

Scottish Women's Convention
response to the Scottish
Parliament's consultation on:

National Performance Framework: Inquiry into Proposed National Outcomes



June 2024

Premise

The Scottish Government centre their work around a wellbeing framework: the National Performance Framework (NPF). This NPF sets out clear aims for all services in Scotland, including national and local government; public and private sectors; voluntary organisations; businesses and communities. In order to achieve it's overall purpose of "creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing and sustainable and inclusive economic growth", the NPF has 13 associated National Outcomes.

The NPF must be reviewed every five years, with the current review beginning in 2023 and the resultant consultation making multiple recommendations. These recommendations are therefore the focus of the following consultation, including the establishment of new National Outcomes and a refreshed purpose. We have also been asked to consider whether the NPF is working to reduce inequalities in Scotland.

After the Scottish Parliament has received consultation responses, they shall consider alterations that are required and rectify their plan accordingly – incorporating suggestions made.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Our Response

What are your views on this updated purpose of the NPF?

The updated purpose of the NPF sets out a general goal of improving the wellbeing of people living in Scotland. Through a simplified approach to national performance, a wide range of organisations and services can easily utilise the framework to improve the lives of Scottish citizens. It is also hoped that this simplification can enable enhanced working, with the vague terminology improving organisation's ability to mould the framework to their individual sectors.

However, this comes with potential pitfalls, with generalisations being made from this initial stage. The overall purpose states that the NPF should aim 'to improve the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, now and in the future'. We would call into question the term 'people' and who this includes. It can be said that most statutory services have been designed with a typical service-user in mind; a straight, white, able-bodied man. Therefore, the usage of the word 'people' without full commitment to an intersectional approach is potentially problematic. This approach should consider the intersectional elements at play throughout our lives, with the overall purpose being altered to state: 'To improve the wellbeing of *all* people living in Scotland, now and in the future'. A simple change such as this shows a clear pledge to actively improve the lives of all citizens, including those who face additional barriers to accessing services.

In your view, do the proposed National Outcomes match the purpose of the NPF? Please explain your answer.

Overall, the proposed National Outcomes align with the purpose of the NPF, covering a range of societal elements. Through the continual improvement of areas of life such as health, fair work, education, housing, etc. women across Scotland are more likely to experience better outcomes, with a focus on anti-poverty action remaining key. It is however vital that the interconnected nature of each National Outcome is widely accepted, for example, those experiencing poverty are less likely to have stable housing. By acknowledging the dependency of each outcome on others, a co-working approach could be more easily developed, with the siloing of sectors remaining a substantial blockage to the improvement of Scotland's society.

What do you think of the changes being proposed?

Care:

The SWC support the changes to proposed to the National Outcomes, particularly the development of the Care Outcome. As stated, through a focus on care as an integral part of our lives, the paid and unpaid care of women will be nationally recognised. Data collected by the SWC aligns with the comments made in the framework, which suggests that caring responsibilities actively worsen women's ability to participate in the labour market. Yet, women also make up a large majority of the care workforce, experiencing poor pay and working conditions, therefore by committing to valuing all those who provide care, the Scottish Government may improve the lives of many women in Scotland.

Furthermore, through the consistent cuts in funding to social care, alongside increased workloads from the Covid-19 pandemic, elderly care is in crisis across the country. We have heard from women concern around the reduction in care homes and community services which would traditionally fill statutory gaps. Through a clear National Outcome, the prioritisation of

care services becomes clear, however, it is vital that alongside policy, there is action from the Scottish Government, particularly around improved funding for the sector.

- “I think there is a real lack of care. There are care homes that were in operation maybe five or ten years ago that have closed down, probably because of... it’s maybe not profitable”
- “It [social care] is understaffed and on its knees.”

Community:

The change made to the National Outcome of Community, with connectivity being included, is applauded. Recent SWC work around transport has highlighted the need for improved public transport links for women across the country, enabling easy access to employment, education, recreation and health services¹. Unfortunately, women have experienced a significant reduction in services, citing high travel costs, poor route options and a lack of joined-up thinking in relation to timetables. This is particularly pertinent for women residing in rural communities who do not have access to a private vehicle, with the poor transport contributing to social isolation. We therefore believe that inclusion of “excellent transport networks” is a good addition to the NPF, however would have preferred for transport to be a standalone National Outcome.

- “...public transport rurally is cancelled without warning. You find out when arriving at a railway or bus station/stance.”
- “Bus services are expensive and unreliable, there is no...integrated ticket...There has been no improvement in transport in decades.”

Equality and Human Rights:

It can be said that equality is a significant element of human rights, with the two being intertwined. A clear focus on equality is supported by the SWC, with women’s equal status across Scottish society not being achieved at any level. Women are still less likely to hold high positions within workplaces and are more likely to experience poverty, drastically impacting their general health and wellbeing. We propose that only through full equality can women and children’s lives be improved in Scotland, and therefore support the change made to include equality within the National Outcome of Equality and Human Rights.

Housing:

Incorporation of Housing as an individual National Outcome is vital to the improvement of women’s lives in Scotland. By having a safe, reliable and secure space within which to live, women are able to participate more easily in society. Housing provides women with a base to access education and employment, while also improving health outcomes. We have heard from women that the Scottish housing situation is becoming increasingly difficult, both the private and social market. They have expressed concern around rising rent, mortgage and heating costs, alongside poor options when finding a new home. The housing market in rural communities is also suffering from an increase in second homes, preventing local people from remaining within their hometowns and villages. This has pushed many to move elsewhere, fuelling the consistent depopulation witnessed across rural regions in Scotland. Therefore, the inclusion of a specific National Outcome on housing should enable improvements across the sector.

¹ The Scottish Women’s Convention. (2024). How Can We Make Transport Work for Women and Families in Scotland? Available at: <https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/report.pdf>

- “Salaries are really low, and the price of houses is really high.”
- “...construction prices have gone up so much over the past ten years, like gas, electricity, that makes it more difficult for people on lower incomes to buy homes.”
- “They’re building everywhere, but that’s private companies, they’re not building anything for those who really need it.”

Are there any policy priorities that should be reflected in the proposed National Outcomes but which, you consider, are not?

As stated, we appreciate the inclusion of equality within the National Outcomes, and strongly believe that the overall aims of ‘respect, protect and fulfil human rights’ and ‘live free from discrimination’ are vital in improving women’s lives in Scotland. The integration of human rights into Scots Law, as proposed in the Human Rights Bill, is a key element of this, embedding human rights practices across Scottish services. We would therefore make a continued call to ensure that the Human Rights Bill is enshrined into Scots Law as soon as possible, making a significant step towards achieving the National Outcome of Equality and Human Rights.

However, we would highlight the limited mention surrounding reducing violence and ensuring justice within this section. While it is stated that the Scottish Government shall aim to ‘have a fair, effective and accessible justice system’ and ‘live free from all forms of violence, including violence against women and girls’, these elements remain a significant barrier to an improved life for many women in Scotland. We have heard from women and girls that they are increasingly facing misogynistic abuse, taking both physical and verbal forms via numerous platforms. They have accounted this to poor regulation over online spaces, engrained prejudices and little to no education within schools which aim to tackle dangerous ideologies. Women have explained that the fear created by violence actively prevents them from participating in education and employment, worsening their outcomes. They have also explained in cases of sexually motivated crimes, such as rape, women rarely experience access to justice. Few cases make it to trial and of those that do, a very small number result in convictions. This has lessened women’s faith in the justice system, resulting in low numbers of women reporting their experiences, with women also suffering from ongoing trauma. We would therefore recommend the creation of a dedicated National Outcome which encapsulates the promotion of safety and the elimination of violent behaviour. A further aim of this Outcome would be the inclusion of fair access to justice, including specific mention of improving women-victims’ experiences of the judicial system.

- “I don’t know a single woman who hasn’t been sexually assaulted in one way or another, and that impacts all of our lives. It impacts you when you’re walking down the street at night, and you hear footsteps behind you”
- “I was sexually harassed by boys at my school, and the teachers didn’t really... a teacher watched it happen on a bus once and didn’t do anything; they don’t really care. The boys didn’t really get a talking to about it; it was all about me and how I reacted, it was my behaviour that needed to change”
- “But the truth is, no-one is getting to court, no-one is getting justice in these situations [sexual assault], because the whole system is set up to point you away from justice systems and towards just dealing with it yourself, and getting on with life”

What are your views on the Scottish Government’s consultation on the proposed National Outcomes?

We are highly supportive of the inclusion of the views of the National Advisory Council of Women and Girls (NACWG), with this resulting in observable changes to the NPF, such as the inclusion of the theme of Care and Equality. The addition of the NACWG's views has also enabled an increased focus on the mainstreaming of gender throughout the NPF development, which further promotes the improvement of women and girls' lives in Scotland.

However, we do hold some concern with regards to the general demographic split of those consulted with throughout Scottish Government scoping exercises. Without fully gathering comprehensive diversity data, it is unlikely a representative sample has been collected. This can result in some vital viewpoints being missed, such as groups of women who are commonly ignored, for example, ethnic minority women, disabled women and LGBT+ women. These women are more likely to experience additional barriers when attempting to improve their lives through institutional and societal bias. Therefore, it is imperative that these experiences are gathered and fed into NPF development, creating a thorough evaluation of National Outcomes.

Moreover, the interaction with community-action plans appears to be ill-judged, with significant gaps apparent. As an organisation which represents the views of women across Scotland, we are acutely aware of the continued lack of consultation carried out with rural communities. We therefore commend the Scottish Government for attempting to understand the views of a multitude of locales, including some rural areas, however, some key locations have been missed. For example, the Western Isles covers a considerable range of citizens, with each community facing unique challenges, however this large geographical area has been missed. Furthermore, of the action plans analysed, only one, Mercat Cross and City Centre (Stirling), includes the views of those residing within a Scottish city. Missing the views of women in places such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, remains a serious oversight, as large urban areas are likely to experience pointedly different challenges. We would recommend increased consultation across urban locations, including the views of a larger range of citizens.

How do you think the proposed National Outcomes will impact on inequality?

Overall, National Outcomes can go some way to reducing inequality in Scotland. By creating national aims, which can be utilised by statutory bodies, a mandate has been set to improve the lives of all people. The positive impact of the NPF can be viewed through the reduction in child poverty rates in Scotland since implementation: in 1994-97 child poverty rates were at 32%, this has dropped to 24% in 2020-23. There has also been a reduction in pensioner poverty, dropping from 31% to 15% over the same period, however, working-age poverty has increased from 18% to 21%². It is vital to note however, that child poverty has seen an increase in recent years, therefore requires considerable focus.

If one considers alternative measures of equality, such as the number of women in positions of influence, despite making up 51% of the population, only 46% of MSPs and 35% of local councillors are women. Additionally, 7% of CEOs of Scotland's top businesses and 35% of public body chief executives are women³. There are clearly significant improvements to be made across Scotland's institutions, however, these figures have shown some progress since 2017: 35% of MSPs, 25% of local councillors, 0% of CEOs of Scotland's top businesses and 28% of public body chief executives were women. It could therefore be argued that National Outcomes have resulted in some positive changes across Scotland, reducing inequalities. However, recent

² Scottish Government. (2024). Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/>

³ Engender. (2023). Sex and Power in Scotland 2023. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/resources/SP2023finalNEW-1.pdf>

poverty rates highlight the changeable nature of societal progress, and therefore continued monitoring of such figures is imperative to improving knowledge around the impact of National Outcomes.

Do you think the proposed National Outcomes align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals? Please explain your answer.

We would like to reiterate the above call to better incorporate justice into the National Outcomes, therefore aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Through our work with women in Scotland, many do not feel that they receive equal access to justice, as their experiences from initial reporting to sentencing rarely meets good standards. It is felt that current judicial systems have been designed to exclude the needs of women, highlighting social bias against this group. Through a specific National Outcomes based around justice, it is more likely that significant progress can be made in this area, while also ensuring that the Scottish Government are aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

To what extent do the proposed National Outcomes support joined-up policymaking in Scotland?

Women have regularly expressed frustration around the continuation of siloing of policy work across Scotland's institutions. They have explained that the lack of joined-up approaches contributes to the worsening of service-provision, making access more difficult. This worsens outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in society, for example women who suffer from substance use. During a conference around drug use in Scotland, the SWC found that many users require substantial cross-sector support, in areas such as housing, mental health, physical healthcare and social security assistance. Women explained that often when users access one service, they are rarely referred to other relevant support, worsening their life chances⁴. This siloing can also be seen to have detrimental impacts for women experiencing domestic abuse, with emergency housing often being unfit for children, social security entitlements being unclear and the lack of mental health support contributing to trauma. Overall, the continued shortage of consistency for women, including those in incredibly difficult circumstances, prevents the effective realisation of Scotland's National Outcomes, with a joined-up approach being required.

⁴ The Scottish Women's Convention. (2023). The Impact of Drugs on Women and Families in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/drugs-conference-report-23.pdf>

Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Commit to an intersectional approach, considering the multitude of experiences women face and how this impacts their ability to live improved lives.
- Establish an additional National Outcome which incorporates safety, the elimination of violence and access to justice, enabling women's full participation in society.
- Carry out a full review into the siloing of services, working to encourage a co-operative mindset across statutory providers.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament's consultation on **National Performance Framework: Inquiry into the Proposed National Outcomes**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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