

2025-2026

WOMEN'S PRIORITIES



Programme
for
Government

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Who are we?

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women across Scotland, ensuring that women's views are represented in decision-making processes.



Introduction

This report brings together the voices and priorities of women across Scotland, motivated by the release of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2025/26. To inform this analysis, the SWC carried out a national online survey, alongside a series of targeted roundtable discussions, engaging women from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Through this engagement, women highlighted six themes as being of particular importance - Education, Employment, Health, Housing, Justice, and Social Care. Conversations with women provided rich insights into the challenges women face and the changes they wish to see in public policy and service delivery. The findings presented here are rooted in real experiences, offering a clear direction for shaping a more inclusive and responsive Programme for Government.



This report reflects the voices of women across Scotland - clear, powerful, and shaped by lived experience. Their priorities must shape the decisions we make, ensuring that policy is not only inclusive, but transformative.

Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair

Women's Priorities Recommendations

1

Education



Strengthen support for children, through improved Additional Support Need provision and free school meals, while reintroducing practical life skills into the curriculum.

2

Employment



Prioritise childcare and flexible working conditions to remove key barriers preventing women from entering and remaining in work.

3

Health



Improve access to primary care and invest in research to better address women's health conditions.

4

Housing



Expand the availability of affordable social housing for rent and purchase, to combat housing insecurity among women and children.

5

Justice



Reform sentencing practices and strengthen the justice system's response to violence against women and girls.

6

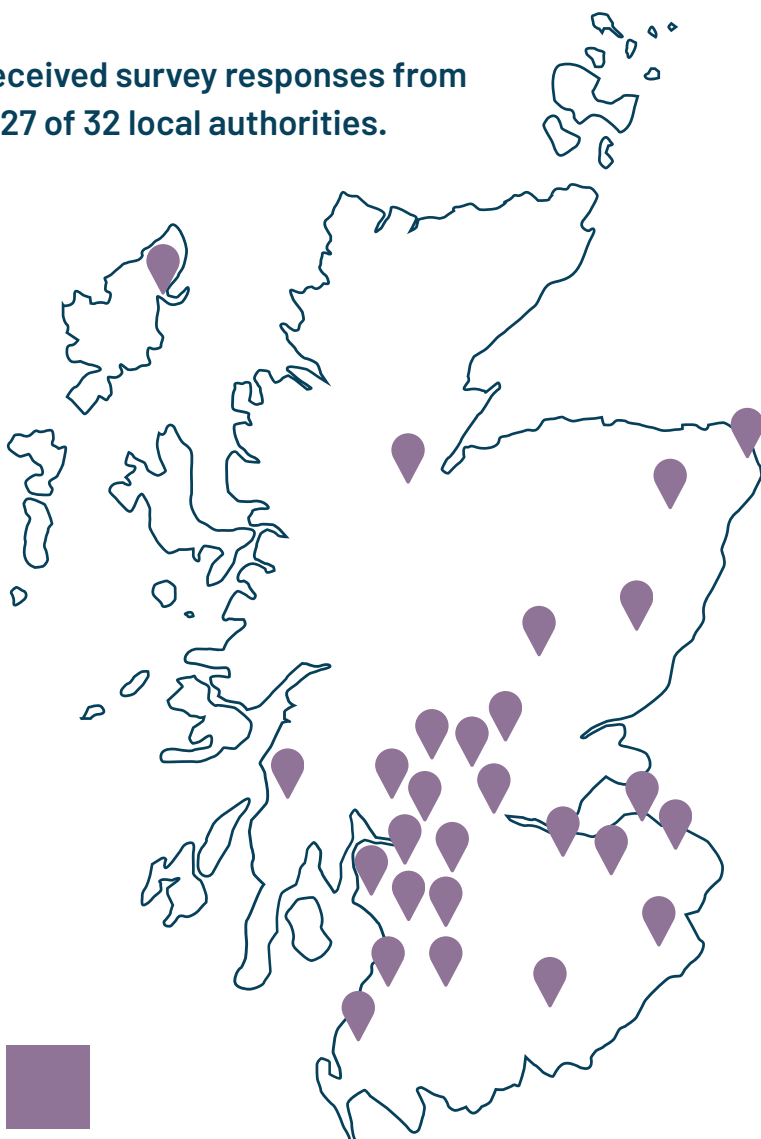
Social Care



Enhance working conditions and pay for social care staff, to ensure the sector is valued and sustainable.

Who Took Part

We received survey responses from
27 of 32 local authorities.



90%

of survey respondents
identified as
'Straight/Heterosexual'

53%

of survey respondents
answered 'Yes' when
asked if they had any
physical or mental health
conditions or illnesses
lasting or expected to last
12 months or more

49%

of survey respondents
stated that they had 'No
Religion'

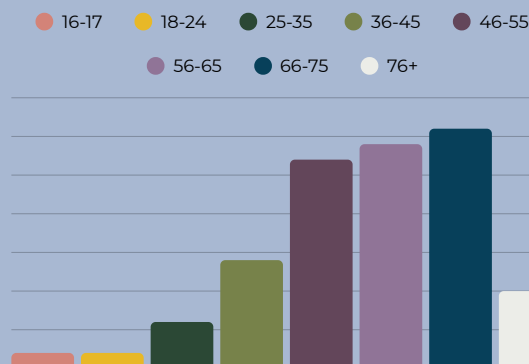
8%

of those
consulted felt
that their
opinions were
listened to by
decision makers

26%

of survey
respondents
stated that their
income did not
cover monthly
expenses

What is your age?



Education



Women are calling for stronger support for children through improved Additional Support Need (ASN) provision, an anti-misogyny approach to learning, and free school meals. There is also a clear desire to reintroduce practical life skills into the curriculum. These priorities reflect a broader push for an inclusive and hands-on approach to learning, preparing young people for real-world challenges.

Women's Voices



"Support for ASN kids - support to increase kindness and improve mental health overall. I work with teens, the misogyny and disrespect they have for each other is sad."

"The Scottish Government should adopt strategies for all which aims to offset the high price of food...Offer free school meals and snacks for all children."

"...address the violence in schools towards teachers and pupils. School is no longer a safe environment."

"Less emphasis on university education and more on a practical based system. Also, more focus on life skills by teaching things like household budgeting."

"It would be great to see more enterprise and practical life skills taught in schools. This would... have a knock-on effect on the economy and society."



Employment

Childcare and flexible work are key to unlocking women's employment potential. Women emphasised the urgent need for affordable childcare and more adaptable working conditions to overcome barriers when entering and staying in the workforce. They also called for expanded apprenticeship and vocational opportunities, to better support diverse talents and pathways beyond traditional academic routes.

"There aren't enough training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people, or adequate salaries for those who do essential work."

"There is a lack of opportunities for those who are not academic - provide more apprenticeships."

66%

of survey respondents said that women and men were not equal within Scottish workplaces



”

"Cheaper and more easily available childcare, better flexible working, and family friendly procedures."

"The cost of living affects everyone but... a stronger enforcement of flexible working rules would allow more women to work."

"[We need] equal pay, equal rights - there is still a significant gap. The gender pay gap is monitored with little consequence if data shows poor performance."

Women's Voices

Health



Health arose as a key priority, with a strong emphasis on improving access to primary care provision through a reduction in bureaucratic barriers, with administrative processes viewed as factors hindering timely and effective care. Additionally, women advocated for increased investment in research focused on conditions that disproportionately affect them, aiming to close longstanding gaps in understanding and treatment.



Over half of survey respondents would rate their experience of Scottish healthcare as 'adequate' to 'very poor'

"...easier access to GP and other health professionals."

"Reduce the amount of admin and middle management. Get back to basics of good nursing care."

"Cut bureaucracy - provide more cash to employ GPs in front-line services and training places for young doctors."

"More research into women's health, shorter waiting times and centre the voices of women in decision-making."

"Studies have centred around men's bodies for generic conditions and women-specific conditions are grossly neglected. It's medical misogyny."

"There is a lack of support or knowledge around issues such as endometriosis"

Women's Voices





Housing

Women across Scotland are calling for urgent action to address the deepening housing crisis. Women emphasised that low wages and rising costs have made home ownership unattainable, with affordable rental options also increasingly scarce. There is a clear demand for a significant increase in affordable social housing, to ensure women and their families can access safety, stability, and dignity.

Women's Voices

"My daughter has been struggling to secure social housing and sadly can't afford private, so she has no choice but to stay with her parents. This has impacted her morale."

"I deal with people every day who are homeless...there's a real lack of every kind of housing, from one beds to large family sized properties."



Approximately 70% of survey respondents believed that there is insufficient housing stock in Scotland.

"...people are too frightened to speak up [about poor housing] because they don't want to lose the house they've got, even though it's not in a fit and proper state."

"Well, I had to leave home because I was unsafe...I went to a refuge who found it difficult to house me. I was then placed into areas that were actually quite unsafe. It made me feel even more vulnerable"

Justice



The impact of imprisonment on women extends beyond the individual, often destabilising families and communities. Short-term sentences were criticised by women as ineffective and harmful, particularly for those already facing hardship. There is also a pressing need for the justice system to better recognise and respond to violence against women and girls, with increased conviction rates, and greater institutional awareness seen as essential steps forward.

“They tend to forget that when they remove the woman [to prison], she’s likely the care provider for that home...There are so many consequences for women who are involved in the system.”

“...the issue of short sentences that women get - when they do get the jail, they’re not getting any form of education or additional support.”

“Nobody goes out and steals for the sake of it, especially women with children...it’s a big decision, a real risk, you must be so desperate. Who is finding these women guilty? Where is the compassion?”

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“You just have to look at the conviction rates for sexual assault and rape to know that women and girls don’t have fair access to justice in Scotland.”

“...too many women who experience rape, sexual assault, domestic violence often feel that they are traumatised by their experience in court; if the case is even taken to court.”

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Women’s Voices



Social Care

The social care workforce must be effectively valued and supported to improve women's experiences. Many women praised the dedication and compassion of social care staff, however they also recognised that these workers were under immense pressure and poorly compensated - undermining the sustainability of the sector. To ensure quality, women called for improved working conditions and greater recognition of social care as a vital and respected profession.

Women's Voices



"My mum had dementia, and the care she got was excellent - staff went above and beyond to make sure she was looked after well and with dignity. I do think staff goodwill was exploited...The long hours and low pay needs to be addressed."

"My sister received home care towards the end of her life. Whilst the carers were great, they were clearly stretched, and weren't able to provide the level of service she perhaps deserved."

"The whole system is on the verge of collapsing. Recruitment needs to be made more attractive by improving pay and conditions."

"Social care does not have a high status and it should. Terms and conditions must be addressed and improved for staff."

"We need to improve pay and conditions for care workers to make it a more attractive career choice - this would hopefully improve the number of carers available."

Emerging Issues



Additional themes were identified as being important to women in Scotland. Women called for improved recognition across decision-making in relation to Equalities and Human Rights and Climate.

Equalities and Human Rights

There is a strong belief amongst women that equality should be upheld for all. This could be achieved by embedding human rights into decision-making and through the Misogyny Bill.

"There needs to be equality and equity for all. Diversity and inclusion, along with proper training, is always important."

"The Scottish Government should implement the Human Rights Bill - something promised in past Programme for Governments."

Climate

Women expressed a clear desire for improved transport and better utilisation of Scotland's natural resources to support a more sustainable future.

"We should be capitalising on our natural resources and ensuring the revenues are reinvested into Scotland."

"Improve public transport, to encourage people to walk, cycle, and use public transport."

Conclusion

This report offers a focused consideration of women in Scotland's priorities as we enter the 2025/26 period.

In **Education**, women called for stronger support for children with Additional Support Needs and their families, alongside a return to practical life skills in the curriculum, and the provision of free school meals.

With regards to **Employment**, inadequate childcare, unequal pay, and inflexible working conditions were identified as barriers to participation, with women urging reforms that enable greater access and balance.

The **Health** system was viewed as a significant priority, with women calling for improved access to primary care, better GP training, reduced bureaucracy, and increased research into women-specific health conditions.

On **Housing**, women expressed deep concern over the shortage of housing stock and the unaffordability of both rental and owned properties, advocating for a significant expansion of affordable social housing.

Within the **Justice** system, women highlighted the negative impact of short-term sentencing and the need for greater awareness and accountability in cases of violence against women and girls.

Finally, in **Social Care**, while women praised the dedication of care staff, they stressed the urgent need to improve working conditions and pay to ensure the sector is properly valued and sustainable.

These insights reflect a collective desire for policies that are inclusive, practical, and grounded, in the lived experiences of women. As the Scottish Government moves forward with its Programme for Government, it is essential that these priorities are not only acknowledged but actively addressed to build a fairer, more equitable Scotland.



Thank You

Thank you to the women in Scotland who took part in our discussions. Our work would not be possible without your continued support and contributions.

We will persist in our drive to represent women's voices in the policy-making process and continue pushing for women's equality across Scottish society.

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