine, March 2023).

We have allocated over £17 million since 2017 to support the development of a Sexual Assault Coordination Service (SARCS) in every health board area for people who have recently experienced rape or sexual assault. We are continuing to invest in SARCS in 2025-2026, with funding provided for key national actions, including:

- funding the SARCS Network to provide national leadership for SARCS within the NHS and to help ensure consistency in the quality of service provided;
- funding a SARCS Patient Advocate post to ensure the voice of lived experience is embedded in everything we do;
- raising awareness of SARCS with NHS Boards and the public;

- developing the SARCS workforce through investment in training for doctors and nurses; and
- funding the NHS 24 telephony service and other nationally delivered projects – as well as supporting the continuous improvement of SARCS services locally.

Bairns' Hoose

The Bairns' Hoose programme is part of our work to improve support and access to justice for children, including those experiencing men's violence, which we know is often linked to violence against women. Bairns' Hoose aims to provide a genuinely child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma, including child sexual abuse. We are testing our approach to Bairns' Hoose across ten geographical areas – providing safe, trauma-informed environments where child victims and witnesses can access multi-agency support and recovery services in line with our 2025-26 Programme for Government commitment. We have, to date, supported this with investment of almost £10 million from 2023 to 2025 with up to £10.5 million of further investment in 2025-26.

The Bairns' Hoose programme is already improving children and young people's experiences of the child protection, justice and health services as partnerships start to introduce Bairns' Hoose style services across Scotland. While stages and approaches vary between partnerships, the primary focus of the work has been on further development of partnerships across local authorities, Police Scotland, health and the third sector as well as planning for and carrying out building work to develop child friendly, trauma-informed environments.

Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill

We introduced the [Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform \(Scotland\) Bill](#) in 2023. It is intended to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses in Scotland's justice system and to therefore improve access to justice for women and girls experiencing men's violence. This progresses our [Vision for Justice strategy](#), which envisions a person-centred and trauma-informed justice system that better serves women, girls and victims.

Building on recommendations from Lady Dorrian's Review into the [Improving the Management of Sexual Offence Cases](#), there is a particular focus on improving the experiences of victims and survivors of sexual crime. Evidence in our [Equality Impact Assessment](#) suggests that those most at risk of gender-based violence, sexual crime and domestic abuse have less confidence in the justice system and are more likely to be retraumatised by justice processes. Disabled and minority ethnic women and girls in particular face barriers to reporting crimes and accessing support.

The Bill's focus on sexual offences and trauma-informed practice is intended to significantly improve the experience of all women and girls in contact with justice agencies.

Corroboration

The NACWG recommended reviewing the law on corroboration as part of creating a world-leading process for complainants of sexual violence. The corroboration rule has been a unique feature of criminal law in Scotland for hundreds of years. The accused cannot be convicted of a crime unless the essential facts of the crime are established by evidence from at least two independent sources. However, corroborative evidence is less likely to exist for certain offences usually committed in private, such as domestic abuse, sexual crimes, and

abuse of children and older or protected adults. Some argue that the corroboration rule can therefore deny access to justice for victims of these types of crime, who are predominantly women and girls.

In 2023 and 2024, the Lord Advocate used the mechanism known as a 'Lord Advocates Reference', to seek the opinion of the High Court on points of law relating to corroboration. This was a decision which the Lord Advocate took independently, in her role as head of the prosecution system in Scotland. The outcomes of those References have been widely hailed as significant in improving access to justice for victims of sexual offences by allowing more evidence to be considered of corroborative value. As a result of these decisions, more cases will now meet the test for legal sufficiency, meaning there is enough evidence or information to support a claim or argument in a legal case.

The [Lord Advocate has commented](#) that this decision will improve access to justice for victims and has the potential to 'transform' the way that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) prosecute all offences, in particular sexual offences. COPFS is the public body that prosecutes crimes and investigates deaths in Scotland. COPFS is considering the terms of the rulings carefully and we are working with them and other partners to understand and respond to the likely systemic impact.

Legal advice and legal aid

Investing in legal advice and legal aid means that women experiencing domestic abuse can more easily and effectively navigate the legal system, improving their access to justice. The Scottish Parliament passed the [Regulation of Legal Services \(Scotland\) Bill](#) in May 2025. Current practice on how third sector organisations can provide reserved legal services is considered unnecessarily

complicated and restrictive, negatively impacting those seeking advice. If passed by Parliament, The Bill will remove restrictions preventing charities, law centres and citizen's advice bodies from directly employing solicitors to provide certain legal services to some of the country's most vulnerable citizens.

We awarded £48m to victims' organisations for the period 2022-2025 under our Victim Centred Approach Fund as part of our commitment to putting victims at the heart of the justice system. This fund now forms part of our Fairer Funding pilot, under which the intent is that recipients will continue to receive awards for the next two financial years. This means we will provide £32m to 23 organisations between 2025-2027, including £12m for specialist advocacy support for survivors of gender-based violence:

- The Scottish Women's Rights Centre which offers free legal information and advice to women in Scotland who have or are experiencing gender-based violence (up to £230,000 a year)
- Linked to this, a project that employs advocacy workers, a project co-ordinator and admin support, and delivers a national helpline (up to £384,026)
- A pilot project, established through the Scottish Legal Aid Board, to support Scottish Women's Aid for the provision of legal advice to those affected by gender-based violence (up to £432,000 from 2023-2026)
- Rape Crisis Scotland's National Advocacy Project which ensures there is a key support worker in every Rape Crisis Centre in Scotland to help victims engage with the criminal justice process.

In March 2024, we launched a pilot scheme allowing complainers in High Court sexual offences cases to have [free access to](#)

[transcripts](#) of their court cases. The pilot will help us understand why applications are made, the potential volume of applications and if cost is a barrier.

Misogyny

The NACWG recommended that the Scottish Government should criminalise serious misogynistic harassment by filling gaps in existing laws. The Scottish Government is committed to delivering new protections for women and girls, and so new protections for women and girls will be introduced via Hate Crime legislation.

In 2023 the Scottish Government consulted on draft legislation to implement the recommendations for criminal law reform contained in the report published by the [Working Group on Misogyny and the Criminal Law](#) chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy. However, misogyny is a complex area of policy and law, and any new criminal law needs to be clear and unambiguous in regard to the circumstances in which they apply.

Instead we will deliver new protections for women and girls by adding the characteristic of sex to the [Hate Crime and Public Order \(Scotland\) Act 2021](#). This will mean women and girls have the same protections as other groups protected by that Act. We will lay before the Scottish Parliament in September a proposed draft of a Scottish Statutory Instrument to make the required changes under that Act. This will criminalise stirring up hatred on the basis of sex, and allow for a sentencing aggravation where an offender demonstrates, or is motivated by, prejudice on the basis of sex. This is a proven model for providing legal protections with the operation of statutory aggravations and stirring up hatred offences for existing characteristics such as race and religion.

We recognise the gendered nature of the harm caused to women and girls. We will take forward further work and engagement on the harms caused by misogyny, including what more could be done to tackle the underlying attitudes that lead to misogyny and gender based abuse. Our [Equally Safe Strategy](#) focuses on violence and abusive behaviour carried out predominately by men and directed at women and girls precisely because they are women and girls. The Strategy places emphasis on challenging gender inequality and norms, and the underpinning attitudes that perpetuate and condone such violence.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

In March 2024 a Multi-Agency Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation was established to inform our approach to tackling all forms of commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, trafficking, lap dancing, stripping and pornography. It will also inform the implementation of Scotland's [Strategic Approach](#) to challenging men's demand for prostitution. The group's work is driven by the [Equally Safe Strategy](#) and its clear definition that commercial sexual exploitation is a form of violence against women. The work of the group will also align with the Scottish Government's [Vision for Justice](#), and will also be guided by [policy principles](#) published in 2022, which were developed by a previous [Short Life Working Group](#).

Domestic Abuse

In 2018, the Scottish Parliament passed our Bill to tackle domestic abuse in Scotland. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 created a specific offence of domestic abuse that covers not just physical abuse, but also other forms of psychological abuse as well as coercive and controlling behaviour.

Our services must acknowledge the significant trauma survivors experience to best support survivors. It is reassuring to note that [research on the operation of our ground-breaking Domestic Abuse legislation](#) found that it does better meet their needs.

In addition, and following the Criminal Justice Committee's post-legislative scrutiny of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, we established a Domestic Abuse Roundtable comprising justice partners who considered the initial implementation of the Act. Members include Scottish Government, Justice Analytical Services, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Judicial Institute for Scotland, Police Scotland, and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. Key focus areas of the group include developing the evidence base, improving victim experience, tackling perpetrators, improving multi agency working, early intervention/prevention and changing societal attitudes.

Police Scotland's Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS) has helped safeguard those who have been suffering from, or are at risk of, domestic abuse. It aims to tackle and prevent domestic abuse by providing individuals with the right to ask police about a partner's background, if they suspect they have a history of domestic abuse. Requests can also be made on their behalf by a concerned family member, friend or neighbour.

Applications to DSDAS have increased 435% between 2015 and the end of the 2023/24 period. In the last five years alone (2019/20 to 2023/24) the number of applications received annually has increased by 111%, more than doubling, from 2,648 to 5,589. This includes a 113% increase in Right To Ask applications from members of the public.

Domestic Homicide and Suicide Reviews

The Scottish Government introduced part two of [the Criminal Justice Modernisation & Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews \(Scotland\) Bill](#) in the Scottish Parliament in September 2024. This includes provisions to create the statutory framework for Scotland's first national multi-agency domestic homicide and suicide review model. This review model aims to learn lessons following a death where abuse is known or suspected and to ensure a voice is given to those who have died and their family. Our commitment to develop a review model was set out within the [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#). Provisions with the Bill have been informed by the [Domestic Homicide and Suicide Review Taskforce](#).

The types of deaths included within the review model scope are: those killed by a partner or ex-partner; violent resistance, where a person kills their abusive partner or ex-partner; where a perpetrator of domestic abuse kills their children (of any age) or their partner/ex-partner's children (of any age); those under 18 (or under 26 for "looked after" children) who are killed as part of an incident of abusive domestic behaviour; and domestic abuse-related which has or may have been contributed to by abuse from a current or former partner. The Bill makes provision for the model scope to be expanded to include other types of deaths or events. Whilst recognising that the majority of domestic homicides are carried out by men against women, the provisions and continuing development include victims of all genders.

In 2023-24, 57 victims of homicide were recorded of which 77% (44) were male and 23% (13) were female. Of the 13 female victims, 38% (5 of the 13) were killed by a partner or ex-partner.

Equality Focused Review Body in the Scottish Parliament

Recommendation: 'We call for an Equality Focused Review Body to be established in the Scottish Parliament.'

While recognising that this recommendation is for the Scottish Parliament to consider and respond to, we are supportive in principle.

Creating Conditions

Changing attitudes and culture is an essential part of creating the conditions for gender equality. The messages we receive can limit our choices about what we and others can do and be. Gender stereotyping and unconscious bias creates barriers for women and girls. Policies and practice also shape our lives. When services are not designed with women and girls in mind, and without their participation, then these services risk not meeting the needs of women. This can cause harm and create additional barriers for women and girls. Gender-sensitive design helps us get service design right for everyone.

This section looks at progress made on the NACWG recommendations around creating the right conditions for change. This includes work to improve gender equality in education and learning settings, as well as providing flexible, accessible and high quality childcare, supporting more women to work or study if they choose. This section also discusses co-producing service design with people with lived experience, and the collection and analysis of robust intersectional data to help us create the conditions for effective, gender-sensitive policy.

Create a Commission on Gender Equality in Education and Learning

Recommendation: ‘Create a Commission on Gender Equality in Education and Learning, covering Early Years, Primary and Secondary Education and Learning, tasked with providing bold and far-reaching recommendations on how gender equality can be embedded in all aspects of learning (from teacher training, to school behaviours/cultures, to the curriculum and CLD practice).’

The Scottish Government has established a Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning to address gender disparities that remain in Scotland’s education system and learning establishments from early years, through primary and secondary school, and community learning settings. For example, while girls’ performance overall in SCQF exams at all levels outstrips boys (in 2023, girls were 50.1% of National 5 candidates, 53.7% of Higher candidates and 55.2% of Advanced Higher candidates) girls are over-represented in subjects which are traditionally considered female and underrepresented in those traditionally considered male. During 2019-2023, female candidates at Higher were significantly over-represented in art and design, biology, drama, dance, all languages, fashion

and textiles, and childcare and development. During the same period, male candidates at Higher far exceeded female candidates in mathematics, economics, accounting, graphic communications, PE, music technology, physics, computing and engineering science. This gender segregation in subject choice and career pathways contributes to women being under-represented in STEM careers, as well as the gender pay gap.

The Taskforce first met in early 2020; however early progress was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 the group re-convened and engaged feminist research organisation The Collective, the Children's Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament to work collaboratively to develop a [theory of change model](#) and [recommendations](#) in consultation with young women and girls.

The reports shone a light on the deep-rooted gender inequality which girls and young women continue to face in education settings. These issues include, but are not limited to: sexual harassment and gender based violence experienced by girls and young women; observing teachers experiencing sexual harassment and gender based violence; boys dominating playground space and dictating the type of games played; a reluctance to choose subjects traditionally dominated by boys; male teachers assuming that girls will not perform as well as boys in stereotypically 'male' subject areas; and holding them to higher standard if they do.

The Taskforce is now co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth MSP and Kathryn Dawson, Rape Crisis Sexual Violence Prevention Co-ordinator. Under their leadership, the Taskforce has re-shaped its focus so that it has the twin aims of:

- identifying and advising on measures to address gender inequality in education and learning settings and;

- being an action- and outcomes-focused group, addressing the key drivers of gender inequality, establishing ways in which barriers can be removed, and working with leaders in the education sector to influence successful implementation of ambitions and strengthen accountability.

In practice, this means that it will:

- Provide focused stakeholder groups to take a strategic view of emerging and existing education policy ambitions, and apply a gendered lens to both the high level ambitions and detailed actions within them.
- Provide leadership, strategic direction and oversight that will drive systemic change.
- Develop and provide a systemic overview of gender equality across the education policy landscape that will:
 - Provide measures which determine what success looks like in terms of whole systems change;
 - Provide policy coherence across the education landscape;
 - Identify levers to tackle gender inequality in education;
 - Identify where gaps exist and where work requires to be undertaken to address those.

Going forward in this way will result in policy coherence across all areas endeavouring to tackle gender inequality and which require expert input within the Scottish Government, executive agencies, and wider national and international commitments. These include, but are not limited to, the Scottish Government's Behaviour in Schools Action Plan; Equally Safe at School; Education Scotland's wider Equalities Work; STEM subject choice; Mentors in Violence Prevention; LGBTI Inclusion work; UNCRC; Learning for Sustainability; and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality.

In 2024, the Taskforce worked with the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour (SAGRABIS) in the development of the [Behaviour in Schools Action Plan](#) to ensure that a gendered lens was applied to the action with in it. Members of the Taskforce also sat on the Scottish Government’s Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group, contributing to the production of the [Gender Based Violence in Schools Framework](#).

Provide 50 hours per Week of Childcare

Recommendation: ‘Provide 50 hours per week of funded, good quality and flexible education and childcare for all children between six months and five years old.’

As set out in our [Strategic Childcare Plan](#), we are committed to high quality childcare that is flexible, accessible and affordable. We recognise the key role childcare plays as part of the economic infrastructure that supports parents and carers to work, train or study. Research shows that women are most likely to bear the responsibility for caring within families, and so are most impacted when there are barriers to accessing childcare.

Early Learning & Childcare

Affordable and flexible Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) can improve standards of living and address child poverty, as well as support equal employment opportunities between women and men. We fund the delivery of 1,140 hours of high quality ELC to all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds, regardless of the working status of their parents – putting children first. Families can access up to 30

hours of funded ELC each week in term time, or around 22 hours a week spread across the calendar year.

The NACWG would like to see this expanded to 50 hours a week. However, our ELC offer is one of the most significant reforms to public services in a generation as we almost doubled the ELC entitlement from 600 to 1140 hours per year in 2021. In 2025-26 we will continue to ensure access to affordable, high-quality funded early learning and childcare services – investing around £1 billion a year.

In December 2023 we published updated [guidance](#) on Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard which sets out the expectation that local authorities use these principles and criteria to shape local funded Early Learning and Childcare. This means that in each area, parents and carers should be able to choose from a range of types of setting and different patterns of provision from the public, private or third sector, or a childminder.

Fair Work has been central to the delivery of 1140 hours of funded ELC. All providers of funded ELC must meet our Fair Work standards. The ELC Real Living Wage and Fair Work Implementation Group identifies barriers and support for the sector in implementing Fair Work practices. In 2025-26 we are making a further £9.7 million available to enable childcare staff delivering funded hours in the private and third sectors to continue to be paid at least the real Living Wage, building on the £16 million investment we made in 2024-25. This is an important part of our Fair Work agenda in a 96% female workforce. We are also working with the Scottish Childminding Association to scale up their innovative childminder recruitment pilots and test new approaches to improving retention in this largely female workforce.

We have a robust [strategy for evaluating](#) the impact of the early learning and childcare (ELC) expansion programme to 1140 hours. As part of our evaluation strategy we published

a report from a survey of [parents' views on ELC](#). Most respondents (95%) were women. We also looked at income/SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), rurality, household type (lone/couple parent), parental age group, whether parents had a limiting health condition (disability), a child(ren) with additional support needs, or English as a second language. 74% of respondents said the funded hours enabled them to work or look for work, 47% felt happier and 46% felt less stressed. Those living in deprived areas, lone parents and younger (under 25s) parents were more likely to report these benefits.

School Age Childcare

We know that an expanded childcare offering for school age children is crucial to tackling child poverty, promoting family wellbeing, driving greater gender equality and to Keep The Promise to our care experienced children. Our [Delivery Framework for School Age Childcare](#) sets out how we will build a system of school age childcare, centred around people and place, and how we will measure the impact of early delivery.

Our [Equality Impact Assessment for the School Age Childcare Programme](#) shows that the burden of school age childcare falls disproportionately onto women rather than men, particularly in blended families, impacting women's capacity to take up work, education or training. The EQIA also highlights particular challenges in accessing school age childcare for families with children with disabilities and/or additional support needs, and that children in families with at least one disabled adult or child account for over two-fifths (42%) of children in relative poverty. There is also an underrepresentation of minority ethnic families using school age childcare, extending to other minoritised families including religious minority families, asylum seeker, refugee and migrant families and gypsy traveller women and families.

In on-going policy development, and within our delivery projects, we are focusing on establishing the experiences, needs and concerns of minoritised families, to improve uptake and experiences of services. Building on the findings from our EQIA we have sought to identify opportunities within our programme to apply a clearer intersectional gender lens and ensure a deeper focus on the needs of minoritised women and families.

Early Adopter Communities

The childcare Early Adopter Communities (EACs) are expanding access to affordable childcare for low-income families with children from early years through to the end of primary school, and evaluating the difference this can make. This work is supporting families in 23 communities in Clackmannanshire, Dundee, Fife, Glasgow, Inverclyde and Shetland. The EACs will be a leading source of evidence, data and insights relating to the approach and outcomes associated with place-based, people-centred systems of childcare.

We are investing up to £16 million over two years within the six local authority areas participating in our EACs - expanding access to childcare services to tackle poverty and improve outcomes for children. The EACs are aligned with wider tackling poverty initiatives and public service reform Fairer Futures Partnership approaches, ensuring that we are focused on how to deliver excellent and sustainable public services for communities which support families to enter and sustain meaningful employment.

Our People Panel co-design discovery project found that school age childcare provision must be flexible to account for complex decisions and changeable circumstances families must navigate in work, family and finances. It highlighted that the burden of this complexity most often falls on women. In both phases of the People Panel Codesign Discovery

project, people with intersecting protected characteristics were underrepresented and we are taking steps to address this.

To deliver on what the People Panel told us, we have invested in a programme of skills development to support and equip the EACs to embed our approach principles and ensure that they have the skills required to co-design local systems of childcare with parents, carers, and childcare providers. Developing their capacity to engage with minoritised families and equip them to apply an intersectional gender lens to the evidence they gather is an important focus. We are committed to going beyond our place-based services to better understand the needs of marginalised women and girls as we develop our policy further. We are also engaging with the Gender Equality Taskforce on Education & Learning to inform and shape this work and support alignment with other areas of Scottish Government.

Women in Scotland experience inequality in a [wide range of areas](#), and mothers face additional, specific forms of disadvantage (in relation to [employment](#), for example). In all of our tests of change, those benefitting from funded childcare are typically women. Our EACs have a high proportion of lone parents, almost 100% of whom are women. It is therefore important that the next phase of evaluation of our Early Adopter Communities considers gender wherever possible. Gendered and intersectional analysis has therefore been included as a requirement for the next phase of evaluation. This will include a focus on families, parents/carers, or children who fall into more than one of these groups:

- Minority ethnic families
- Families with children with Additional Support Needs (ASN)
- Single parents
- Disabled parents

For the next stage of EAC evaluation, we are working with internal and external gender equality experts to support the development of this intersectional data collection, analysis and outcomes reporting. This stage will include evaluation of impact on short- to medium-term outcomes, process and spend and we expect this evaluation to run between Spring 2025 and Summer 2026.

Finding, managing & paying for Childcare

We know that improving the quality and availability of information about school age childcare is an important step in removing the barriers experienced by parents and carers seeking to access it - the responsibility for which still falls primarily on women. Similarly, we need to ensure that all users have easy access to information about the childcare funding and support available from the Scottish and UK Governments, such as Universal Credit childcare element and Tax Free Childcare.

We are progressing work towards a digital service that will help parents and carers find and manage childcare that meets their needs. As part of this work, we have undertaken exploratory research on the needs of parents and carers and providers, in a potential digital service. During this work we focused on our six priority family groups, and held a dedicated workshop for minority ethnic parents and carers to share their experiences. Our EACs are also supporting parents to better access existing entitlements to childcare subsidies through Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare

Extra Time Programme

In a joint initiative with the Scottish Football Association (SFA), our 'Extra Time Programme' is supporting local football clubs and trusts to provide before school, after school and holiday clubs to targeted primary school children from low-income families. Over 2024/25, the Extra

Time Programme is supporting 31 clubs across the country, providing around 3,500 children and families with access to vital services, to support them entering and sustaining employment, training and study, as well as better understanding the impact of reducing inequalities of access to children's activities for those most at risk of living in poverty.

We know that despite increased focus on the girl's game, football is often still stereotypically seen as a boys' sport with lower rates of female participation. Some clubs are offering 'girls only' activity club sessions as part of the Extra Time Programme, to encourage and increase girls' participation in football. This year, clubs began reporting on the number of girls and boys participating in the programme. The data from the [Extra Time Annual Impact Report](#), published in November 2024, shows that the number of girls taking part in the clubs during term time is above the SFA's national participation gender breakdown.

Breakfast Provision

The £3m Bright Start Breakfasts fund we have recently launched will create more free places at breakfast clubs for thousands of primary school children across Scotland, and provide childcare before the school day. We know that women often work in sectors and roles with reduced flexibility and the important role that flexible and affordable childcare can play in supporting employment. Alongside the provision of food, breakfast clubs also provide valuable support to parents before the school day, enabling early drop off to provide them with increased opportunities for employment.

Engagement & Co-design

To support taking a people-centred and place-based approach to service design, we developed design principles to guide our co-design work, reflecting the approach outlined in the [Scottish Approach to Service Design](#) (SATSD). The principles can be understood as

explicit commitments we make to co-design participants to ensure that that our work reflects established practice in person-centred design, and that co-design participants have clear expectations of how we will work with them. We have also been conscious of the impact of gender and other intersecting characteristics, and sought to take a 'gender sensitive' approach to design, as laid out in the [SATSD](#).

In all our engagement and co-design to date, we have prioritised the inclusion of people in our Tackling Child Poverty priority family groups, many of them members of minoritised communities, such as minority ethnic families, families with a disabled family member, families in which the mother is aged under 25 and lone parents, the majority of whom are mothers. We have also worked with organisations holding trusted relationships with those we have sought to engage, such as One Parent Families Scotland, BEMIS & CEMVO. When undertaking co-design with children for our [National Children's Charter for school age childcare](#), we worked with a local Young Carers Group to ensure that young carers' needs were represented. Our EACs are working closely with local community organisations to ensure that the needs of minoritised families are considered.

In order to further embed the voices of intersectional women in the co-design of the School Age Childcare Programme, officials undertook a series of engagements with the Empowering Women Panel (EWP). Specifically, we sought to understand how we can shift complexity in accessing and using childcare from marginalised women onto government and other actors. We are now working through what we have learned to ensure it can be shared with other policy areas in government alongside shaping ongoing policy development and delivery within the SACC programme. In addition, we are sharing our learning about what it takes to engage meaningfully with marginalised women and the value of doing so with officials across the Scottish Government.

Co-production of Policy-making and Lived Experience

Recommendation: ‘People powered policy-making: The Scottish Government, Local Government and Public Bodies should build on existing work already underway (Scottish Approach to Service Design) to create a genuine effort in co-production of policy-making with evidence of lived experience at its heart.’

We are committed to ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience shape our policies so that the decisions we take make practical improvements in people’s lives. This is particularly important for intersectional women who are often furthest from power.

On 25 April 2025, we published our [new equality outcomes](#) for the period 2025-2029. One of these outcomes is focused on strengthening participation and embedding lived experience at the heart of our work. This reflects our clear commitment to ensuring that the voices of people most affected by inequality help shape the decisions we take.

We have set out a range of actions to drive meaningful change both in the short term (within one year) and over the longer term (across four years), considering the Scottish Government’s role as both a policy-maker and an employer. These actions will be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain effective

in enabling genuine co-production and inclusive decision-making, leading to practical improvements in people’s lives.

In 2022, the Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD) working group published a report with recommendations on how to embed participatory approaches across the work of government, including but not limited to Citizens’ Assemblies. In 2023, Scottish Government accepted most of these recommendations. It was the intention that the IPDD recommendations would support the delivery of Programme for Government 2021-22 commitments to run more, and more regular, Citizens’ Assemblies, alongside local and routine participatory and deliberative engagements. Whilst resource constraints have limited progress in this area, our commitment remains to increased, high quality opportunities for meaningful public participation.

Our Social Research Working Group on Participation and Lived Experience is developing guidance and standardised processes within Social Research for conducting participatory and lived experience work to the highest ethical standard. A focus of this work has been the publication in 2024 of [guidance on paying participant expenses and compensating participant time](#), developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and welcomed by the sector. This builds on our [Participation Handbook](#), produced through the 2018-20 Open Government Action Plan.

The 2021-25 Open Government Action Plan includes activities on participation. This initially focused on improving equality aspects of the Participation Handbook, and using this to deliver participation training across Scottish Government that focuses on inclusive practice. New activities with a focus on participation have been added through the course of the Action Plan, such as developing a procurement framework for participation work with adults

(to complement an existing framework in place for participation work with children and young people), and establishing a staff network and associated training to support delivery of high quality advice on public participation.

Wider and future Open Government work will consider options for monitoring and evaluating participatory work taking place in Scottish Government, and using this to drive improvement. Throughout 2025, we will be co-creating our next Open Government Action Plan and expect to see renewed commitment to ensuring that the people of Scotland can see, understand and get involved in decisions that affect them.

Co-design

Following this NACWG recommendation, the Office of the Chief Designer delivered a programme to develop and embed design approaches, working with a broad range of health and care services, as well as children and families, including women. This focused on high profile reviews such as the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (IRASC) and the Independent Care Review (The Promise). This saw the development of the 'design school' model, which helps teams ensure service and policy design is legal, inclusive and ethical. It takes teams through an end-to-end design process, from readiness, capacity building and defining the problem, to creating and testing solutions. Each iteration of the 'design school' is evaluated and improved.

Initially designed with The Promise Scotland, [the Promise Design School training programme](#) supports collaboration across multi-agency projects, and centres lived experience. This model was the basis for the [Children's Hearing System Collaborative Redesign](#) project and is currently being delivered within Scottish Government for the [National Care Service programme](#) and the ['Getting It Right For Everyone' \(GIRFE\) pathfinders](#).

Taking an intersectional approach requires careful consideration of who is involved in research and design work and a plan for the collection and analysis of data. The Lived Experience Experts Panel (LEEP) for the National Care Service (NCS) programme provides opportunities for those with lived experience to get involved in the co-design. Collecting equality data, including protected characteristics, at point of sign-up allows for an intersectional approach to policy and service design. This includes the detailed segmentation of data and the development of insights, as well as highlighting gaps to be addressed. The National Care Service (NCS) is partnering with organisations that represent communities under-represented in the work so far. Guidance has been provided by the Office of the Chief Designer to ensure continuity in approach and organisations are asked to collect data on protected characteristics using specific segmentation guidance for reporting purposes. Co-design sessions started in October 2023 and are led by CEMVO, SCLD, MECOPP, SACRO, Simon Community, LGBT Health & Wellbeing, and Alzheimer's Scotland. 'Collaborative sense-making', the process of making sense of data together, helps develop collective understanding, reduces bias and creates shared ownership of insights.

Design guidance and tools

There is ongoing work to develop the design guidance, training and tools that are built into the design school model, and to share examples of good practice across the public sector, including Local Government, the NHS and the third sector. The aim is to drive consistency and consider deeper forms of engagement to complement traditional consultations. This includes methods to help organisations, for example, grow capacity and capability to undertake co-design projects; create safe and supported spaces; analyse data collaboratively; assess and mitigate risk; develop segmentation and sampling strategies; use tools such as

research-based journey maps and composite stories to show different experiences, avoiding over reliance on generic personas; and understand and mitigate the unintended consequences of gender-specific bias.

Intersectional Data

Recommendation: ‘We recommend adequate resourcing to enable the collection and analysis of robust intersectional data.’

Having intersectional data available helps us to better understand different women’s experiences, for example: disabled women, older women, and minority ethnic women, and the specific barriers they may encounter because of multiple discrimination. This helps us to develop better and more informed policy, and to know when additional targeted measures might be needed.

The Equality Data Improvement Programme ([EDIP](#)) aims to strengthen Scotland’s equality evidence base. This will help us better understand difference women’s experiences so we can make better informed policies to help all women. Our [Equality Evidence Strategy \(2023-25\)](#) sets out three core principles and 45 prioritised actions to improve the equality evidence base across most policy areas, by:

- Establishing processes (e.g. with stakeholders) to enable more equality data collection;
- Enhancing equality data collection/ collection of new equality data in existing datasets;
- Commencing new data collection (e.g. a new survey) including one or more equality variables;
- Enhancing analysis of equality data;

- Enhancing reporting or publication of equality data collected.

The actions cover a range of equality and intersectional variables, including data on all nine protected characteristics. An [Interim Review of the Equality Evidence Strategy](#) was published in December 2024, which highlights where progress has been made. As of January 2025, of the 45 actions in the strategy, 13 are complete and 23 are on course for completion by the end of the strategy period, demonstrating strong commitment to advancing equality evidence across many policy areas. Six are delayed, one is not yet started, and two are now marked as no longer feasible to complete due to a lack of appropriate dataset.

We recognise that embedding an intersectional approach into policymaking, as per Scottish Government’s mainstreaming approach, requires resourcing across the Scottish Government. The actions in the Equality Evidence Strategy are led by multiple analytical and policy areas. For example, Labour Market and Employability analysts analysed and published equality data collected through a new [‘No One Left Behind’ data template](#) (including on trans status and disability) before publishing intersectional analyses of data on Fair Start Scotland. Health and Social Care analysts now produce cross-tabulations (a way to analyse the relationship between two or more categories, such as sex and age) of Scottish Health and Care Experience (HACE) Survey results by equality variables. Poverty researchers also now publish more equality breakdowns with the Poverty and Income Inequality reporting, which helps us better understand women’s experiences of poverty. Examples of additional equality data activity outside of the Strategy include work in Social Security Scotland to improve the quality of their equality data collection and analysis and their inclusive communications.

On 25 April 2025, we published our new equality outcomes for the period 2025–2029. One of these outcomes is centred around strengthening equality evidence in the Scottish Government. Specifically, it focuses on improving how data is collected, analysed, and applied to inform decision-making. High-quality, disaggregated data is essential for developing a robust understanding of the diverse experiences of people across Scotland and for identifying where inequalities persist. Through this outcome, we are committed to enhancing the availability and use of intersectional evidence across government and public bodies. The actions set out will support more informed, data-driven policy-making and ensure that interventions are better targeted to address the needs of those most affected by inequality.

In 2022, Scottish Government published an [evidence synthesis](#) of literature on intersectionality, examining what the concept means, its application to policymaking and analysis, and spotlight examples. A good proportion of the Equality Evidence Strategy Actions are improvements to intersectional data and analysis specifically. For instance, we are creating a series of evidence reviews which focus on the outcomes and experiences of people with intersecting characteristics. The first of these was published in December 2024 and focused on the experiences and outcomes of [Minority Ethnic Women in Scotland](#). Similarly, the Equality Analysis team will be undertaking new analysis of the Scotland Census 2022 dataset, drawing out intersectional findings where available and relevant.

Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission

Recommendation: ‘Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission consider producing a set of scrutiny principles to support this methodology/approach for public bodies, similar to their recent “Principles for Community Empowerment”, (linked to the Policy-makers National Standards).’

While recognising that this recommendation is for Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission to consider and respond to, we are supportive in principle.

Paid Paternity Leave

Recommendation: ‘Create two “Daddy months” of use-it-or-lose-it paid paternity leave in Scotland, using existing and additional powers transferred by UK Government.’

In the absence of legal powers governing parental leave and pay, Scottish Ministers in 2020 called on the then UK Government to enhance paternity/partner leave to provide 12 weeks fathers/partners leave on a paid, non-transferable “use it or lose it” basis, among other enhancements to maternity and neonatal care pay and leave. Scottish Ministers wrote this year to the current UK Government on this issue.

In October 2024 the UK Government introduced the [UK Employment Rights Bill](#). This Bill intends to expand employment rights with added protections that will support women in the workplace such as: strengthening protection from dismissal for pregnant workers and for parents returning from parental leave; including sexual harassment in protections from whistleblowing; expanding the preventative duty on employers to take 'all' reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace; and increasing the burden of justification on employers to accept flexible working requests. It has committed to removing the qualifying period of employment for parental and paternity leave making this a day one right; introducing the ability to take paternity leave following shared parental leave; and introducing a right to one week unpaid bereavement leave. The Scottish Government welcomes the introduction of this Bill and the wider Make Work Pay agenda. It aligns closely with our Fair Work approach to strengthen worker voice and trade unions, end one-sided flexibility, and review measures on pay and family-friendly policies. It provides the opportunity to put on a statutory footing some of the progress we have made with the levers at our disposal.

The Scottish Government has, however, consistently made clear that in order to fully protect Scottish workers, employment law should be fully devolved. As stated in [Building a New Scotland: Education and lifelong learning in an independent Scotland](#), part of a series which set out the Scottish Government's proposals for an independent Scotland, future Scottish governments could consider improvements to the parental leave and pay system, with higher minimum standards than those currently set by the UK Government.

On 3 February 2025 the Minister for Employment and Investment wrote to the UK Government to set out the Scottish Government's position on these issues and his support for wider reforms as part of the Make Work Pay agenda, including the review into the Parental Leave and Pay System. The Minister called for reform and would particularly like to see the introduction of 'non-transferable' pay and leave for fathers/partners. This would help to increase the take-up of paternity leave; help ease the pressure and financial worry that often forces fathers to return to work sooner; and would support a more gender balanced approach to childcare. He also called on the review to consider the provision of at least three days paid miscarriage leave and is keen for the Scottish Government to participate in this review. The Minister received a response from the UK Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets on 20 April 2025. It noted the specific points raised by Scottish Government regarding the consideration of 'non-transferable' leave for fathers and partners and expressed his desire for his department to work with interested parties to deliver this review, including the Devolved Governments.

Gender Sensitive Design

Recommendation: 'Embed gender sensitive approaches in all work relating to programmes developed through the new Scottish Government 'Scottish Approach to Service Design' model.'

The Office of the Chief Designer reviewed best practice in gender sensitive design, focusing on the barriers that may prevent women and girls taking part meaningfully in policy and service design activities. An advisory group of Scottish Government officials, the third sector (Engender, Young Scot), the educational sector and NHS was set up to review progress, and act as 'critical friends'. A report on [making design methods more gender sensitive](#) was published in 2021. Gender sensitive design considerations have been incorporated into the minimum evidence framework for the [Digital Scotland Service Standard](#), a set of criteria that central government organisations must meet when delivering services.

Create a 'Gender Beacon Collaborative'

Recommendation: 'Create a "Gender Beacon Collaborative" – made up of Scottish Government, a Local Authority, a public body, a third sector agency and a business to take a holistic and systemic approach to gender equality and work.'

We fund Close the Gap to support selected local authorities, public bodies, third sector organisations and the Scottish Government (the 'Gender Beacon Collaborative') to achieve the Equally Safe at Work (ESW) Bronze Accreditation. This innovative employer accreditation scheme aims to advance workplace gender equality and prevent violence against women and girls by requiring organisations to fulfil approximately 30 criteria across themes such as leadership, data and workplace culture. The Gender Beacon Collaborative has worked with a number of local authorities to achieve the Bronze Accreditation and is now working with NHS Boards and Third Sector organisations.

Scottish Human Rights Commission and CEDAW

Recommendation: 'We call on the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to appoint a Commissioner tasked specifically with promotion and protection of Women's Rights. This Commissioner would lead work to realise rights for all women and girls as set out in CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention and other international instruments.'

As an independent body it is for the SHRC to consider and respond to this recommendation.

Expansion of the Mandate of the Scottish Human Rights Commission

Recommendation: ‘We also call for the expansion of the mandate of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, with sufficient resourcing, to allow it to take on cases on behalf of individuals’.

As set out in the Programme for Government 2025-26, we are working collaboratively with stakeholders to refine proposals for a Human Rights Bill, and lay the groundwork for effective implementation. The proposals for a Bill would incorporate four international UN treaties into Scots Law, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), within the limits of devolved competence. Proposals for the Human Rights Bill intend to provide an expanded power for SHRC to raise and intervene in civil proceedings relating to the duties in the Human Rights Bill. In relation to resourcing, funding for the SHRC is predominantly a matter for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB).

The Parliamentary review being undertaken by the SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee to review and develop a framework for SPCB supported bodies, such as the SHRC, may have potential implications on plans to expand the SHRC’s powers and mandate, and this will need to be carefully considered.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Recommendation: ‘We call on the Scottish Government as part of the current review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) regulations in Scotland to place additional specific duties on listed Public Bodies to:

- **Gather and use intersectional data, including employment and service-user data, to advance equality between protected groups, including men and women;**
- **Integrate intersectional gender budget analysis into their budget setting procedures.’**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED, otherwise known as the general duty) is not a duty on listed authorities to achieve any particular results, but a duty to have ‘due regard’ to the need to achieve the three goals of:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- Advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The general duty is likely to have a positive impact for women by virtue of listed authorities having due regard to the three goals above. Scottish Ministers are committed to using the powers at their disposal to improve the operation of the PSED in Scotland, with the intention of improving outcomes for women and other protected groups under the Equality Act 2010.

We are working on improving the effectiveness of the PSED regime in Scotland. This phased programme of improvement activity will initially consider specific regulatory changes and the use of our powers under Regulation 11. In the longer term, will consider other elements of the regime and the scope for non-regulatory change.

A [review of consultation responses](#) shows a significant proportion of listed authorities lack confidence that their organisation could comply with a requirement to integrate intersectional gender budget analysis into budget-setting procedures at this stage.

Early engagement highlighted concerns around listed authorities' capacity and capability to improve data collection in the short term. Considerable work and support would be required if these aspects were agreed as priorities for new regulations. We have therefore decided to use the outcome setting process required under the PSED as an alternative vehicle for bolstering the use of equality data and evidence by the Scottish Government. Our new outcomes run from 2025-2029, and a programme of supporting actions has been agreed.

We are exploring the possibility of using the Scottish Specific Duties, specifically the expansion of the gender pay gap reporting duty under Regulation 7 to include disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting, and the use of Regulation 11 powers. Regulation 11 empowers Scottish Ministers to draw listed authorities' attention to certain matters that they consider will enable better performance of the PSED, and listed authorities would be required to consider these matters when carrying out their Specific Duties.

We are not taking the NACWG recommendations forward in this first phase of improvements. We will engage with the NACWG in relation to action to be taken forward in the next phase. However, NACWG recommendations will also inform Ministers' thinking in terms of their Regulation 12 proposals, due for publication in December 2025. Regulation 12 means that Scottish Ministers must publish a report on progress in relation to the published proposals for activity to enable the better performance of the PSED by public authorities every four years and report on progress in relation to this activity every two years. We have taken considerable steps to improve the equality outcome setting process across the public sector, and the Scottish Government has taken more of a leadership role on this in recent months.

We have created a dedicated PSED Improvement Team to take this vital work forward.

Women In Our Four Priorities

As outlined in our [Programme for Government 2025-26](#), we are focusing our efforts and resources on our Four Priorities:

- eradicating child poverty
- growing the economy
- tackling the climate emergency
- ensuring high quality and sustainable public services.

It is key that gender equality is embedded throughout our priorities to ensure we are delivering effective change in a way that works for everyone in Scotland, including diverse groups of women.

This chapter discusses women in our Four Priorities. The first section describes our intersectional approach to tackling women's and children's poverty, with an overview of the broad actions we are taking across government. The second section focuses on women in a growing economy. It outlines how we are encouraging Fair Work practices, how we are helping women access and progress in work, and how we are supporting women in entrepreneurship, especially in the tech industries. The next section looks at tackling the climate emergency. It discusses our engagement to understand diverse women's perspectives on climate change, the economic opportunities for women in 'green

jobs', women's specific travel needs as we decarbonise our transport systems, and our commitment to equality and a just transition in the agriculture sector. The last section explains how we are ensuring high quality and sustainable public services for women, focusing on health, housing and transport.

Tackling Women's and Children's Poverty

Eradicating child poverty in Scotland is a national mission and the foremost of the Scottish Government's four key priorities. We know that child poverty and women's poverty is inextricably linked and that we can only tackle child poverty by tackling the inequality faced by women.

'Every Child, Every Chance', the first [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) for 2018 to 2022, sets out how child poverty is gendered and deeply connected to the roles of women in society and the issues they face. Our [second plan](#), 'Best Start, Bright Futures' sets out further details of our approach, recognising the need for systems and services to align in order to support families to thrive.

Our approach to tackling child poverty is rooted in evidence. It focuses on influencing three key drivers of poverty reduction: increasing incomes from work and earnings, reducing the cost of living, and maximising incomes from social security and benefits in kind. It also focuses on improving the wellbeing and outcomes of families, and on ensuring that action addresses the challenges and barriers faced by those at greatest risk of poverty.

Women are strongly represented within the [six priority family types](#) we have identified. This includes lone parent families, of which around 90% are headed by women, and young mothers under 25. The other priority family types are minority ethnic families, families with

a disabled adult or child, families with a child under one year old and larger families with three or more children.

By taking an intersectional approach to policy delivery across our actions to eradicate child poverty, we are working to deliver positive outcomes for low-income families, whilst acknowledging that there are often additional barriers and challenges which groups may face, including experiences unique to women. As part of our 2023-24 Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report, we published a [focus report on other marginalised groups](#) at risk of poverty in recognition of the complex nature of poverty and the intersectionality of poverty and other circumstances. This builds on our evidence base on the groups most at risk of poverty, and ensures we recognise the other characteristics and issues which intersect to place people and groups at increased risk of poverty, all of which come together to shape our understanding of unique individual experiences.

Actions in Eradicating Child Poverty

Eradicating child poverty is the top priority across all of government, with actions covering a range of policy areas. Each of our annual Tackling Child Poverty Progress Reports are organised by thematic area, with a focus on the impact of actions taken over each reporting period across:

- Supporting parents to increase their earned incomes
- Transforming our economy
- Improving access to, and the availability of, childcare
- Enhancing access to, and the affordability of, public transport
- Person-centred support
- Enhanced support through Social Security
- Ensuring access to warm, affordable homes
- Maximising income
- Place-based transformation.

Within each of these areas, there are a range of actions being taken which contribute to tackling the inequality faced by women. These include:

- **Employability** – Women are impacted by working patterns and the affordability and availability of childcare. Parental leave policies still assume women to take the main carer role for children which can result in reducing working hours when returning to the workplace. We are supporting parents to take up employment and progress within the labour market through our [No One Left Behind](#) approach. Specific focus is placed on the priority family groups through our employability system, and recognition is given to the significant barriers to entry which some people may face, including women, disabled people and people from minority ethnic communities, demonstrating the intersectional approach taken. Women account for 70% of participants who access the Parental Employability Support delivered as part of the No One Left Behind approach.
- **Economy** – The gender pay gap and in-work poverty persist. Women are more likely to be in temporary work and on zero-hour contracts in Scotland, whilst also carrying out unpaid work including caring responsibilities. We are taking steps to build a labour market that provides good and sustainable jobs that are accessible to all, as well as offering the wages, hours and conditions needed to allow parents to support their families, including women and other groups who are impacted by workplace inequality. We have continued to take steps to improve pay and promote fair work practices. Scotland has a narrower median and mean gender pay gap and proportionately more women earning the Real Living Wage or more than the UK. In 2024, the estimated median gender pay gap for full-time employees was 2.2% in Scotland and 7.0% in the UK. Across all

employees in 2024 (those working both full-time and part-time), the estimated gender pay gap was 9.2% in Scotland and 13.1% in the UK.

- **Care workers** – The majority of adult and children’s social care workers are women. Since 2016 and 2024 respectively, the Scottish Government has provided funding to enable adult and children’s social care workers in commissioned services to be paid at least the Real Living Wage. In the 2025-26 financial year alone, we are investing £155 million to increase the pay of eligible care workers from £12 per hour to the new Real Living Wage of £12.60 per hour. This policy overwhelmingly benefits women. Women account for 79% of the adult social care workforce, 70% of the residential childcare workforce, which includes Secure Care, Care Homes for children and young people and Residential Special Schools, and 76% of the workforce providing support services for children with disabilities and Housing Support services for care leavers. We have also provided an additional £16 million to local authorities in 2024-25 to enable childcare workers delivering funded early learning and childcare in private and third sector services to be paid at least £12 an hour from April 2024. This is an increase of £2,000 a year for full-time staff in a workforce which is 96% women.
- **Childcare** – As detailed earlier in the statement, childcare availability and affordability can have a negative impact on household income, especially for those with caring responsibilities, which research shows are most likely to be women. We are continuing to invest around £1 billion in the delivery of 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds, providing access to high quality, accessible and affordable childcare, supporting equal employment opportunities for women and men and supporting those with caring responsibilities. Our approach to childcare also includes a commitment to work collaboratively with families, including listening to the voices of women and marginalised groups to ensure our offer meets their individual needs.
- **Transport** – Women are less likely to have access to private transport and are more dependent on public transport, with part time work meaning women may require to travel outside of peak times. We have continued investment to make our transport system available, affordable and accessible for all, including by providing access to free bus travel for 2.3 million people in Scotland, including all children and young people under 22, disabled people and everyone aged 60 and over.
- **Person-centred support** – Women consistently experience a greater burden of mental health issues than men. We have continued investment in our Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults, ensuring that the Fund’s guidance highlights the importance of considering the six priority families, which feature women strongly.
- **Social Security** – Women are twice as dependent on social security and have been disproportionately affected by cuts to social security since 2010. Our Scottish Child Payment currently provides £26.70 per eligible child per week and is forecast to benefit the families of over 330,000 children in 2025-26. Our five family payments, including the Scottish Child Payment, could be worth over £10,000 by the time an eligible child turns six and around £25,000 by the time an eligible child turns 16. The interim evaluation of Scottish Child Payment, published in July 2022, found that this payment has led to more money being

spent on children, including for essentials like food, family day trips, and medical items for families with disabled children. The payment has also helped people avoid debts, with some feeling they would be forced to use foodbanks without the benefit.

- **Unpaid Carers** – Women account for a significant majority of unpaid carers in Scotland. Data from the Scottish Government’s Carers Census shows that around three-quarters of carers in the 2023-24 census (73%) were female. This increased to 80% of working age carers. In the 2025-26 financial year, the Scottish Government is investing £522 million to deliver three benefits to support unpaid carers: Carer Support Payment, which is replacing Carer’s Allowance in Scotland, Carer’s Allowance Supplement, and Young Carer Grant. Carer’s Allowance Supplement and Young Carer Grant are only available in Scotland. Our investment this financial year is £100 million more than the Scottish Government receives from the UK Government for carer benefits.
- **Housing** – Women are more likely to depend on social housing and spend longer periods in temporary accommodation, particularly if they have children. We have targeted funding and support to local authorities with sustained temporary accommodation pressures to increase the supply of social and affordable homes, including larger properties suitable for families.
- **Maximising income** – There are proportionally higher costs for lone parent households, primarily headed by women, to support children. We are continuing to invest in the provision of free income maximisation support, welfare and debt advice, supporting people to understand their rights and entitlements and helping to reduce poverty. Our Advice in Accessible Settings Fund is supporting partnership

working between agencies and services, delivering holistic advice services to families including lone parents, minority ethnic families and families with disabled children.

- **Place-based transformation** – Women are impacted by a range of issues, including those referenced above such as housing, higher costs, and in-work poverty and the gender pay gap. We are enabling local authorities to test and improve how they deliver services to promote family wellbeing, maximise incomes and support people towards sustained employment through our Fairer Futures Partnerships. Through these, service providers operate as a network to help people access support easily from a range of organisations.

Next steps

We continue to recognise the intersectionality between child poverty and women’s poverty and will use our next Tackling Child Poverty progress report, which is due to be published in June 2025, to further demonstrate these tangible links. As part of this we are working to produce a focus report deep dive into gender which will allow us to improve our understanding of the link between gender and poverty. In this we will review evaluations from policies detailed in ‘Best Start, Bright Futures’ to assess whether they are designed and reviewed with a gender lens in mind.

Further, as we look ahead to the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2026-31, we are committed to working with and hearing from gender equality organisations to inform the development of the Plan and its actions. Engagement is ongoing throughout 2025 with the Plan to publish by the end of March 2026, setting out the actions we will take as a Government between 2026 and 2031 towards eradicating child poverty and meeting the final child poverty targets set for 2030.

Women in a Growing Economy

The [2024-25 Programme for Government](#) is clear that boosting fair, green economic growth is central to the Scottish Government's four interconnected priorities. It acknowledges that children's poverty is parents' poverty and recognises the impact of caring responsibilities on women. It includes measures to foster an inclusive and productive workforce by removing barriers to employment, and to tackle challenges such as economic inactivity and skills shortages, including by improving access to health services. These measures are intended to sit alongside other work across government, for example in relation to childcare.

Building on this, the 2025 Programme for Government sets out further actions to help people remain in work and strengthen pathways into sustainable employment for those furthest from the labour market. We will also invest up to £6 million to implement the [Pathways report](#) and enable more women to start and scale businesses. In addition, to help address the gender export gap we will support women-led businesses to export more, including by increasing the number of women who participate in international trade missions.

We have also committed to funding pilot projects that will develop actions employers can take to implement inclusive recruitment practices – including flexible working, support for disabled employees, and supporting people at risk of economic inactivity.

Our Wellbeing Economy Monitor tracks broader economic outcomes beyond GDP on issues such as health, equality, Fair Work and the environment. The [National Strategy for Economic Transformation's](#) (NSET) 'Measures of Success' include the gender pay gap, employment income, contractually secure work, and new company incorporations by

women. We aim to improve labour market outcomes for groups who experience the most disadvantage and inequality, especially disabled people, women, and people from minority ethnic communities, including where these characteristics intersect.

Fair Work

We continue to use fair work to drive success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society. Fair Work is vital in tackling the cost of living crisis, in-work poverty and child poverty, all of which disproportionately impact women, many of whom face intersecting structural barriers to accessing, sustaining and progressing in work. Fair Work supports positive outcomes in all parts of society. That is why it was central in our second [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#), 'Best Start, Bright Futures', and our fourth [National Planning Framework](#).

Fair Work First is the Scottish Government's main lever, in the absence of legislative powers over employment and industrial relations, for promoting Fair Work practices in Scotland. Employers in receipt of public sector grants, contracts and other funding are asked to adopt Fair Work First criteria. Following the implementation of the more stringent Fair Work First grant conditionality in July 2023, requiring public sector grant recipients to pay their workers at least the real Living Wage and provide appropriate channels for effective voice, Fair Work First has been applied to over £2.6bn worth of public sector grants between July 2023 and March 2024.

Our Fair Work First criteria is:

- Provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice, such as trade union recognition
- Payment of at least the real Living Wage (rLW)
- Investment in workforce development

- Address workplace inequalities, including pay and employment gaps for disabled people, racialised minorities, women and workers aged over 50
- No inappropriate use of zero hours contracts
- Offer of flexible and family friendly working for all workers from day one of employment
- Oppose the use of fire and rehire practice

Our [Fair Work First Guidance](#) provides good practice examples and encourages employers to align workplace policies with Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

In 2024, Scotland remained the best performing UK country for the share of employees paid the rLW or more at 88.6% for all employees (18+). However, in Scotland, the estimated proportion of women (employees aged 18+) earning the rLW or above was 87.3% compared to 90.04% of men, and 59.8% of those earning below the rLW were women, according to our [annual survey of hours and earnings](#). More needs to be done and we want to use Fair Work conditionality to uplift more workers to the rLW, helping to narrow pay gaps.

Payment of at least the rLW could relieve the disproportionate financial pressures experienced by single-parent households, households with a disabled member and households with a baby, and reduce poverty, particularly child poverty across rural and island communities. Security is largely linked to having a consistent income and there could be particular benefit to those over-represented in zero-hours contracts and low-paid insecure work, including women and minority ethnic women. (For more information, see our [Equality Impact Assessment](#)).

The [Fair Work Action Plan](#) brings together our original Fair Work, Gender Pay Gap and Disabled People's Employment action plans,

along with our [Anti-Racist Employment Strategy](#). It takes an intersectional approach where possible, focusing on the structural barriers and issues faced by disadvantaged groups in Scotland's labour market, specifically women, racialised minorities, disabled people and the over 50s workforce.

We have committed to working with employers and trade unions in sectors where low pay and precarious work is most prevalent to promote Fair Work sectoral agreements and collective bargaining to achieve higher standards of pay, better security of work, and greater union representation. This action is expected to benefit women in particular, given their over-representation in sectors with historically low pay and work insecurity. Existing commitments to encourage and progress sectoral agreements are being pursued in a number of sectors including construction, retail, social care, childcare and hospitality.

Employability

No One Left Behind is the Scottish Government's shared approach to delivering an all-age, place-based, person-centred model of employability support in Scotland. Scottish and Local Government work with public, private and third sector organisations to design and deliver services that meet the needs of people and labour markets locally. Participation is voluntary, with no maximum period of support and value placed on wider progression and outcomes other than job starts. We made up to £103 million available for the delivery of employability services in 2023-2024, including specific funding to support more parents to enter employment and increase their earnings as part of our plans to tackle child poverty.

We aim to build an employability system that tackles labour market inequality by creating a more responsive, joined up and aligned employability system. We recognise that people face significant challenges and barriers

to obtaining and sustaining work, including women, disabled people, parents and people from minority ethnic communities. Research by [One Parent Families Scotland](#) highlighted the challenges single parents face and noted a consistent undervaluation of unpaid care and women's work more generally. The majority of unpaid carers and single parents are women, suggesting that an intersectional and gendered lens must inform Scotland's employability framework.

Entrepreneurship

We want to establish Scotland as a world-class entrepreneurial nation that encourages and promotes entrepreneurial activity. By targeting priority groups, including women, and offering additional support, we aim to address inequality around entrepreneurship. The Ana Stewart Review, [Pathways: A new approach for Women in Entrepreneurship](#), informs the design and delivery of our policies.

Our immediate priorities are to:

- Establish a capacity building fund to support and evaluate partner-led projects supporting the key Pathways themes of access to support, access to finance and investment and education;
- Work with our enterprise agencies, the Scottish National Investment Bank, and private sector investors to open up investment avenues for women-led businesses, and for other under-invested groups;
- Work with partners to enhance entrepreneurial learning in schools; and
- Work with delivery and academic partners to improve our collection and reporting of data, developing a dashboard of measures around how our actions are closing the gender gap and widening participation in entrepreneurship.

Techscaler Network

Techscaler is the Scottish Government's platform to help people launch and scale tech startups, run by startup ecosystem builder CodeBase. There are 11 physical hubs across seven regions, and an online community open to all. Delivered through community activity, entrepreneurial education programmes and mentoring, Techscaler focuses on addressing barriers faced by under-represented groups, including women. The first Techscaler Annual Report, published in March 2024, shows that the programme supported over 500 startups in its first year. 36% of Techscaler Founder applicants were female and 36.3% were non-White European. The Techscaler performance indicators include measuring progress in achieving diversity and inclusion outcomes.

Techscaler partnered with [AccelerateHER](#), an organisation supporting female founders. Through this collaboration, they have developed tailored support initiatives, including regular Tech Clinics, Hackathon events, an online community space and regular Scotland-wide meetups. Techscaler hubs hosted events focused on connecting women founders with investment, including events with [Female Founders Rise](#), [Mint Ventures](#) and [Investing Women Angels](#). In Stirling, the Techscaler team co-hosted an event with [Netwomen](#) celebrating Black Female Founders as part of Black History Month. Techscaler uses hybrid delivery methods for workshops targeting women, with baby-room facilities provided.

Women and the Climate Emergency

The Scottish Government recognises that different aspects of the net zero transition will have particular implications for women and girls. As part of our commitment to a just transition for all, we are taking significant action to understand and assess the different impacts, across the full range of transition policy.

Engagement

We have undertaken a significant programme of engagement and participation to inform the development of our Just Transition Plans. Phase 1 of this programme, carried out in March 2023, involved a series of online workshops designed to explore the aims and vision for the Plans. Participants included representatives from organisations such as Engender, Equate and the Scottish Women's Budget Group. These workshops highlighted a number of considerations in relation to gender equality and net zero, from potential opportunities from the growth of green jobs, to particular socio-economic implications of transition policies.

Following the publication of our Just Transition discussion papers in summer 2023, the Scottish Government undertook further engagement with communities across the country, as well as the public sector, businesses, workers and trade unions. In total, our Climate Change Participation Programme engaged with over 2,000 people in 2023/24. In order to reach people who might not have been involved in these kinds of climate discussions before, we partnered with representative organisations that had well-established and trusted relationships with groups who have particularly relevant lived experience, such as people from lower income households and single parent families, the majority of which are headed by women.

We are taking action to gain a clearer understanding of public attitudes towards a just transition and climate change, including the attitudes of women and girls specifically. For example, since 2022, the Scottish Government has allocated £886,000 from our Just Transition Fund to the North East Scotland Climate Action Network's (NESCAN) [Just Transition Communities](#) project, a flagship deliberative democracy and just transition capacity building and research programme. The

programme spans the North East region and engages local communities in exploring what a Just Transition means for them. It has delivered a number of engagement activities with a focus on women and girls, including a workshop co-delivered by Aberdeen Ethnic Minorities Women's Group CIC, an event with Girl Guides in Turiff, and an event run by Go Deep Scotland which focused on young people and adults from diverse multicultural backgrounds, including women and girls.

In 2024, the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Climate Survey, which is designed to generate reliable estimates of Scottish adults' awareness and understanding of climate change-related issues. The survey results will include demographic breakdowns, including by sex and, in doing so, provide a basis for more meaningful engagement with women. The [first wave of the survey](#) was published in April 2025, and we will repeat the survey regularly to monitor changes in public attitudes and behaviour.

Economic Opportunity

We recognise that the move to net zero provides an opportunity to address labour market inequality, and promote greater gender balance in key transition sectors. [Research](#) suggests that 'green jobs' in Scotland attract higher salaries than 'non-green jobs', and that women are currently underrepresented in these roles. Supporting more women into these jobs will help reduce the gender pay gap.

The Scottish Government believes that progress in addressing this challenge, and ensuring that women can share equally in the opportunities of net zero, is vital to delivering a just transition. In our energy sector, it is estimated that just 25% of people (aged 16+) in employment are women. Key actions we are taking to address this disparity, in the energy sector and other transition sectors, include:

- Ongoing implementation of our national

strategy to improve the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) in schools, colleges and universities, with a particular focus on encouraging more women and girls to pursue STEM subjects.

- Encouraging further measures from industry to address the underrepresentation of women in key sectors. This is a key proposal of our [draft Just Transition Plan for Transport](#).
- Enabling actions to support more women into work, such as our early learning and childcare policies, and our support for workplace equality
- Putting equality at the heart of our reform of Scotland's post-school education and skills system. We are exploring improvements in every aspect of the skills pipeline, from careers guidance, to apprenticeships, to the funding landscape.

Transport Transition

In February 2025, the Scottish Government published a [draft Just Transition Plan for Transport](#), which sets out our determination to transform our transport system in a way that addresses, existing inequities. The draft Plan recognises that the transport transition has specific implications for women and girls. For example, it highlights the fact that women tend to use public transport, and make multi-purpose trips, more than men, in part because women are more likely to take children to school or provide other caring responsibilities. It also cites evidence that reliance on public transport is higher among minority ethnic women, and that car use is lower among disabled women.

In addition, the draft Plan outlines the action the Scottish Government and others are taking to address personal safety on public transport. Our engagement has underlined that perceptions and experiences of safety on public transport affects the mobility and travel choices of

women and girls. The draft Plan seeks views on our approach to addressing types of problems, as our transport system decarbonises.

In developing the Just Transition Plan for Transport, one of our partners leading on consultation events as a 'trusted messenger' was the Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG), since the net zero transition in the transport sector has particular implications for women and girls. The SWBG led on five events including one with disabled women (in partnership with the Glasgow Disability Alliance), and another with a mixed group including those on low incomes, and with migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Agriculture Transition

We intend to publish our consultation on a Just Transition Plan for Land Use and Agriculture in summer 2025. Our approach to a Just Transition recognises that women have a vital role to play in shaping the future of all sectors, and that by supporting women's skills, talents and ambitions, we can help build a stronger, fairer economy – one that's resilient in the face of climate challenges and open to new opportunities.

To that end, we continue to invest in initiatives like Women in Agriculture Knowing Your Business and the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund. These programmes provide hands-on training and support to women and girls, particularly those who face barriers to opportunities. Whether it's developing practical farming skills, improving business know-how, or building confidence in leadership, these programmes are about breaking down barriers and making sure women get the support they need to thrive. They also help reduce isolation and strengthen local networks, making rural communities more connected and resilient.

We know that women are early adopters of

climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. That's why we are supporting women and girls aged 13 and over across Scotland through Women in Agriculture, empowering them, enhancing their skills, and helping them adopt climate change solutions in line with the Scottish Government's Just Transition approach.

Looking ahead, we are developing Scotland's first Gender Strategy for Agriculture, as part of our commitment to equality and a just transition. This strategy will give women a stronger voice in shaping the industry's future, ensuring they have the opportunities and support to succeed. By putting equality at the heart of our agricultural policies, we're not just supporting women – we're building a more innovative, sustainable, and inclusive future for Scottish farming.

Women and Public Services

Women and men often have different needs when it comes to using public services, whether this is different usage patterns, different priorities or different experiences as services users. Women are often more likely to use public services. For example, in 2022/23, the rate of women receiving social care was over one and half times that of men (605.8 women compared to 389.4 men per 1,000 population), according to [Public Health Scotland](#). The public sector is an important employer of women. In 2023, over 60% of people in [employment in the public sector](#) in Scotland were women, compared to 44% in the private sector. Quality public services must therefore be designed to work for all women, otherwise these services risk being ineffective or even causing additional harm and barriers. This section discusses some of the work we are doing to improve women's experiences of healthcare, housing and public transport.

Health

We know that women face particular health inequality and disadvantages because they are women. Health outcomes for women are poorer than those for men, particularly in some vitally important areas such as heart health. For example, ischaemic heart disease is the single biggest killer of women in Scotland – before breast cancer – yet women are less likely than men to be prescribed medication to prevent a second heart attack.

Women are under-represented in health research and in clinical trials. This failure to gather data on disease and disease outcomes related specifically to women has, over many years, limited both our knowledge and the availability and efficacy of treatments for women. Endometriosis, for example, impacts one in ten women, making it as common as asthma and diabetes, and yet many women struggle for years to receive a diagnosis. At present there is no cure and it can be challenging for women to manage their symptoms using the treatments currently available.

Women consistently experience a greater burden of mental health issues than men. In 2021 the biggest difference was amongst 16-24 year olds where the percentage of female patients (20%) reporting a mental health condition was nearly twice as high as male patients (11%).

While women may have a longer life expectancy and healthy life expectancy than men, the proportion of their life that is spent in good health is notably and consistently lower than men's. In Scotland, data from the [Scottish Health Survey 2022](#) found that women are more likely than men to report living with a limiting long-term health condition (42% and 32% respectively).

More information about the evidence related to women's health inequality can be found in our published research on '[Women's experiences of discrimination and the impact on health](#)'.

Women's Health Plan: Phase One

Women's health is key priority for this government which is why Scotland was the first country in the UK to publish an ambitious [Women's Health Plan](#) in August 2021. The Plan aims to address women's health inequality by raising awareness around women's health, improving access to health care for women across their life course and reducing inequality in health outcomes for girls and women, both for sex-specific conditions and in women's general health. The Plan sets out 66 actions across six priority areas: menopause, menstrual health, endometriosis, abortion, contraception (including postnatal contraception) and cardiac disease.

Our ambition is that healthcare for women will be holistic, inclusive, respectful, centred around the individual and responsive to their needs and choices. Women will be provided with consistent, reliable and accessible information, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and healthcare.

Since its publication in 2021, the Women's Health Plan has brought change for Scotland:

- We appointed Scotland's first Women's Health Champion, Professor Anna Glasier OBE.
- We improved access to consistent, reliable information for women and girls by launching our [Women's Health Platform](#) on NHS Inform.
- We supported the development of the endometriosis care pathway for NHS Scotland which sets out a holistic approach and timely care for those with endometriosis and endometriosis-like symptoms.
- We improved women's access to services by ensuring there is a specialist menopause service in every mainland health board and a 'buddy' support system in place for the Island health boards.
- We increased the choices that women have to access contraception at community pharmacies.
- We supported women in the workplace by establishing a menopause and menstrual health workplace policy for NHS Scotland.
- We mapped the data on women's health in Scotland and published a '[Review of the Data Landscape](#)' that sets out some of the routinely published data on women's health currently available in Scotland and highlights key gaps.

Our [Final Report](#) on Phase One provides more detail, highlights other key achievements, and shines a light on the breadth of work from our partners across the health and social care sector, and beyond.

Women's Health Plan: Phase Two

The first phase of the Women's Health Plan has provided a solid foundation for us build upon, but we know there is a lot more to be done. We are now working on Phase Two. We are bringing together an evidence base and gathering views from our stakeholders with the intention of publishing Phase Two in 2025.

Phase Two will be an opportunity to build on progress as well as focusing our efforts where they are needed most. For example, we are committed to ensuring those living with endometriosis are able to access the best possible care and support, and to reducing time to diagnosis. We also want to see cervical cancer eliminated – and we believe that this is something that can be achieved in our lifetimes.

Significant data gaps remain regarding the health of women. For example, there is a lack of published data on menstrual health. This includes information on menarche (starting menstruation), painful and heavy periods, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), period poverty, menstrual migraines, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis. Data on both prevalence of these conditions and women's experiences of these conditions is lacking. The Women's Health Plan highlights the need to improve the data on women's health. That is why we published the [Women's Health Plan Data Landscape Review](#) in November 2024. Improving data on women's health will continue to be a priority as we develop the next phase of the Women's Health Plan.

But we don't shy away from the reality that improving health outcomes for women and girls is also about cultural change – so that women don't feel that they have to fight to be heard. Changing that culture is as important as developing services, and we are committed to seeing that through.

Free Period Products

Since 2018, the Scottish Government has invested over £53 million to make period products available free of charge in a range of settings, including schools, colleges and universities and public spaces. We have also worked with community groups to ensure that women on low incomes are able to access free period products. In 2021, the Scottish Parliament passed the [Period Products \(Free Provision\) \(Scotland\) Bill 2021](#), enshrining access to free period products in law. The now Act places duties on local authorities and education providers to ensure that free period products can be obtained reasonably easily, and in a way that respects dignity. In January 2022, the [social enterprise Hey Girls](#), launched the 'PickUpMyPeriod' mobile app with funding from the Scottish Government. The

app helps women and girls to identify locations in Scotland where period products can be accessed for free. The Scottish Government has also funded the creation of the website [myperiod.org.uk](#) which provides advice, tools and training resources to help businesses become period friendly.

Housing

We recognise that women's experiences of homelessness are very different to men's experiences of homelessness. Therefore the response to their housing needs should also be different.

Domestic abuse is a leading cause of women's homelessness in Scotland. Official annual homelessness statistics, published in September 2024, show that 23% of women seeking homelessness assistance cited the reason as due to 'dispute within household: violent or abusive'. The main reason for men making a homelessness application was due to being 'asked to leave' which accounts for 28% of homelessness applications made by men.

Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse in the Social Rented Sector

In 2020, the Scottish Government commissioned a working group, co-chaired by Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Scotland, to look at the actions needed to prevent homelessness for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

The [Improving Housing Outcomes Report](#) was published in December 2020. Scottish Government accepted all 27 recommendations in principle. In 2022, stakeholders agreed to focus on the implementation of part 2 of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021, which creates a new ground for recovery of possession by a landlord where they consider a tenant may be experiencing abuse by a

partner or ex-partner, and on the proposed duty on social landlords to have a domestic abuse housing policy in the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Homelessness Prevention Duties

The Housing (Scotland) Bill, introduced to Parliament in March 2024, will introduce a new duty on social landlords to develop and publish a domestic abuse policy which outlines how they will support their tenants experiencing domestic abuse.

The policy objective is to prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse. By having a domestic abuse policy, social landlords will better understand and respond to people experiencing domestic abuse and support them with their housing needs. This duty will be underpinned by statutory guidance, which will be developed with partner organisations and include extensive stakeholder engagement in both the housing and VAWG sectors. It is intended that the guidance will also incorporate a number of the recommendations from the Improving Housing Outcomes report including the importance of gender analysis.

Provisions in the Bill will also ensure social landlords fully consider domestic abuse financial control. This will allow them to support individuals with financial arrears caused by domestic abuse in a specialised manner, before commencing legal action to recover possession of a property. This will help protect the rights of women and children experiencing domestic abuse financial control, living in social housing, to remain in their home, or be re-housed if that is their wish, and ensure arrears accrued because of domestic abuse are not a barrier to accessing social housing in the future.

The Bill also updates the definition of domestic abuse in housing legislation to bring it into line with what constitutes domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021. The Bill is currently going through

the parliamentary process. We will work in partnership with stakeholders to ensure the legislation is fit for purpose and that we have the right guidance, training and timescales for implementation to support the successful delivery of the duties.

Homelessness Data review

The Scottish Government is currently undertaking a review of its homelessness and homelessness prevention data collections. The review aims to ensure collection content is up to date and fit for purpose, and flexible enough to respond to changing data needs. This includes reviewing the information collected on the reason for the homelessness application and how best to record cases of domestic abuse.

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs)

All 32 local authorities in Scotland have developed and are implementing Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs). RRTPs aim to move people into settled, mainstream housing as quickly as possible, with time in temporary accommodation and transitions reduced to a minimum. As part of the annual monitoring of RRTP progress, local authorities are requested to submit an Equality Impact Assessment. This will help ensure the needs of women and girls are fully taken into account.

Local Housing Strategies

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to prepare a Local Housing Strategy that sets out their priorities and plans for the delivery of housing and related services.

Equality and consultation is central to the development of a Local Housing Strategy. All local authorities are required to consult widely with communities and prepare an Equality Impact Assessment to help inform local priorities and outcomes. Local authorities are encouraged to work with their local Violence Against Women and Girls Partnerships to help inform the development of a Local Housing

Strategy to ensure that a gender sensitive approach, that recognises the dynamics of domestic abuse, is considered.

Refreshed Local Housing Strategy guidance will be published in spring 2025. It will continue focusing on ensuring that women and girls at risk of and experiencing violence, abuse and exploitation, receive joined up, effective mainstream and specialist service support.

Public Transport

Evidence shows that women use public transport more than men and that their use is shaped by intersecting factors, such as income, ethnicity and parental status. However, evidence also suggests that both female passengers and transport workers frequently feel less safe than their male counterparts.

We undertook a programme of research on women and girls' safety on public transport. This included a large qualitative study with women and girls using public transport as well as transport workers. The research placed individuals with lived experience at the centre of engagement, ensuring that their voices are used to directly inform policy aimed at improving the safety of women and girls accessing and using public transport.

Participants came from diverse demographic backgrounds, including those:

- Living in both urban and rural areas of Scotland (including island communities);
- Women living with disabilities (both physical disabilities and learning disabilities);
- Women from minority ethnic communities;
- Women with caring responsibilities (including lone parents);
- Professional/employed women, unemployed women and students;
- Women living in both high and low income communities; and

- Female transport workers (from within both the rail and bus industry).

The [results and recommendations](#) from this research were published in March 2023. Age, ethnicity and disability were the three features of participants' personal characteristics that intersected with gender to make them feel most vulnerable. Young women were most likely to report being victims of sexual harassment, disabled women were most likely to report general anti-social or intolerant behaviour from fellow passengers and women from minority ethnic communities were most likely to report extreme examples of verbal abuse (including both sexist and racist abuse).

The report contained 10 recommendations aimed at creating conditions in which women and girls both feel and are safer when using public transport. The recommendations referred to the need for staff training and better and clearer procedures for following up after incidents are reported and the need for improved sharing of best practice. The recommendations also highlighted the impact of the presence of drugs and alcohol on safety concerns. Transport Scotland is taking forward a range of actions informed by the research and officials are working closely with colleagues in Scotrail to promote a range of measures aimed at tackling anti-social behaviour.

In December 2023 the Cabinet Secretary for Transport attended a workshop to discuss the recommendations from the research. 40 stakeholders from over 30 organisations including British Transport Police, Unions, Transport Providers and youth and women's organisations participated. The event took place as part of the [16 Days of Activism](#) against Gender-Based Violence and produced co-designed principles intended to improve collaboration between key stakeholders. A [summary report of the meeting](#) was published in April 2024.

International Policy

Feminist Approach to International Relations

We want to be a global leader in gender equality. This is why in the 2021-22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to developing a feminist approach to foreign policy.

Our [Feminist Approach to International Relations \(FAIR\)](#) commits us to four policy focus areas: **International Development, Climate, Trade and Peace and Security**. Across these areas, we collaborate on and implement policies for a fairer, more sustainable world. This includes advancing gender equality and the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups. We want to amplify women's voices in finding solutions to inequality and insecurity.

We integrate feminist principles across all aspects of our international policy making. We also learn from other countries, which helps us address inequality in Scotland. Many of our domestic policies such as the Baby Box, Wellbeing Economy, Period Poverty and our approaches to the Just Transition have either been shaped through learning from other countries or have been shared internationally as examples of progressive, transformative policies.

Climate

Women are at the frontline and remain disproportionately affected by climate change and nature loss. They are also underrepresented in climate decision making at international conferences. The Scottish Government advocates for women and girls to lead on solutions to the climate crisis at community, national, and international level. Through our partnership with the Women's Environment Development Organisation (WEDO), we have provided grant funding

to support 17 women from Global South countries to travel and negotiate at climate negotiations, including at Conference of the Parties (COPs) and Subsidiary Bodies sessions. We have also supported WEDO's Gender Just Climate Solutions (GJCS) Scale Fund, which provides small grants to grassroots feminist organisations in the Global South, enabling them to scale their climate solutions and showcase the transformative impact of gender-just approaches.

Trade

We promote our 'Vision for Trade' to international stakeholders, highlighting our work on the impacts of trade on women and the barriers they face in accessing the full benefits of international trade.

Peace and Security

We have contributed to the international Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda since 2016, through the Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship. Over 360 women peace-builders from 40 conflict affected countries and regions have come to Scotland for expert training and capacity building, enabling them to play a more active role in peace processes.

International Development

Within our 2021 [International Development Review](#), we outlined our commitment to advancing equality for women and girls, set out in our specific [Equality principle](#):

'We recognise the enduring and intersectional inequalities that exist and we ensure reducing inequalities is central to how we work. We oppose racism in all its forms and aspire to be anti-racist in our work. We prioritise the rights of women and girls, their advancement and equality.'

The Review also committed to establishing a new equality programme in our partner countries of Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda, with a particular focus on the promotion of equality and empowerment of women and girls. This commitment was in recognition of the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on women and girls, exacerbating pre-existing inequality.

Our feminist approach to international development work is underpinned by two key strands: equalising power and advancing gender equality. Within our work we are implementing a gender-equality-focused programme as well as mainstreaming gender equality across all of our international development portfolio. This aligns with the NACWG's [recent report](#) which recommends that the Scottish Government adopts a twin-track approach to equality, in line with international good practice on gender mainstreaming.

Implementing a gender-equality-focused programme

We launched the £3 million Women and Girls Fund (WGF) in March 2024. Women and girls in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia are driving the design and delivery of this Fund to advance gender equality in their own countries. The lead delivery partner is international research consultancy Ecorys, working in collaboration with local partners Forum for African Women Educationalists. The WGF takes a participatory design approach and has been co-developed by women and girls, and women and girl-led organisations, in the three countries. This work aligns with the Scottish Government's [vision for public participation](#), ensuring that communities affected by our work are at the heart of the decision-making process. Learning gained from this participatory methodology will inform future programming.

We also support the Police Scotland Peer-to-Peer Partnership with the police services of Malawi and Zambia. This partnership supports the Malawian and Zambian police services to tackle violence against women and children through the delivery of training, improvement of IT systems and awareness-raising activities. This work aims to improve the experience of victims reporting and seeking support in relation to gender-based violence, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5, 16 and 17. It also aims to increase the reporting and conviction rate for incidents of violence against women and children, and to influence attitude change around gender-based violence and child protection.

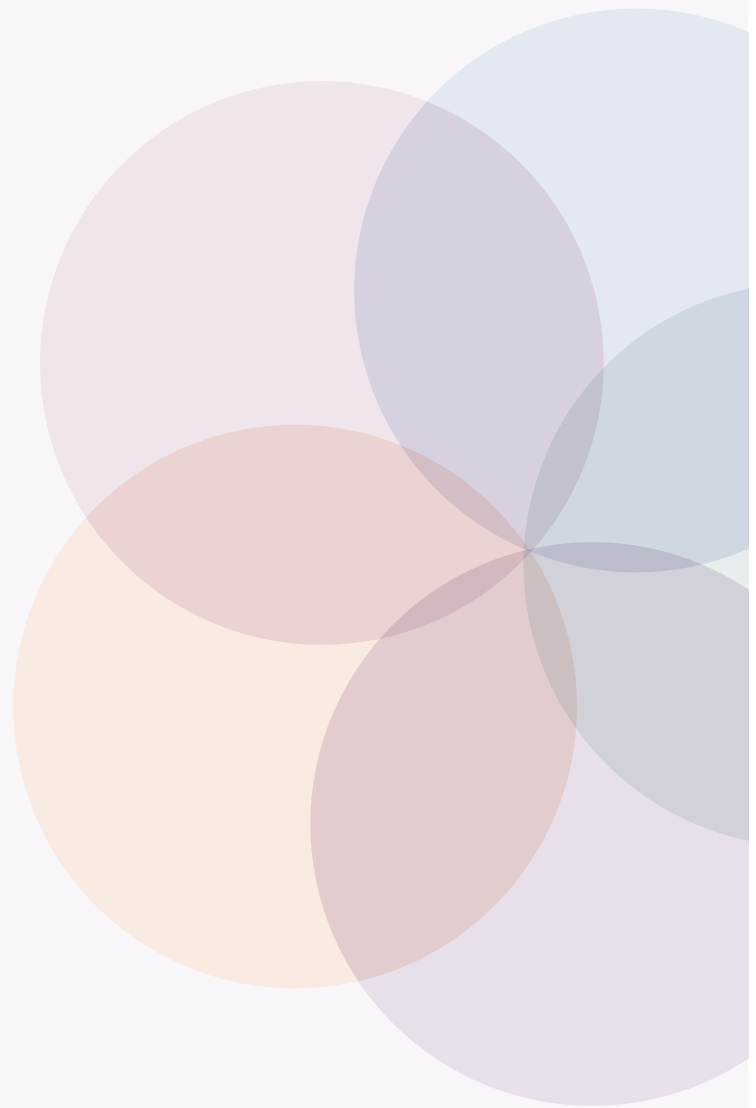
Mainstreaming gender equality across our international development and climate justice portfolio

We are mainstreaming gender equality across our [international development](#) portfolio, including in our health, inclusive education, renewable energy and peace programmes, and across our climate justice spend. In 2023, we published our [Gender Equality Mainstreaming Guidance Note](#) which outlines our commitment to apply the OECD DAC gender equality policy marker to score all Official Development Assistance spending, with the aim to fund more work which is gender sensitive or gender transformative.

All our ongoing [Climate Justice Fund programmes](#) include a specific focus on advancing gender equality. Our £24m Climate Just Communities programme and our £5m Non-Economic Loss and Damage programmes have been designed to tackle climate impacts in a gender responsive manner, with interventions helping to address some of the underlying causes of structural inequality.

Finally, we are currently conducting a review of the Scottish Government's Humanitarian Funding to inform our future response to global humanitarian crises. This includes a review of international best practice with a particular focus on feminist and gendered approaches to humanitarian funding. It also considers how to ensure gender equality and climate justice are mainstreamed throughout our humanitarian spend in practice.

As part of the FAIR policy, we recognise the relationship between addressing inequality and tackling insecurity in pursuit of a fairer world for all. We strive to give people most affected by inequality, injustice, conflict, climate change and environmental damage a platform to speak for themselves, influence others and make decisions. We are developing a proportionate approach to monitoring and evaluation in relation to FAIR. This will help us to continue efforts to mainstream this policy in our international work.



Next Steps

An equal future for women in Scotland

This annual statement on gender policy coherence provides a summary of some of the wide ranging work we are taking forward to make Scotland a place where women and girls have equality with men and boys. We know there is more to do and things we can and must do better.

The progress towards equality for women and girls has been painfully slow and hard won. More challenging still, we are seeing efforts to further erode the rights of marginalised communities and undermine the important and brave work of feminist activists. The current political headwinds feel particularly hostile to advancing equality and human rights, including for women and girls.

The Scottish Government remains fully, defiantly committed to advancing equality and rights for women and girls.

That being said, we know that as a government we need to go further faster. In response we have established new internal processes and structures to redouble and refocus efforts to deliver. We call this a 'programmatic approach'.

Programmatic approaches are common in government and other organisations to deliver large and complex projects or groups of projects. The programmatic approach for the delivery of the NACWG recommendations has been agreed by Cabinet Secretaries and will report directly to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. The commitment to this work by Cabinet Secretaries and oversight from the First Minister reflects the priority placed on this work and provides the cross-government leadership required to deliver the ambitious and cross-cutting recommendations.

We are working with the NACWG to build external expertise and scrutiny into our programmatic approach. The model for external expertise and scrutiny in the programmatic approach is still in development but it is our intention that it will provide a mechanism for greater transparency and an more effective scrutiny of our work to advance equality for women and girls.

In their 2019 report the NACWG called for greater policy coherence towards gender equality so that all policies and organisations were working towards the same goals. It was in that report that they recommended that this annual statement be provided to parliament to scrutinise our progress so far. In their 2024 report the NACWG again asserted that people and policies needed to align and reinforce each other to deliver greater equality for women and girls. They recommended that we develop a national gender strategy that builds on the recommendations that they have already made and takes a holistic approach to tackling gender inequality.

On 26 February 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice committed to developing a strategy in response to the NACWG recommendation. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the Strategy would be co-designed with the NACWG and the EWP and with wider groups of women with diverse lived experience and the organisations that represent them. Equality is everyone's responsibility and we will ensure that senior leaders in Scotland are involved in the development of the strategy from the outset to explore opportunities to work in partnership to deliver tangible improvements for women and girls.

The strategy will include gender equality goals that will provide greater clarity and direction on what policies across the public

sector should be aligning to achieve. One way in which we will do this is by embedding the goals in Scottish Government processes such as in the development of the budget and in future annual statements. Additionally, the goals will form the basis of a measurement framework – also recommended by the NACWG – to monitor progress in delivering the strategy and by extension on equality for women and girls.

This annual statement will act as a baseline for the strategy by setting out the range of work already underway in the Scottish Government. Once the goals for the strategy have been developed we will work with the NACWG, EWP, public sector leaders and with wider groups of women with diverse lived experience and the organisations that represent them to examine at what we are doing in these areas and what more needs done to see the change women and girls deserve. This will allow us to build on the whole systems approach taken by the NACWG and ensuring a lasting legacy for the progress they have already achieved.

Gender inequality is entrenched, intransigent and deeply harmful. It can feel insurmountable at times. But it is not. The bold and ambitious work of the NACWG, all the wide and varied work set out in this annual statement, the future work of the programmatic approach and even the gender equality strategy will not solve gender inequality. However, they are the next steps in a long line of steps made by inspiring women over centuries on our journey towards gender equality.





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