

Scottish Women's Convention Fairer Scotland Discussion

Health and Social Care Zero Hours Contracts
Progression Skills Modern Apprenticeships
Flexibility Family Sanctions **Childcare**
Maternity **Low Paid Disability Affordable**

Fairer Scotland

Justice Benefits **Community** Barriers
Living Wage Employment Schools
Training Council Tax **Welfare Reform**
Development Caring Mental Health

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) has been consulting with women throughout Scotland around the issues that matter the most to them. We have consulted with women from a variety of different backgrounds and of all ages.

This response sets out their key priorities on a range of issues, from health to housing, work and wages to welfare. Our points and recommendations have been informed by the women upon whom legislation, policies and practice will impact on the most. We are extremely thankful for their continued input in shaping Scotland's future.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) wants to see Scotland continue to grow and develop into a fairer, more equitable society. One of the key ways in which this will be achieved is by ensuring that gender equality is at the heart of all future legislation, policy and practice. It is vital that the needs of women, their concerns and recommendations are an integral part of every level of the decision making process in Scotland.

This paper sets out the key priorities for women in delivering a Fairer Scotland. They are based on the points titled '*Where We'd Like to be in 2030*' in the Fairer Discussion Paper. They are:

- I get a fair working wage which allows for a decent standard of living.
- I know I can rely on a fair and simple social security system.
- I can get access to justice quickly and at a reasonable cost.
- I am not charged a higher price for services, such as electricity, just because of my circumstances.
- There is more affordable housing allowing me and my family to rent or own a decent and warm property.
- I feel safe no matter where I live or where I go.
- Every child is loved by someone who can provide for their needs.
- There is good quality childcare available when I need it.
- Where you are born, where you live, or who you are doesn't stop you having the opportunity to reach your full potential.
- Everyone can access the health and social services support they need to be safe, happy and healthy.



I get a fair working wage which allows for a decent standard of living

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **Women are paid a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, as well as given equal pay for work of equal value.**
- **Wages are increased to a National Living Wage in order to reduce reliance on tax credits and top up benefits, making work pay.**
- **Women were afforded more flexibility within the workplace, allowing them to undertake one full time job as opposed to being underemployed in one or more part-time jobs.**
- **Zero hours contracts are banned.**
- **Barriers to employment in rural areas are recognised.**
- **Specific issues for older women and BME women in employment are taken into consideration.**

Decent pay

Women continue to be clustered into roles in what is known as the '5c's' – catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering and clerical. These jobs offer low wages and little in the way of training, development and progression. This type of employment is often part-time. It can also raise issues around temporary and zero hours contracts and agency work. These are all insecure forms of employment and tend to be predominant in areas of what is traditionally seen as 'women's work'.

The lack of decent pay and conditions means there is a significant amount of in-work poverty, as well as a reliance on 'top up' welfare benefits, such as Housing and Council Tax Benefit and Tax Credits. Changes to the welfare system are making it increasingly difficult for women to claim and be eligible for additional income assistance.

Working hours thresholds for tax credit entitlement have increased. Lone parents must work at least 16 hours per week. For couples, joint working hours need to be at least 24 per week with one person working at least 16 hours per week. In a couple where only one person is working, that person must be working 24 hours a week. These changes are causing concern as employers may be unwilling or unable to increase working hours where necessary. Women will therefore be forced to engage in more part-time work and face additional childcare and transport costs.

"There are no guarantees my employer will increase my hours so I still qualify for tax credits. I need this money to pay for my childcare. If they can't increase my hours I really don't know how I'm going to manage."

The SWC fully supports the payment of a Living Wage. This has the potential to lift women and their families out of poverty, as well as reducing reliance on welfare benefits. It would not only be beneficial to the workers who receive it, but also the economy as a whole.

Decent Working Hours

Many of the roles which are available to women are centred on low paid, low skilled, part-time jobs. For some this is an informed choice, however for many others it is the only option available. Family and caring responsibilities and poor public transport mean that part-time work is often the most feasible means of employment. The lack of flexibility demonstrated by many employers for those who work full-time is also a contributing factor. Many women are forced to take on two or three jobs in order to make ends meet.

Only being able to find this type of work can be detrimental to women's confidence. There is not a lot of support for those who wish to progress.

“How many women can give up one or two part-time jobs (which suit their family circumstances) to go to university to get a teaching degree or an accountancy degree?”

A lot of women are underemployed, whereby they have one or more part-time job instead of one full-time job, or they are carrying out work which they are over-qualified for. This can be for a number of reasons. The main causes of this type of work include lack of flexibility in full-time employment, part-time work not being valued, and a lack of job opportunities overall.

“Having a degree doesn't guarantee a job. I'm a team leader in a shop and I'm being made redundant. I have a degree in maths but I can't get a job.”

Underemployment also has a significant impact on young women graduates, due to a lack of full-time jobs available in the careers they wish to pursue. Many keep the jobs they had while studying, e.g. in bars and shops, which attract low wages and have limited opportunities for training and development.

Temporary, seasonal, part-time jobs are often the only work available in rural Scotland. As well as a lack of childcare services, public transport in these areas is *“expensive and unreliable”*.

“Buses in this area are extortionate. If you're on minimum wage then you're working two or three hours a day just to be able to get to work.”

Women who work or have worked in senior roles find themselves extremely disadvantaged when they choose to have a family. Those returning from maternity leave can face barriers when trying to return to the job they held before they had a baby.

“I was made redundant whilst on maternity leave. I was told that due to business needs, when I returned to work I would have to travel to an office 40 miles from my home and be there for 6.30am. When I said I couldn’t do this, I was offered reduced hours. This was also unsuitable, so I was made redundant.”

Despite the existence of legislation, women find they have less responsibility and their roles and hours are subject to change. This can make progression very difficult. Many choose not to return to their previous job, but instead seek part-time employment which fits around their caring responsibilities.

“I was a bank branch manager in a town approximately 30 miles away from where I live before I had my second baby. Travelling there every day plus the cost of childcare meant it was not worth my while to go back. I now work part-time at the weekends when my husband is at home so we don’t have to pay for childcare. He increased his hours slightly and because he is a lower wage earner we qualify for tax credits. It’s crazy how we are better off now than me working 6 days a week as a bank manager.”

There can be a feeling amongst some employers, often in the private sector, that women who have had children are not as committed or ambitious as others.

“I showed an interest in working part-time when I went back after having my baby. My male boss was surprised as prior to becoming a mother I was interested in a promotion – he didn’t see how this would work if I wasn’t working all the hours in the day.”

The lack of flexibility on the part of some employers is also a significant contributing factor.

“I was previously a senior manager. When I had my children I wanted to be able to keep my job but adapt my working hours so I could be at home more. This wasn’t an option. I now do part-time work in the evenings and at weekends because this fits better round my family responsibilities.”

There is a lack of knowledge around the right to request flexible working. Employees are often unaware that they can ask to work on a more flexible basis. Women feel they have to have a level of confidence and strength to be able to make such a request.

The precarious nature of employment in the third sector, which employs a large number of women, is also an issue.

“You’re always as little as a year away from losing your job because of funding. It’s hard to work with this as a constant possibility.”

Zero Hours Contracts

Many of the jobs available in the current climate are undertaken as zero hours contracts. This type of work is often offered in areas where women predominate, i.e. low paid, low skilled, part-time jobs. Workers on zero hours contracts do not accrue holidays and are not paid for sick days. There are no guarantees of work from day to day, therefore no fixed income.

“It’s not right. People have to phone in every day to see if they have a shift or not. How can you plan your life around that?”

Women need work to be flexible, which is often an argument put forward for the use of zero hours contracts. The reality, however, is that they are not flexible but instead create uncertainty and, in many cases, poverty.

A good example of positive flexible working is through the NHS. ‘Bank staff’ provide temporary staffing cover to various services within the health board area, with work opportunities available to fill temporary full or part time hours. Workers, the majority of whom are women, are able to ‘pick and choose’ hours to suit them and their family responsibilities. They do, however, accumulate holidays and are entitled to sick pay when they are ill.

“I suppose it’s technically a zero hours contract but it provides decent working terms and conditions which makes all the difference. It’s a flexible approach which, ultimately, suits and benefits women.”

Older Women

There needs to be a recognition that older women have significant experience, and many have worked for the same employer throughout the course of their working lives.

There are issues for many who work in particular jobs, many of which are subject to Equal Pay cases, in which women predominate. These women often undertake physically and mentally demanding roles, such as that of a carer, or a nurse, which can become more difficult with age. They have had to fight for the basic right to be paid fairly for the work they have done, and in many cases continue to do.

Restructuring and redundancies within workplaces can contribute to women feeling, or being made to feel, that they are older. They are being forced to compete for positions similar to those which they have occupied for years previously.

“It wasn’t until I had to re-apply for jobs that management started to ask how old I was. Up until that point nobody had mentioned my age but when the reorganisation started all of a sudden it seemed to become relevant.”

This type of process can make women feel that they should be considering retirement, especially when they are “displaced” into another role. Adjusting to new roles and responsibilities can be challenging, and older women are often afforded little or no assistance to make this transition.

Certain working environments can be seen to be the domain of young people, such as contact centres. This can be off-putting for older women.

“I was 48 when I joined this particular company and didn’t feel old. At that time there were a lot of older people working in the contact centre, and a lot of them had been displaced from the branches. The company were looking for people with experience to be able to properly assist customers. However over the last five years I have seen older women disappear.”

Some women are reluctant to define themselves as older, as the way they feel about their own skills and abilities may change. Women who work in certain areas, for example youth work, feel it necessary to keep a “*young attitude*” because of the nature of the work they do.

The lack of recognition of the health issues faced by older women has become more apparent over the last five years.

“Women aren’t necessarily having major health issues, they’re just having to deal with things that happen as you get older. They usually have to do this with little or no support at work.”

Often policies relating to menopause, for example, are extremely difficult to negotiate and implement. Misunderstandings and misinformation around menopause can cause difficulties for women who are experiencing it, which discourages them from seeking support from their employer.

One of the most significant changes to work situations has, however, been the increased use of IT. Employers may offer inductions and training courses, however this is not always possible with the constant advances in technology. These training sessions rarely take into account the specific needs of older women, who may require more time and further information in order to be able to use systems. The increase in workloads across all forms of employment can also be problematic.

“We’re expected to do more and more, often with less time. In order to keep up with computer systems, I find I have to read up on things in my own time. There’s no policy for getting that time back. It becomes a debate where I end up having to explain that I’m not just slow at typing.”

It is vital that employers and other staff members recognise the skills and experience that older women bring to the workplace. There needs to be a basic understanding that although older women may, at times, require additional support, time and assistance, they are still more than capable of fulfilling their role and making a positive contribution. There needs to be a way of maximising the skills and experience older women possess, for example through mentoring other staff members or younger people.

“Employers need to understand the benefit they will get from having older women in the workplace.”

BME Women

For many BME women, language is the most significant barrier to entering, sustaining and progressing in employment. The skills and knowledge that they possess are often underestimated or, in some cases, ignored due to basic language barriers.

"I have to translate what's being said to me in my head and then translate my answer into English. I'm always concerned that people don't understand me. It's really frustrating."

Women who enter the country on a spousal visa can access certain levels of education or volunteer, however they are unable to enter into employment. This means that the skills of these teachers, nurses and many others are being diminished and in some cases lost altogether.

The unpaid work that women undertake can be a barrier to employment, particularly for women who move to Scotland and who are expected to carry on the culture and traditions of their home country.

"In my culture, women are there to be the mother and the wife, to keep the house clean and cook the food. But I see myself as a 'Scottish woman' having lived here for a number of years now. It's difficult to strike a balance."

Society places very little value - either in monetary or social terms - on unpaid work. As a result, women often do not recognise the transferrable skills they have gained from years of keeping a house and bringing up a family. The abilities these women have could be incorporated into the workplace with the right support and guidance, however that very seldom exists. This is further exacerbated by the idea there are 'men's roles' and 'women's roles' in society.

There is a real lack of diversity in many workplaces, meaning there are not enough role models for young BME women. Better representation of BME women in workplaces, as well as political and public life, is one of the most important ways to remove barriers.

"We need more role models for BME women to give direction for women to come through and challenge perceptions and discrimination."

Improved access to childcare would also be welcomed. Lack of provision is one of the most significant barriers for women who wish to enter, sustain and progress in employment. This is particularly the case for women who are incorporating two different cultures. Recognition of this is extremely important.

"In my culture we don't put our children into nursery or to a childminder, because it's the role of the women to look after their children. There needs to be a balance for women like me who want to honour our own culture but also integrate into Scottish society."

I know I can rely on a fair and simple social security system

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- The stigma of claiming benefits was removed and public awareness raised about the reality of this type of support.
- The Scottish Government continues to consult on the social security powers which will be devolved to Holyrood, in order to ensure that policies are made in the best interests of the Scottish people. Services which support women to get back into work are properly funded and resourced.
- The Scottish and UK Governments work together in order to ensure that the transfer of powers over aspects of social security are carried out with minimum impact on those who rely on welfare support.

“Women, who still manage household budgets and support children’s day to day lives proportionately more than men, are bearing the brunt of austerity cuts and demonising of those on benefits.”

Overall

Some women have been able to report positive experiences of the system, mainly due to the actions and assistance of individual Jobcentre workers. In the main, however, women have faced barriers to and difficulties in accessing the social security they need in order to be able to support themselves and their families.

“The system is impersonal, punitive, and humiliating.”

The way in which those who claim benefits are portrayed in the media creates a stigma, suggesting that the social security system is a bad thing, and that those who rely on welfare support have a lot of money. Certain TV programmes, newspapers and magazines portray those who need support as too lazy to work or as ‘scroungers’.

“We have claimed JSA for a while now. We definitely cannot afford the lifestyle that the media likes to claim many on benefits have. We have 4 children and sometimes it is a struggle to find money for food. We always make sure our kids have a meal, or clothes, before we do. My health has deteriorated as a result of not being able to eat healthily. It seems to me that labelling anyone on benefits as a scrounger is really damaging. We are trying our hardest to gain employment, and are constantly getting knocked back down.”

One of the key issues for women is the stigmatisation of those on benefits. This takes many forms, including the way in which the media perceive people who rely on social security, the way they are referred to by the UK Government and even the way in which workers in the DWP and Jobcentres treat claimants.

“Everyone is treated as the lowest common denominator, regardless of abilities, skills, experiences or circumstance.”

More needs to be done by the Scottish Government to make society aware that the experiences of those accessing the social security system are not the same as the way in which the media portrays it. Many women rely on assistance because they are in low paid, low skilled employment, because they have become ill or have been made redundant, or because their ability to work is restricted as a result of caring responsibilities.

“I became very ill and had to stop working. I was advised that I would be able to go on benefits until I got better and that it was ‘not the end of the world’. It certainly felt like the end of my world. I couldn’t imagine not working again, and I couldn’t imagine having to survive on this type of support for the rest of my life. Anyone who thinks people on benefits have it easy needs a reality check.”

Tax Credits

There is a reliance on additional financial assistance through tax credits by many families living in Scotland. Without this extra support, many would struggle to be able to make ends meet. This is particularly the case for women who receive state support to pay for childcare.

Women working in low paid, low skilled jobs, such as cleaning and in the care sector, have to rely on ‘top up’ benefits. They would be at risk of in-work poverty without this additional financial help. The nature of this type of employment, however, means they are often unable to secure sufficient hours from their employer in order to secure the necessary support. The constant worry around their financial situation can have a significant impact on their mental health.

“For too many women, going to work is more of a financial strain than staying away from the labour market and relying solely on social security. This is down to a combination of low pay, high rents, council tax and expensive private childcare.”

In order to be able to claim tax credits, women must be earning under a certain amount of money and working a specified number of hours per week. Under the working tax credits system, the claimant receives support based on their previous year’s earnings. This can be detrimental and can lead more women to rely on short-term, pay day loans.

Universal Credit

Previously, each person in a household made an individual claim. Under the system of Universal Credit (UC) which is being put in place by the UK Government, the benefit will go to the household overall. In the future the Scottish Parliament will be able to decide how this is administered, as part of the package of devolved powers which are currently being discussed and debated at Westminster.

Until this transfer of control takes place, however, only one claim per household can be made. The likelihood is that in many cases the man will receive the money. This has the potential to put women at risk of having little or no financial independence, particularly if they have an abusive or controlling partner.

UC will be paid monthly in arrears. Previously, individual payments were made on a weekly basis to claimants. Under the old system, housing and council tax benefits were paid directly to the landlord. These will now go directly to the claimant. There is a real worry that families will end up in debt as a result of these imposed changes. There is very little additional support or information around personal and household budgeting.

“Women are used to managing their money in a certain way, getting small payments throughout the month which spreads their finances. There will be so many who fall into rent arrears or who have to rely on pay day loans because they don't know how to handle a lump sum once a month.”

Seeking Work - Applications, Interviews and Support

The changes which have been implemented, and will continue to be implemented, are forcing women into work. They are expected to undertake jobs that they do not have the skills for or are unable to do due to issues such as transport and caring responsibilities.

“Many women have been away from the labour market for a number of years and for a number of reasons. It's unreasonable to expect them just to be put into a job without doing any work on their skills, abilities and confidence.”

Application forms can be a barrier for women who wish to access social security. They are long, unnecessarily complicated and offer little flexibility.

“It feels like an exercise in hoop jumping. It's all very stark and binary – you have to answer the questions on a yes or no basis without the ability to explain about, for example, fluctuating medical conditions.”

Applications for any type of welfare benefit must now be made online. This presumes that claimants have access to a computer and the internet, as well as the skills to be able to fill out complicated forms online. If not, then those who wish to make a claim will have to travel to a local library, for example, which could be expensive depending on how far away the facility is. There are then issues with having to provide personal information in a public space.

“If you're a woman on low pay, your first thought is not getting broadband or a smartphone, it's making sure your kids have something to eat and clothes. My sister-in-law was sanctioned because she does not have computer skills so was struggling to get the forms filled in. She was sent on a computer course, with a really long waiting list, which is now being cut due to a lack of funding so she's back to where she started.”

Basic support from the Jobcentre is provided. However because staff are under so much pressure to deal with so many claimants, with varying skills, levels and competencies, it is extremely difficult to access the individual support that many require. There are also issues for women who have been made redundant and attend the Jobcentre in order to find a new job.

“While there is help available around applications and interview processes, it is at a very basic level. I have good computer skills and a good standard of education. I have, as a result, been turned away from attending courses as my CV as it stands is considered to be ‘good enough’. I don’t know where to go from here.”

Similarly, where childcare exists, funded places in Local Authority nurseries are very difficult to obtain and are generally only provided on the basis of sessions in the morning or the afternoon. This leads to a reliance on expensive private childcare, which is out of the financial reach of many families.

“Finding childcare is such a struggle. It means endlessly searching websites and the phone book, then making the necessary calls to see if there is availability in the local area. That then leads to trying to work out how to gather the necessary deposit. Most places look for one month upfront – how are you supposed to get that when you’re relying on benefits?”

Difficulty in accessing formal childcare provision, particularly in rural areas where there is very little availability, leads to a reliance on informal care from friends and family. More often than not, this falls upon other women, many of whom are already looking after other family members while maintaining employment. The strain can take a toll on their physical and mental health.

“I feel like I rely on my family, particularly my mum, too much and I feel bad about that. But there’s nothing I can do. If they didn’t look after my children then I can’t look for work, and if I can’t look for work then I’ll get sanctioned. If it wasn’t for them I would be in a really difficult financial situation – I’m lucky though, not everyone has a support network round about them.”

Support provided by services within the voluntary sector is seen as *“invaluable”*, however can be withdrawn with very little notice due to precarious funding arrangements.

“With a lot of things, it’s a case of support being available until the money runs out.”

There is a feeling amongst women that many aspects of the current system should be reconsidered, taking into account the needs of individuals, as well as maintaining levels of dignity and respect.

“People need encouragement and to be treated as individuals, not numbers to be processed. Ideally the Jobcentre should find work and arrange interviews for people according to their skills and abilities, which is not the way it works at the moment. Where work placements are found, people should be paid a decent wage and work to decent terms and conditions.”

Any new employability service developed when powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament needs to be aware that entering the labour market after a long time away, or for the first time, can be extremely daunting. The level of support will depend solely on the needs of the individual. Assumptions cannot be made about what they need or do not need based on complex, inflexible forms and assessments.

“What is the point in making people apply for jobs they are not qualified to do or are unable to undertake because of e.g. caring responsibilities, just to be able to show that they have completed a specific number of applications in a week?”

Sanctions

Sanctions, which can occur when the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) deem that a claimant has not fulfilled actions required in order to receive their benefit, have been described as *“harsh”* and *“unfair”*. Under the new system, those claiming certain benefits have to work a specific number of hours in order to keep receiving the money they rely on.

If not, they face the real prospect of their benefits being stopped or removed altogether. This has an impact on women, lone parents in particular, who can struggle to find extra hours on top of those they already do.

“I work at the moment but have had to get another job to take me over the required working hours threshold. If I hadn't, I would have lost the money I need to pay for my childcare. People shouldn't be living in fear like this.”

Sanctions are one of the most significant changes brought about by welfare reform measures.

“Sanctions have hit people hard and have left many with even lower self-esteem and confidence than they had previously. Women have been coming to the organisation I work with asking for sanitary products because they have been sanctioned and have absolutely no money.”

There have been examples of women organising childcare for appointments at the Jobcentre, only to get there and be told they have been given the wrong date and will have to return the next day. It is very difficult to organise childcare at such short notice, and as a result women have to either take their children with them, which is not always appropriate, or fail to attend the rescheduled appointment and be sanctioned.

The lack of public transport in many areas further exacerbates barriers. There is a real lack of flexibility within the process.

“I live in a rural area where there is only one bus per hour to take me to the nearest Jobcentre. If that bus is running late, or not running at all, which is sometimes the case, I can’t get to my appointment on time and risk being left with nothing.”

Assessments

Claimants are expected to undertake ‘fit for work’ assessments in order to determine whether they are eligible for Personal Independence Payment. These are undertaken by DWP staff, without input from medical professionals. Those with mental health issues are frequently deemed capable to look for work because they are physically fit. This has a detrimental impact and keeps people in a cycle of working for a short time in a low paid, zero hours job, then having to leave because of their illness. They then have to go through the assessment process again when they try to claim benefits.

“If the DWP see that you can answer the phone or walk twenty paces unaided then to them you’re fit for work, even when you’re absolutely not.”

Those with mental health issues are also bearing the brunt of benefit reductions and sanctions.

“If someone with mental health issues has a fit for work assessment on a ‘good day’, the person making the decision about them wouldn’t know there was anything wrong. It seems to be unless the person being assessed physically can’t walk, they’re fine and fit for work.”

Further Powers

Overall, women have commented on the potentially positive outcomes as a result of the Scottish Parliament being given more powers over these aspects of social security.

“I struggle to see anything negative about Scotland having more powers. I feel that the UK Government are just so far removed from Scotland and the different social and geographical issues that we have.”

There is a feeling that there is a “*stronger sense of social justice*” in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. There is real hope that this, coupled with the positive steps taken by the Scottish Government already over the past few years to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform, will mean that which is devolved to Scotland will be managed and administered in a way which keeps the dignity and respect of those claiming social security at its heart.

“We need a political change. People are realising that what we have is not enough. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened and that’s contributing to wider issues. Politicians are beginning to take note and that’s so important.”

It is vital that the Scottish Government capitalise on the positive impacts and ensure that, wherever and insofar as possible, the negative outcomes are considered and steps are taken to mitigate their impact on women and their families in Scotland.

While there are many positive outcomes, the potentially negative impacts of further devolution of social security must be borne in mind.

One of the key issues for women is how the recommendations of the Smith Commission have translated to the Scotland Bill and as a result the aspects of social security which will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

“The new powers are much more restricted than the Smith Commission intended and I worry this will mean our hands are actually more tied than they are at the moment. It’s difficult to make real change with control over such a small percentage of social security.”

There are also other negative impacts which could arise. Scotland will only have a small percentage of overall welfare control, however people are relying more and more on assistance. There are concerns that only devolving such a small amount of power will in fact have a detrimental impact, as budgets are stretched and other services potentially diminished or removed in order to make up the shortfall in welfare spending.

“Without a doubt the most negative thing is that the Scottish Government has not had enough power conferred to it. This could lead to a really limited ability to help people.”



I can get access to justice quickly and at a reasonable cost

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **The Scottish Government continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG)**
- **Funding is provided to establish more specialist domestic abuse courts throughout the country.**
- **The Scottish Government ensures that the commitment to scrap Employment Tribunal fees is upheld.**

Violence Against Women

The work undertaken by the justice system and various agencies in tackling domestic abuse, such as Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), is undoubtedly welcomed. Despite this, there are still too many loopholes within the law which means those who perpetrate abuse are not punished in the way they should be. Victims, the majority of whom are women, are denied access to justice as a result. Domestic abuse is a highly gendered issue and VAWG overall is both a cause and a consequence of the significant gender inequalities which exist in society.

Recent developments in the law, such as the introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011, have improved access. The civil protections they offer are, however, still not incentive enough for more women to seek the assistance of the law. Women have told the SWC that there are *“too many loopholes”*, which discourages them from reporting, or encouraging their friends and family to report instances of domestic abuse to the police.

“Going to the police, telling your story over and over again, then having to go to court takes its toll. It feels like there’s no point for the sake of him getting a suspended sentence or 30 days in prison. He’ll be back at my door anyway.”

The SWC has welcomed the introduction of both current and proposed legislation, such as the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011 and the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill. This type of policy demonstrates the Scottish Government’s commitment to ensuring that instances of VAWG are tackled appropriately. Such a measure sends the message that those who perpetuate such crimes will be adequately punished.

“This issue is so important. The only way to ensure women have access to justice, support and most importantly safety, is by putting laws in place which punish the men who abuse.”

The Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill looks at the introduction of a specific offence of disclosing, or threatening to disclose, an intimate photograph or film. The increase of so-called ‘revenge porn’ is having a significant impact on women. The use of various forms of technology and social media, particularly amongst young people, means that images can be anonymously shared to many in a very short space of time.

The SWC recently held a Young Women's event, which looked at the influences, pressures and experiences of young women. One of the workshops focused on the issue of sexualisation and social media. The rise in the use of social media and the damage this can do, particularly in terms of the sharing of images and videos amongst young people, was one of the key topics of discussion.

"It's difficult to have a private life and do something innocent such as taking a picture when people play their lives out through social media. Sadly, you can't trust that other people will use the picture in the way you intended to."

The SWC has consulted with young women on the sharing of intimate and explicit images, as well as the impact this can have. Discussions have taken place around how quickly an image can spread and the backlash often faced by the women who find themselves in these situations.

"When this happens to girls we get called 'sluts' and 'whores' and it's our fault, even though all we did was let someone we trusted take a picture in what we thought was a safe environment. There are absolutely no repercussions for the guys who think it's all 'lads banter'."

The SWC has also consulted directly with women who have spoken of the impact revenge porn has had on them.

"My ex posted topless pictures of me a website, along with details of my Twitter and Facebook accounts, the town I live in (which is a small town) and where I work. I have never been so embarrassed in my whole life. I could have lost my job, but thankfully my employers were extremely understanding. That didn't stop the whispers and rumours going round the office though. People would stop my parents in the street and talk to them about it. It got to the stage where I didn't even want to leave the house. Meanwhile he got off completely scot free because there was nothing the police could really do about it."

While images of women under 18 are covered under laws relating to the distribution of child pornography, there is very little that can be done for women over the age of 18. The SWC therefore wholeheartedly supports the creation of a specific criminal offence to protect the women who, at present, have no recourse to justice if private images are shared without their consent.

Non-harassment orders and interdicts obtained by women to stop the perpetrators being able to contact them are not always policed effectively. Frequent breaches of bail conditions are also common.

"There needs to be a much more pro-active approach from the police to deal with these breaches. Otherwise the victim has nothing more than a worthless piece of paper. That doesn't send out a positive message at all."

More convictions and harsher sentences would make clear to those who commit VAWG offences that they will not *"get off lightly"*. This must be considered as part of prevention work within the proposed strategy.

It is also extremely important that the services which provide advice and support to victims of revenge porn are provided with adequate funding, especially given the rise in this form of VAWG. It is also vital that the police and the courts are given thorough training in order to be able to properly deal with both victims and perpetrators. Without this full circle approach, women will continue to be limited in access to justice and redress.

The establishment of specialist domestic abuse courts in locations throughout the country is welcomed. Women have called for domestic abuse courts, or similar appropriate, community-based justice mechanisms to be set up in more areas throughout Scotland.

Many women are afraid to disclose that they have been abused. If specialist mechanisms operated in more parts of the country, awareness of this type of access to justice would increase. This would, hopefully, further increase awareness of domestic abuse and take away the stigma that is too often attached to women in this situation.

Those who have experienced violence and abuse often drop charges in cases in the mainstream courts as *“financially it’s them who have to bear the brunt”*. Case processing times are different (often longer) in smaller, more outlying areas than they are in the main towns.

Many solicitors often do not fully understand the complexities of VAWG and are therefore not best placed to represent victims. Accessing specialists can be very difficult, particularly for those who live outwith main towns and cities. Many women are also unaware that they are free to seek alternative legal representation if they are unhappy with the advice they receive.

“There just isn’t enough information available for women who are looking to get protection from the courts. This discourages too many from even trying.”

More advocacy services are necessary, particularly for women from BME communities, disabled women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be considered, with particular attention paid to cultural issues and specific needs.

“Too many vulnerable women are frightened of the legal system and do not know where to turn for help.”

While prevention work being carried out at the moment is vital, more needs to be done to tackle the root causes of VAWG. A change in the culture of Scotland is necessary, looking at the way in which women are viewed and how this can both stem from and lead to VAWG.

Employment Tribunals

Under the Employment Tribunals and Employment Appeal Tribunals Fees Order 2013, introduced by the then UK Coalition Government, those wishing to make a claim at Tribunal now have to pay in order to do so. These changes are having a direct impact on women, who face sexual harassment, unequal pay and discrimination in the workplace on a daily basis. The introduction of fees of up to £1200 to lodge a claim at Tribunal creates a significant barrier to those trying to access legal remedies.

Level 2 claims, which attract the highest fees, are lodged, in the main, by women. This category will include cases relating to Equal Pay, discrimination around pregnancy and maternity, flexible working, age discrimination and sexual harassment. Many of those who take this type of claim for discrimination or poor working practices are in low paid, low skilled jobs which are often part-time. Unless they qualify for a fee remission, they are being forced to either pay the new charges or be denied access to justice.

The new system also presumes that those wishing to lodge a claim have access to the internet and the skills and ability to use it. There is also the assumption that women have a bank account or access to a credit or debit card or cheque book, as well as up to £1200 to pay their fees.

Further costs will be incurred for women who wish to call witnesses. The impact on women in rural areas has not been considered. For example, someone who lives in Thurso does not only have to pay to have a case heard in Inverness, but also to cover the costs of any witnesses she requires to support her claim.

The new rules and fee structures in relation to Employment Tribunals are having a significant and detrimental impact on women seeking access to justice in the workplace. The commitment of the Scottish Government to scrap Employment Tribunal fees once powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament is, therefore, extremely important. It would also be extremely beneficial if the Scottish Government used any relevant powers they have at the moment to assist women who are, because of Westminster's policies, being denied redress and justice.



I am not charged a higher price for services, such as electricity, just because of my circumstances

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **The higher costs of goods and services in rural areas is properly recognised.**
- **More is done to create improved, integrated public transport systems outwith main towns and cities.**
- **The impact of fuel poverty on women and their families throughout Scotland is not only accepted but robust measures are taken in order to assist those who are suffering as a result.**

Women in Rural Areas

Rural Scotland accounts for 94% of the country's land mass and approximately 18% of the overall population. The remote, sparse nature of the geography of Scotland means that the cost of basic items, such as fuel and food, as well as broadband, are higher for families who live in these areas.

Rising fuel costs continue to have an adverse impact on communities in rural Scotland. As well as affecting day to day travel, high fuel prices are also impacting on business activity. The cost of transporting goods or providing services results in increased costs to the end user. Women, finding it difficult to access employment within their own community, are forced to travel long distances to work, often for little financial benefit.

"It's shocking that the cost of fuel inhibits travel outwith a restricted area. As a part-time worker I can only afford to travel the three days a week. Five days would be so expensive, not only for fuel but also in the long run for car maintenance."

Rural businesses, in the current financial climate, are encountering difficulties in providing competitive goods and services due to increased fuel costs. As a result rural economies are suffering and women are experiencing financial hardship in accessing and sustaining employment opportunities.

"Huge fuel costs are putting rural businesses in jeopardy. Due to our location, fuel costs are a serious threat to employment opportunities."

Broadband is very slow and there is a reliance on old copper cables as opposed to faster fibre-optic lines. Services which people in urban areas take for granted, such as internet banking, are not as accessible. Provision is especially slow in the evenings, when more people are online.

"You usually end up having to phone the bank rather than completing a transaction through internet banking. If that's difficult then how could you complete a course online?"

The cost of broadband is also significantly higher than in urban areas. Offers for 'cheap deals' in towns and cities are not available.

"You're paying £40 for a service that's £15 in, say Inverness. The service we get isn't as good as they have either."

Fuel Costs

Fuel poverty is a significant issue for families throughout Scotland. Paying for gas and electricity takes up a significant amount of household budgets. Too many families are being faced with the very real choice of 'heat or eat'.

"The energy companies have carte blanche to charge whatever they like, with the sole aim of making bigger profits. It's 2015. People shouldn't be forced to choose between feeding their families or putting the heating on in the cold weather."

Many homes, particularly in deprived areas, use pre-pay electricity meters, which are more expensive than other options, such as paying via monthly direct debit, which is out of the reach of those who do not have bank accounts. Similarly many homes are heated via expensive, power-consuming storage heaters, as opposed to more efficient and cheaper central heating systems.

"The companies are capitalising on the poor. If you run out of power and can't get to the shop for whatever reason, you're put onto emergency power, the cost of which is then taken off your next top-up. It's a vicious circle."



There is more affordable housing allowing me and my family to rent or own a decent and warm property

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **More affordable, safe and secure housing was built.**
- **The stigma of living in social housing was removed, making it a viable option for families and not a “last resort”.**
- **The Scottish Government ensures that rent and council tax benefits continue to be paid directly to a tenant’s landlord.**

The availability of affordable, safe and secure housing is one of the most important aspects of a fair society. At present, this is under threat by the removal of council tax and housing benefit brought about by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). While the Scottish Government will be given the power to change this when further welfare measures are devolved, this change will not come into effect for some time.

Women who are used to having their rent paid directly to the landlord will, under the new system, be given the money directly and expected to make the payment themselves. This could cause issues with rent arrears. More often than not, women manage very tight household budgets, which run to the dates upon which small pockets of money will be received.

“If we have a bad winter I won’t be paying my rent. The money will go towards my gas and electricity instead. I can’t cope with my kids being cold again.”

With a greater reliance on high-cost private let homes, women are sourcing unregulated, high interest ‘payday’ loans or credit cards in order to pay increased housing costs.

“The Welfare Reform measures are a financial assault on women. All of the cuts are impacting on women more than men due to the inequalities we are exposed to in the first place.”

There is a critical need for more affordable, appropriate housing overall in Scotland. This is particularly the case in the social housing sector, where families often live in unsuitable accommodation. Many are overcrowded, or are forced to move away from support networks due to lack of availability.

“I don’t want to have to live in a two bedroom flat with my two kids, but I know there are no bigger properties available round about this area. I rely on my family and friends, who live nearby, for childcare so that I can go out to work. If I had to move outwith the area, I would have to get a bus to drop my kids off, get another bus to work, and then do a similar journey at night. It would make me going out to work completely pointless and I don’t want that.”

“Social housing used to be the norm in Scotland, but the introduction of right to buy meant that the best houses were bought and those who needed accommodation were placed in less desirable areas. Living in a ‘council house’ became an insult, something to be ashamed of, instead of a normal, decent way of living.”

The Help to Buy (Scotland) scheme is welcomed by women, as it allows many to be able to consider purchasing a home, which they would be otherwise unable to do this without the assistance provided by this scheme. However, the availability of this type of housing, particularly in rural areas, is often scarce. The Scottish Government must ensure that appropriate properties are built in all areas of the country, so that as many families as possible are able to benefit from taking part in the scheme.



I feel safe no matter where I live or where I go

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- There was more recognition of the impact of the removal of police at a local level, particularly in rural areas.
- Local Authorities carried out Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) on measures taken to save money, ensuring that no decision has a detrimental impact on women's safety.
- Services which support women who have experienced violence and abuse are fully funded, without fear of reduction or removal of resources. Particular consideration must be given to the stretch on capacity in rural areas.
- The unique challenges faced by BME women attempting to access VAWG services are recognised, with advocacy and interpretive services being made available to assist them.
- More public campaigns around specific aspects of VAWG are created, which will raise awareness and educate all aspects of society about the issues.

Community Safety

Many women have commented on the potential risks to community safety following the closure of a number of police stations, particularly in smaller towns and villages. The creation of Police Scotland has resulted in the centralisation of a number of services, often to the detriment of local residents.

"We used to have a police station in the town. Over the past few years staffing levels have been reduced and after the single police force came into being the station closed altogether. As a woman living on my own, this has made me feel quite apprehensive. Previously, if I needed assistance, I knew I could contact the station and a local officer would come to my house. Now I have to phone a central call centre and wait until officers are available. It's really disconcerting."

Some Local Authorities have introduced cost-cutting measures which are having an impact on the safety of individuals. In certain areas, councils are turning street lights off in order to save money. This has a particular impact on women, who are left feeling unsafe when, for example, returning home from work. This is especially true for those in rural areas, where many of the employment available is shift-work within the hospitality industry.

"I finish work at about ten o'clock at night and have to walk fifteen minutes along the road to get home. It's not so bad in the summer because it's still fairly light so you don't notice that there are no streetlights. In the winter, however, when it's dark and freezing cold and wet, it's horrible. I don't have a choice though - I need my job, I don't drive and there aren't any taxis in the area that would take me the equivalent of a few minutes in the car."

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Women in Scotland are proud of the gender-based definition of violence used by the Scottish Government. This recognises that VAWG is both a cause and a consequence of fundamental gender inequality. The clear commitment by the Scottish Government to tackle VAWG is welcomed by women throughout the country. The implementation of policy and practices, such as 'Equally Safe', the National Group to Address Violence Against Women and the creation of the Caledonian System, are all important steps towards the eradication of VAWG.

The legal protection which has been put in place by the Scottish Government and as a result of lobbying, campaigning and support from public and third sector organisations is also extremely important. For example, the introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011 has afforded women who have experienced violence increased access to justice. It sends out a clear message that the courts will impose custodial sentences on men who commit offences under this legislation.

The SWC also fully supported and welcomed the introduction of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2010. This legislation has provided new and wider definitions of rape and other sexual offences. More needs to be done, however, in terms of securing convictions for this offence. Despite this legislation, conviction rates remain disappointingly low in Scotland. There are a number of contributing factors as to why so few men are brought to justice. Attitudes towards the victim in court, questions about their previous sexual partners, what they had been wearing when the rape happened and whether they had been drinking can all lead to low conviction rates.

Campaigns such as 'This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me' and 'Not Ever', which were run by Rape Crisis Scotland, are excellent examples of preventative work being done. The Scottish Government should do more to endorse and run this type of advertising campaign, not only for rape and sexual violence, but across the broader VAWG spectrum.

Services

Women throughout the country have praised the Scottish Government for its commitment to funding VAWG services such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. The value of these services is undeniable. The provision of refuge accommodation, as well as assistance with applications for housing, welfare benefits and other support mechanisms allow women to recognise, survive and exit abusive relationships. VAWG services allow women and their children to move forward with their lives.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without the support and assistance I've had from these services. They saved my life."

Funding for VAWG services should continue and should under no circumstances be cut, despite tightening budgets across the public and voluntary sectors. It must also be recognised, however, that different women have different service provision needs. A 'one-size fits all' model does not work throughout Scotland.

Rural Women

Services to support women experiencing VAWG are not always accessible in every part of the country. Many Local Authorities have specialist units, however most are based in the main towns and do not extend to outlying villages and more remote areas.

Rural Scotland accounts for 18% of the population and makes up 94% of the country's land mass. Women who live in remote, rural and super sparse areas are not afforded the same access to services as those living in more urban parts of the country. Services such as Women's Aid run outreach programmes. However, with increasingly stretched funding and workers having to travel significant distances to provide services, too many women who have experienced violence are being left without the help they need.

There is also a strong patriarchal culture in Scotland which is especially apparent in rural areas. This can make it extremely difficult for women to 'speak out' and report incidents of violence, often due to fear of repercussions within the community. VAWG is seen as a "*hidden evil*" in many rural areas and a "*behind closed doors*" mentality is often displayed. A lack of female police officers, particularly in more remote areas, can also create barriers for women in reporting domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault etc. Police officers tend to be known in smaller communities, which can make it even more difficult to disclose incidents of violence.

"I don't want to be talking about my private life with the local police officer who is the son or daughter of someone I have known for years. I would feel more comfortable discussing these things with a complete stranger."

BME Women

It is recognised that more barriers exist for BME women who seek to access VAWG services. Issues such as a lack of trust or uncertainty around organisations often prevents those who have experienced violence from accessing help and support.

"There needs to be adverts and information in hospitals, mosques, schools etc. All it would take to raise awareness would be a leaflet on the notice board."

Help and advice can be complicated by language barriers and a genuine fear that cultural sensitivities can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Women who do not speak English as a first language are at a "*double disadvantage*". For example, the use of hand gestures or varying voice pitches to explain a point can be viewed by male translators, GPs etc as hysteria or instability. These methods of expression are often common within certain cultures.

"More female translators or women who understand cultural sensitivities on hand to help in these circumstances are vital."

Many BME women are unaware of services available because their abusers (in the main husbands or family members) control their movements and all access to communication.

Women in this situation are accompanied everywhere. For some, even a visit to the GP can result in the doctor being instructed to speak to the woman through her husband.

Women who come to the UK with their spouse often do so without any knowledge of the rights afforded to them or of the services available to assist. Improved advocacy would increase awareness and make women more willing and able to approach services for help and guidance.

These women have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) due to their immigration status and as a result are unable to qualify for any welfare benefits or other forms of assistance. This makes it extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner, with specialist support services for BME women stretched to capacity. The threat of losing their children is also a major deterrent.

“If women with NRPF leave an abusive relationship, the courts will often appoint the father as the children’s carer/guardian. This means these women can have little to no contact with their children. It’s fundamentally not right.”

Young Women

Prevention work carried out in schools around issues such as domestic abuse and rape and sexual violence is also very important. Again, however, awareness on wider VAWG issues needs to be raised at this level.

The increased sexualisation of young women is an example of gender inequality which both causes and stems from VAWG. Pressure to conform, commercialism and social media are all contributing factors. Many have spoken about the difficulties in challenging stereotypical and unrealistic images presented in the media, as well as peer pressure to conform. The increased use of social media perpetuates views of how young women should look and act. It also allows anonymous comments and images to be posted of impressionable and vulnerable people. This is having a detrimental impact.

The media has a huge role to play in prevention of VAWG. The proposed strategy must recognise this. There is continuous use of sexualised images in advertising, with certain newspapers still publishing daily pictures of topless young women. Music videos often depict women as objects and accompany songs with inappropriate and derogatory lyrics.

“The media in general presents a really skewed view of sex and sexual relationships.”

The Scottish Government strategy must factor in prevention work which needs to be undertaken with young people. Both young men and young women need to be educated on and given the opportunity to talk about issues around sexualisation, access to pornography etc. Instilling in them the dangers of these at a young age would raise awareness and go some way to preventing instances of VAWG.

Every child is loved by someone who can provide for their needs

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **The unpaid work carried out by grandparents, other family members and friends who undertake kinship care is properly recognised and adequately resourced.**

While every parent wants to be able to give their children the best start in life, it has to be recognised that is not always possible. Many are unable, for a variety of reasons, to give their child the support, development and love they would like to. As a result, children are often taken into foster care and placed with families who are able to provide for their needs.

This, however, is not always the case. Many children end up living with grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings or family friends when their parents are unable to provide the care and attention they need. The work undertaken by kinship carers saves the economy a significant amount of money every year, however their contribution is extremely undervalued and grossly underpaid.

“Of course the Scottish Government’s focus on childcare is a good thing, because it’s giving a lot of children a positive start in life. The amount of attention placed on that, however, can be detrimental in other ways. It means that women like me, who look after two of my grandchildren because my daughter has mental health issues and just can’t cope, don’t get the same focus and as a result we’re missing out on the same level of support.”

Many of those who provide kinship care are doing so while caring for their own children or other family members, such as older relatives, as well as holding down one or more jobs. This takes a significant toll on women’s physical and mental health, particularly as many employers expect workers to be more and more flexible.

“It’s a constant juggling act. I look after my sister’s kids because she is in prison at the moment. I couldn’t have them put into foster care, I want them with me, but it’s so hard trying to make ends meet and make sure neither my children nor my sister’s are missing out.”

It is vital that the Scottish Government does more to raise awareness as to the number of women who undertake this type of caring responsibility. The most important thing is ultimately that children live in a loving, family environment in which they are nurtured and can develop and grow. The necessity for more support to allow this to happen in informal caring situations cannot be underestimated.

There is good quality childcare available when I need it

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **Accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare was made available to families throughout Scotland, in a way which suits their diverse and often complex needs.**
- **The work undertaken by the childcare workforce, the majority of whom are women, is recognised and valued by society. The disparities in terms and conditions and pay between public and private sector workers must also be addressed.**

“If employment is the route out of poverty and onto a better life, then childcare is the bridge.”

There is not enough accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare in Scotland. The SWC welcomed the provisions in the Children and Young People's Act, which raised the number of early years funding hours for 3-4 year olds and vulnerable two year olds from 475 hours per year to 600 hours per year. However it must be recognised that while this attempt to improve things for families is a step in the right direction, it is not enough to remove any of the barriers to women's labour market participation.

Those additional hours equate to sixteen minutes per day. They do not take into account children under the age of three, or those over the age of five. The need for childcare does not stop when a child turns 5 and goes to school. The lack of after-school care in Scotland is a real issue, and one which is all too often forgotten when childcare is being discussed. The Act also makes no provisions for the working conditions of those employed in the childcare sector.

Many of the jobs available to women have antisocial hours. There is no childcare to cover these shift patterns, which often cover evenings and weekends, apart from some childminders.

“They are few and far between and even then women are still having to rely on one person – what happens if they take ill? Employers don't take too kindly to mums needing time off to look after their kids in these circumstances.”

The cost of childcare is a huge barrier for women accessing employment or increasing working hours. This is particularly the case for families with more than one child, a disabled child and lone parents.

Flexibility in childcare, at present, comes at a price. Private nurseries tend to provide longer opening hours, often taking children in from 0730 and closing at 1800. Local Authority nurseries, on the other hand, provide childcare in sessions, offering places either in the morning or the afternoon. Working patterns have changed, but the way in which children are looked after have not.

Local Authority provision still works on the notion that a woman will work on a part-time basis, a few mornings or afternoons a week in their local area, and the 16 hours and 20 minutes per week of funded provision will cover their childcare needs. The reality for many women is that they are in low paid, low skilled employment, on zero hours contracts or in uncertain shift patterns.

“If you have to be in work for 8.30am and the nursery doesn’t take kids until 9.00am, what are you supposed to do? Anything before 9am is seen as wrap around care and you have to pay more for it.”

The lack of wrap-around, flexible provision, makes it extremely difficult for these women to access childcare. As a result they rely heavily on assistance from friends and family. The lack of flexibility, coupled with their working patterns, means that their children are often missing out on the funded places they are entitled to.

During school holidays many secondary school age children have to stay at home themselves because their parents have to work. If they have little or no family or support networks round about them, they have no other option.

Similarly breakfast and after school clubs are not always available. Where they do exist, they are heavily relied on by many parents. It is often the case that schools and organisations who provide these services do not have enough places to cope with the demand. It can also be expensive to make use of this provision.

“After care costs anything up to £12.50 per day per child. If you work part-time you end up spending almost all of your wage on childcare. It’s not worth it.”

Informal caring is becoming increasingly relied upon, with many women in the *“middle layer of caring, looking after both young grandchildren and elderly parents.”* This can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of these women, many of whom continue to hold down part-time jobs. However women often do not have support networks round about them, such as friends and family, so have no choice but to rely on expensive private childcare.

“The lack of accessible, affordable childcare is holding so many women back.”

In the past, communities *“pulled together to help each other”* when it came to raising children. For a number of reasons, this is no longer the case.

“Women make childcare work, but it’s a complicated jigsaw. Access to free childcare would open up so many opportunities and more choices.”

The geography of rural Scotland makes it difficult for women to access childcare which is near to their place of work or study. They can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport to get their children dropped off, then to get to work or college, before doing the same again in the evening. Many of the women who have to juggle these responsibilities are in low paid employment.

Middle income families do not qualify for assistance with childcare costs. Sending a child to nursery takes “a huge chunk” out of household budgets, particularly if they have more than one child. Women often delay returning to work until their children are at school as it is the only financially viable option.

The childcare workforce, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, are also too often forgotten about. The women are vastly underpaid and grossly undervalued by society. It is also important to recognise that there are often significant disparities in the way those employed in the private sector and those employed in the public sector are treated.

Workers in private nurseries are open to more exploitation than their Local Authority counterparts. They are often only paid the minimum wage, and the younger workers who are in training through a Modern Apprenticeship or college placement are paid less than that. These workplaces are, more often than not, non-unionised. Once the young women are fully qualified, they are let go in favour of a younger, cheaper trainee.

“It’s exploitation in it’s most obvious form, which causes competition between recently qualified early years practitioners. Many are forced to work as supply or bank staff, which means no guaranteed hours or income.”

Conversely Local Authority childcare workers are in nurseries and pre-five centres which receive better funding, where they are able to join a trade union, and where the payment of the Living Wage is a real possibility. Regardless of the type of childcare provider they use, parents should be assured that the women who are looking after their children are subject to the same working conditions, are well paid, and given the recognition they deserve for the vital work that they do.

It is, therefore, vital that the Scottish Government monitors the implementation of its recent investments in childcare and early learning in order to ensure that children, parents and childcare workers are not being adversely affected by any of the policies and practices which have been proposed.



Where you are born, where you live, or who you are, doesn't stop you having the opportunity to reach your full potential

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **There was more Government support and strategies for women to access and sustain a place within political and public life. Political parties should encourage gender equality when selecting candidates and assist those women elected to remain fully engaged.**
- **Government, public and private sector organisations work in partnership to promote and encourage women to be representative in public life.**
- **The publication of gender-specific data was produced as a requirement following both local and national elections, in order to ascertain the percentage of women elected.**
- **More support was made available to women in rural areas, in terms of both education and employment, in order to remove current barriers and allow them to develop and reach their potential.**

Women's Representation in Political and Public Life

The referendum on Scotland's future engaged more women in politics than ever before. Women are more vocal and are more interested in a variety of issues, as well as being quicker to hold elected representatives to account. Despite this, and despite women representing over 50% of the population, we are not proportionately represented in political and public life.

The First Minister's commitment to ensuring 50/50 representation on public boards by the year 2020 is undoubtedly a welcome measure. It does not, however, extend to political parties and representation, meaning that women will continue to be under-represented at the highest level of policy and decision making.

At present, there is no requirement to publish gender-specific statistics after elections – either with regards to the number of women seeking election or the number of successful candidates. Publication of these statistics would not only show the percentage of women elected into public office, but would help to identify gaps in representation.

"The Scottish Parliament was intended to be a true representation of our society as a whole. How can that be the case when only 33% of our MSPs are women?"

Women continue to be grossly underrepresented on the boards of both public and private organisations. The SWC is pleased that the gender imbalance on most boards is being recognised, and that both the Scottish and UK Governments are seeking to put measures in place in order to address this.

While we support the introduction of quotas as a temporary special measure to get more women into these positions, it must be recognised that quotas alone are not enough. A number of barriers exist that will not be broken down simply by legislating for a mandatory minimum of 40% women on these boards. The Scottish Government must, therefore, recognise the importance of additional measures which will encourage women to become involved.

“The whole point of quotas is surely to get us to a level playing field, which doesn’t exist at the moment. Once we see more women on public boards, you would hope there will be enough momentum to keep us there without the need for specific measures.”

Quotas alone, however, are not enough. There are a range of reasons why women do not apply for these positions. These need to be taken into account in order to challenge the culture which surrounds public appointments.

In order to encourage more gender equality on public boards, positions must be advertised where women will be able to see them. Information should be available in, for example, libraries, health centres and supermarkets. Making the adverts more visible and accessible would be extremely beneficial.

“How can I be expected to apply for a position on a board if I don’t even know I would find the advert? I don’t have time to go looking for this type of information – it would be so much easier if it was put somewhere I’m actually likely to be.”

Men also continue to be put onto public boards because they tend to be at a higher level of employment than women, which can mean they are considered to be more ‘committed’ or able to do the job. It is well known that due to the glass ceiling, gender streaming and the gender pay gap, caring responsibilities and childbearing, women are unable to progress in the workplace at the same rate as men. This discrimination means they are even less likely to be able to progress to board level in their workplaces.

Another aspect of the application process is the confidence that women have in themselves and their abilities. Too many will underestimate their capabilities and only look at the negative aspects of a position, rather than the positives.

“A man will look at the key skills for a role and say ‘I can do three out of five of those so of course I’ll go for the position’, whereas a woman is more likely to say ‘I can only do three out of five so there’s no point in going for it’. Confidence is key.”

The role of mentors must also be considered. Women have spoken about the importance of having the support of other women across political and public life, employment, trade union involvement etc. The value of having someone who has already been there, who can guide others through the process and give advice, cannot be underestimated.

“It is the duty of women who are currently in these positions to encourage others to join them.”

Women in Rural Scotland

Those who live in remote, rural and super sparse areas of the country face significant barriers to, amongst others, employment, education, childcare and social activities.

Due to the rural nature of Scotland's geography, there is a distinct lack of investment in employment opportunities within the regions. Tourism is a major attraction with women often relying on part-time seasonal or low paid work in this sector. Some women establish their own businesses relying on local support and networking to promote their enterprise.

The public sector is a major employer within rural Scotland. The current loss of public sector jobs is having a detrimental impact on rural communities, in particular the women employed to provide necessary local services.

"The public sector employs 40% of workers in this region, the majority of these are women. It stands to reason we will be the most likely to feel the repercussions of policy decisions."

High speed broadband connections are not available in many rural areas. Small, remote businesses with poor transport links need to rely on internet services to promote and conduct business activities. Some areas of rural Scotland have no access to broadband resulting in restricted business opportunities. In areas where internet services are provided, an absence of internet provider competition results in rural communities enjoying less competitive tariffs than those in urban areas.

"Lack of high speed broadband limits so many social and business opportunities. Slow internet connection stops people working from home and being able to shop online."

Poor or non-existent internet provision also impedes access to education and employment opportunities for women. Online application forms are more often than not the only way to apply for social security, jobs and places in educational institutions. Distance learning, home study and accredited workplace training are all curtailed for women by a lack of reliable, affordable and accessible internet services.

"Lack of high speed broadband is also a major disadvantage in terms of applying for jobs, with more and more organisations accepting online applications only"

Young women who wish to pursue non-academic careers are often unable to do so in rural areas due to lack of opportunity and support.

"More needs to be done to encourage girls into non-traditional careers – we expect renewables to become an important employment sector, and there are incentives for young women to get into agriculture, but girls at the local secondary school are not taking up technical subjects in order to gain a share of the opportunities being created. The lack of infrastructure in rural areas doesn't help either."

Everyone can access the health and social services support they need to be safe, happy and healthy

Scotland would be a fairer country if:

- **More consideration was taken over the perceived ‘postcode lottery’ of health and social service provision in Scotland, taking into account the particular disparities in urban and rural areas.**
- **Mental health services are adequately funded and resourced, especially given the increase in mental health issues which have resulted from changes to welfare benefits.**
- **All potential impacts of the continued integration of health and social care are considered, ensuring that no decision has an adverse impact.**
- **The Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People Strategy takes account of the specific impact early pregnancy has on young women, both in terms of health and economic and social opportunities.**

There are a number of health inequalities in Scotland, with women in deprived inner city areas living much shorter lives than their peers in less populated, less deprived parts of the country. Many services are not consistent. Women in rural areas often have to travel long distances to access basic support.

The Scottish Government’s human rights based approach to providing healthcare to all at the point of need should be welcomed. In particular, its commitment to providing free access to NHS healthcare on the same basis as an ordinary resident to all those who have made a formal application for asylum (whether pending or unsuccessful) is endorsed.

Mental Health Provision

The support services available are highly valued by users and “*should never be underestimated*”. Those suffering from mental health problems “*should not be a hidden group in society*”. While the introduction of a person-centred strategy is undoubtedly welcomed, the introduction of an on-line portal should not, however, replace the face-to-face support required by women.

Stigmas around mental health are often more acute in rural areas and are more likely to ‘stick’ to a person due to “*small town mentality*”. The role of the family and carers in tackling mental illness is vital. Caring responsibilities are, in the main, undertaken by women. Carers must receive adequate support.

Mental Health issues were a key contributor to women’s offending and to the likelihood of prison as a disposal in the Commission on Women Offenders Report. The Commission identified the need to improve the treatment and support offered to women before, during and after imprisonment.

Integration of Health and Social Care

This commitment by the Scottish Government to support the delivery of new models of health and social care in all areas is positive, particularly the recognition of the challenges faced in rural areas. The geography of rural Scotland can cause significant inconsistencies in health and social care provision. Hospitals, and other services, including mental health care as well as GP and dental provision have all been reduced at a local level. Services are being centralised to main towns and too many community services have been withdrawn. This is of particular concern to women, who are often the main users of healthcare amenities.

The integration of health and social care has the potential to be extremely important both for those who receive and provide care in Scotland. However, it is vital that the principles underpinning those new policies do not have any adverse gender impacts, particularly on rural women, for whom accessing services can be extremely difficult.

Patient transport is heavily relied upon, however it is described as *“patchy and inconsistent”*. Due to poor public transport links, patient transport is essential for those requiring hospital treatment. Access to medical provision using this service, however, often results in delays, long journeys and, in some cases, an overnight stay away from home. Patient transport provision is viewed as inconvenient for women in work or in need of childcare.

“Hospital transport is adequate but it is a 60 mile round trip (Dumfries and Galloway). There is an Ayrshire hospital a 32-mile round trip which cannot be accessed due to a lack of cohesion between different NHS Boards.”

There also needs to be a recognition of the complex interrelating issues such as poverty and rurality, and the impact that these can have on women’s physical and mental health.

Disability

Support set out in the Scottish Draft Budget 2015-2016 which will allow severely disabled people and those with long term conditions to live independently are welcomed. This is a positive step in assisting those people who wish to remain in their homes in being able to do so. However, it is vital to ensure that there is no further burden put on carers, the majority of whom are women. Those who work in the care sector are already struggling to be able to provide the levels of care they want to. This is often due to the need for them to visit a certain amount of people in a day, as opposed to being able to spend time with the – often vulnerable - people they care for.

Maternity Services

The SWC fully supports the expansion of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP). The importance of personal care and intensive support for young mothers from deprived communities cannot be underestimated. The FNP was previously considered to be something of a *“postcode lottery”*, benefitting only young women in certain areas.

Its expansion has the potential to ensure that this care is more widespread.

While it is undoubtedly positive that by the end of 2015 there will be at least one FNP team in each NHS Board area, the workload of those teams, plus the geography of Scotland must be taken into account. Just like the care sector, the majority of those who work in maternity care services are women. One FNP team covering an area the size of, for example, NHS Highlands and Islands, will mean a significant workload over a remote, rural and super sparse area of the country. It is therefore vital that the needs of the local area are taken into account when allocating a FNP to each NHS Board.

In rural areas of Scotland, women often feel isolated in the services offered around maternity care. In some cases, air ambulances are used to uplift women in labour, resulting in women giving birth alone without a family or support network surrounding them.

Rural women have commented on the lack of health visitors and midwives. Many who live on the islands must leave 38 weeks into their pregnancy, creating childcare issues, as well as removing support networks.

The creation of the Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People Strategy is also an extremely positive step in reducing this type of health inequality. The strategy has the potential to delay pregnancy in young people, as well as supporting young women through pregnancy and ensuring they are given access to education and training opportunities following the birth of their child.

It is vital the strategy clearly demonstrates that, while pregnancy in those under the age of 20 impacts both on mothers and fathers, there is a significant difference between the two genders. Many young women who become pregnant do not have the support of a partner and this must be recognised in the strategy. It is also vital that the Scottish Government recognises the barriers young women face in staying in education, the impact of gender streaming in schools and how this can increase young women's chances of becoming pregnant.

Similarly, women who have had a baby under the age of 20 often have limited opportunities in returning to education/training or employment, mainly through a lack of childcare, transport issues and geographical location. There is a link between the types of jobs that many young women will end up doing and the choices they make around pregnancy and parenthood.

“What’s so great about a job stacking shelves or working in a call centre for rubbish money? I think I am doing much better by having a baby, I would much rather look after it every day than be in a job I hate and that’s not going to get me anywhere in life.”



Summary

There have undoubtedly been significant advancements towards a Fairer Scotland by the Scottish Government over the last few years. The Scottish Parliament has taken positive and pro-active steps in advancing equality, with the introduction of legislation, policies and practices in a number of key areas.

Despite this progress, women in Scotland continue to face barriers and discrimination, which leads to an unequal and ultimately unfair society.

The economic downturn has had a significant impact on women. Cuts to budgets have seen a wave of redundancies in the public and voluntary sectors, where women predominate. Job losses in the private sector have tended to be in lower graded roles which are mostly undertaken by women. The majority of work undertaken by women is low-paid, low-skilled and on a part-time basis, which leads to a reliance on 'top up' benefits.

Underemployment is a significant issue for women, as is discrimination in the workplace. This is particularly the case in relation to pregnancy and maternity, older women and BME women. The lack of flexible working is also restrictive for women in work.

Welfare Reform measures introduced by the UK Coalition Government have impacted hardest on women. Individual claimants will have to manage their accounts online and strict sanctions for non-compliance with 'work related requirements' are already being imposed. Working hours thresholds for tax credit entitlement, which many women rely on to pay childcare costs, have increased. As a result women will be forced to increase their hours or seek other forms of employment in order to make ends meet.

Those who rely on support from social security are subject to stigma and negative portrayal, both in the media and through the general public. Women also face significant barriers in entering, or re-entering the labour market, including transport, childcare and a lack of flexibility in the welfare system.

The creation of Police Scotland has resulted in the closure of well-used and valued community stations. The lack of visible police presence in these areas is having an impact on residents, who no longer feel as safe knowing there are no officers in their town or village. Similarly, cuts to various aspects of Local Authority budgets have further exacerbated community safety issues.

Despite the implementation of various pieces of legislation, women who experience violence and abuse continue to face barriers to justice. The cost of civil action, the stigma associated with reporting and a lack of specialist legal services are all contributing factors. The introduction of Employment Tribunal fees have resulted in significantly limited access to redress for discrimination and unequal treatment in the workplace.

Fuel poverty affects a number of women and their families throughout Scotland, with too many facing the real choice of heating their homes or feeding their children. The cost of fuel in rural areas can limit women's participation in employment and education.

The lack of affordable, safe and secure housing in Scotland has led to a reliance on expensive private let accommodation. Social housing is no longer a viable option for families, but is instead considered a *"last resort"* which attracts stigma and negative connotations.

Despite a raft of legislation, policies and practices around Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), it is still a significant issue in Scotland. Rape conviction rates currently sit around 6%. Men who pay for sexual services are not subject to any punishment, however the women they buy face prosecution for having been purchased. Young women face increased pressures through sexualisation in the media, which can have an extremely negative impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Women who undertake unpaid caring are neither valued nor adequately paid for the work they do. The lack of accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare is undoubtedly one of the most significant barriers to women seeking to enter further or higher education or employment.

Women are not fully represented in political and public life, either in Local Government, the Scottish or the UK Parliament. Disabled and BME women are even less visible in these institutions.

There are genuine health inequalities in Scotland. The poorest in society die earlier and have higher rates of disease, including mental illness. Scotland has a higher rate of teenage pregnancy than most other Western European countries. Maternity services are inconsistent throughout the country, with women in rural areas not afforded the same access to services as their urban peers.





The SWC response to this conversation on a Fairer Scotland is informed by the experiences, real stories and ideas of women we have consulted with throughout Scotland. In preparing this response, the SWC has used information gathered at our roadshows, round table events, thematic conferences and through both formal and informal networking in order to ensure that all aspects of a fairer society are considered.

The SWC would like to thank the women who have participated in discussions over the last few years. The information contained within this document is a true reflection of the voices of real women in Scotland.