

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S
CONVENTION

Women's Priorities

2026 - 27



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Who are we?

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

Introduction

This report brings together the voices, experiences and priorities of women across Scotland in response to the publication of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026/27. To inform our analysis, the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) carried out a national online survey alongside a series of targeted roundtable discussions. Women from a wide range of backgrounds, communities and lived experiences shared their views on the issues affecting their lives and the areas in which they believe government action is most urgently required.

Six policy areas emerged as clear priorities: Health, Education, Social Care, Housing, Crime and Justice and Employment and the Economy.

These priorities reflect the pressures women are facing and their concerns about the accessibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of public services. Women also highlighted how decisions made across government can have consistent and cumulative effects on their lives. Challenges relating to income, caring responsibilities, housing, health and access to services frequently overlap, increasing the pressures women and their families experience.

Our response to the Programme for Government therefore emphasises the need for women's lived experiences to be meaningfully reflected in policymaking, through their own words, and for public services to be designed in ways that recognise the realities of women's lives.

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



Health

Improve women's healthcare through shorter waiting times, improved access, adequate NHS funding, enhanced training, higher investment in women's health research and an increase of women's representation in healthcare leadership and decision-making.



Education

Improve education and lifelong learning for women by expanding flexible, affordable routes into skills and retraining particularly for those balancing work, caring and family responsibilities. Offer greater support for children with additional needs and families facing wider pressures.



Social Care

Invest in social care staffing, pay and standards, whilst simplifying eligibility and access routes to social care. Move towards reduced waiting times, particularly in rural areas.



Housing

Increase the supply of affordable, accessible housing, with targeted support for disabled women, single mothers and survivors of domestic abuse whilst also addressing rural housing pressures linked to cost and short-term lets.



Crime & Justice

Strengthen trauma-informed support and justice processes for women experiencing violence, reduce barriers to reporting and address emerging forms of online abuse and technology enabling harm. This should include legislative and cultural measures such as a misogyny bill to signal that misogynistic attitudes and behaviours are unacceptable.



Employment & Economy

Tackle barriers to women's employment by addressing discrimination, improving access to flexible and well-paid work, childcare and expanding entry-level opportunities. Improved transport links for workers

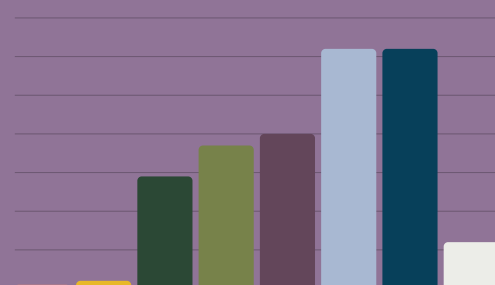
Who Took Part

31 of 32

local authorities represented in responses.

What is your age?

16-17 18-24 25-35 36-45
46-55 56-65 66-75 76+



7%

felt their opinions were listened to by decision makers ↓ down from 8% (2025/26).

Response received
No response received



Women identified three consistent priorities: improved access to healthcare, better quality of care, and stronger recognition of women's health needs. Long waits and difficulties securing GP and other appointments were widespread concerns, alongside calls for more flexible provision and increased NHS capacity.

Participants also highlighted the impact of feeling dismissed or brushed aside when seeking medical support, particularly where knowledge and awareness of women's health conditions was apparently limited. They emphasised the need for more informed, empathetic and patient-centred care.

Alongside service improvements, women called for greater investment in women's health research and stronger female representation in healthcare leadership and decision-making, viewing both as essential to developing more responsive and equitable services.

"[more] investment in rural hospitals."

"Listen to the impact of poor health on women's lives."

"Research, fund and consult with women to help improve medical professional knowledge on women's health issues."

"Investment in preventative care and public health."

"Reduce harm in maternity and neonatal care...Scotland must [look at] avoidable harm being caused to women and their babies."

"More time allocated so they can review notes and really listen."

"Recognise that women know their own bodies and are not attention seeking hypochondriacs."



Only 18%

of survey respondents feel women's health is a priority for the Scottish Government.



Education

Women had mixed views about education in Scotland, with many feeling the system has come under increasing pressure in recent years. Key concerns included falling standards, large class sizes, disruptive behaviour, staff shortages and underfunding. Some felt the system works better for academically able children, while support can be lacking for those with additional support needs or different learning styles.

Many felt there was too much emphasis on attainment and university, calling for more apprenticeships, practical and vocational routes, creativity, trades and alternative forms of learning. However, they welcomed the availability of free higher education in Scotland.

Lifelong learning was also seen as important, although paid work, caring responsibilities and family life could make this difficult. Women, particularly mothers, were seen as needing greater flexibility, financial support and opportunities to retrain or change career later in life. Evening classes, local courses and better access to education in rural areas were also seen as important.

"Childcare, in my experience this is the biggest barrier to women getting further education, career progression and remaining in employment."

"Less emphasis on academia and more emphasis on practical life skills."

What would help women access lifelong learning outside mainstream education?

47% cited barriers related to childcare and other caregiving responsibilities.

"I received a free undergraduate degree, I wouldn't be where I am today without it."

"I am an adult who would like to pursue further education now my children are at secondary school but I simply can't afford to leave work to study."

"Access is generally good but there are real issues recruiting teachers in rural areas of Scotland which can limit the opportunities for our young people."



Social Care

The women identified staffing as one of the biggest challenges facing effective social care. They described a workforce that is overstretched and underpaid, often expected to work unsociable hours with limited support. These conditions can make the sector less attractive to potential employees and contribute to high staff turnover, which in turn places further pressure on already stretched services.

Women also felt that social care is too often treated as secondary to healthcare, particularly in relation to funding, standards and regulations. Accessing social care was seen as unnecessarily difficult, with complex application processes, high eligibility thresholds and long waiting lists. These challenges were reported to be particularly acute in rural areas, where services and staffing can be even more problematic.

"I had wonderful care from overworked people."

"Council funded nursing homes are dirty, smelly and residents are left all day to stare at walls."

"It is grossly undervalued and underfunded with health being the default priority without understanding that proper social care is the only way to relieve pressure on acute health services."

"Higher funding, proper training and a more stringent selection in standard of employment."

"Waiting over 2 years to receive self-directed support."

"More support for unpaid carers."

"Social workers in small and rural communities are notoriously underfunded."

"Social care funding is arguably a second-class citizen to health services."



How would you improve social care in Scotland?

44% linked social care improvements to funding, investment, pay, and resources, making this the most frequently raised issue.



Housing

A lack of affordable, good quality and accessible housing was a major concern for the women. They highlighted the shortage of social housing, lengthy waiting lists and a housing market that is increasingly competitive and unaffordable. The impact on women was particularly clear. Women with disabilities can struggle to find homes that meet their needs, whilst single mothers and women with caring responsibilities face additional financial and practical pressures. For women experiencing domestic abuse, a lack of affordable housing can also make it much harder to leave an unsafe situation.

Women also raised concerns about the housing crisis in rural areas. The growth of short-term holiday lets, including Airbnb, alongside rising house prices and rents, was seen as reducing the availability of homes for local people and making it more difficult for people of working age to move to, or even to remain in, rural communities.

"We have no housing stock in a rural area, if I was to flee domestic abuse I would not have anywhere to go within Argyll that's not 80 miles away which doesn't support women leaving."

"Long list for social housing, private rents far too high...need rent cap."

"I was on an emergency housing list at 6 months pregnant, escaping domestic abuse...I lived in a large cupboard type room for a year with a new born."

"Every government in recent years has come nowhere near their new build target. Homelessness is on the rise."

"The housing crisis is beyond extreme. Everyone deserves to feel safe and secure at home."

"I struggled for over eight years to find a suitable accessible house that would fit my family. Women with disabilities aren't seen as mothers so most accessible properties aren't big enough."

"I'll never be able to afford to buy a house despite working so hard."

 **72%**
of survey respondents believed that there is insufficient housing stock in Scotland.



Crime & Justice¹⁰

Crime and justice were most strongly associated with male violence against women and girls. Women described difficult experiences of reporting abuse, including having to repeatedly recount traumatic events, not being believed, and receiving little or no trauma-informed support. These experiences can discourage women from reporting crimes in the first place.

Women also spoke about the emotional toll of lengthy legal processes, which can force victims to remain engaged with their abuse for prolonged periods, adding further pressure to already difficult circumstances. There was also frustration around women being continually expected to change their own behaviour in order to feel safe in public spaces.

Concerns were also raised about emerging forms of online abuse, the influence of 'manosphere' culture, and the ways in which technology can enable harassment, control and surveillance. Women felt that these developments are making abuse more complex and, in some cases, even harder to escape. Women have been calling for a misogyny bill to change the culture of male violence against women and girls, stating that there is already sufficient evidence from survivors over the years to justify its enactment.

"Better access to legal aid and solicitors, There are so few that will pick up a case...CMS and family court system is a shame."

"More training needed for police taking statements from women who have suffered abuse."

"The misogyny bill would have addressed all these concerns but was never passed!"

"[Introduce] a domestic abuse register and greater increase in funds to support women services."

"...restore affordable access to justice; improve conviction rates for domestic violence."

"Every female has a story about sexual harassment."

"These things are happening, and they're happening at an exponential rate on social media."

"Society is more worried about men being falsely accused, despite the rarity, than women experiencing abuse."

Only 8%

of survey respondents felt that women have fair access to justice in Scotland.





The women described a range of barriers to employment, including discrimination linked to ethnicity and disability, as well as negative attitudes towards flexible working and childcare responsibilities. A highly competitive job market was a persistent concern, with women highlighting a shortage of well-paid and entry-level opportunities, overly demanding job specifications, and extensive recruitment processes. These challenges were seen as particularly prevalent for younger women seeking employment.

Access to work was also affected by limited public transport, particularly in rural areas, where poor connectivity can restrict the range of jobs available and make shift work difficult or impractical. Alongside these immediate barriers, women also expressed growing concern about the potential impact of artificial intelligence on job security and future employment opportunities.

"Few employers willing to employ disabled people and minority ethnic people in positions they are qualified to fill."

"Still very little flexibility for parents and carers, really hard to get into entrance jobs."

"Retirement age too high, reduce this more jobs for the younger generation."

"The cost of living makes it harder for people to survive on the basic wage."

"It's hard to find a job, pay is poor when you do find one, even when you are highly educated."

"Lots of part time jobs so people are working two or three jobs just to earn a FT wage."

"For an autistic person like me, the process of finding and applying for a job is rigged against us."

73%

feel women and men are not equal in Scottish workplaces
↑ up from 66% (2025/26 Survey)

33%

said their income did not cover monthly expenses
↑ up from 26% (2025/26 Survey)

Emerging Issues

Additional themes were identified as being important to women in Scotland.



Technology & Innovation

Women raised concerns about the rapid pace of technological change and its impact on children and young people, including social media, pornography, unrealistic online images, harmful relationship expectations and AI-manipulated photographs. They felt communities are struggling to keep pace with emerging risks.

Digital exclusion was also a concern, as increasing reliance on smartphones and online systems can make it harder for less connected people to access information and essential services.

Women were also sceptical about claims that AI and data-centre developments would bring significant local economic benefits, particularly jobs. Overall, they felt technological innovation should deliver clear community benefits without leaving people behind.

"Every week you hear something different that they're doing with AI."

"if you've not got a smartphone, you're almost invisible or you're being isolated from a variety of things."

"It has reduced basic human connection and reduced quality of services across the board."

"More misogynism."

"Everybody is being filmed without their knowledge so they could be doing anything."

"Awful for young girls self-esteem. Constantly seeing images/adverts/false news/beauty trends that are not healthy or sustainable."

"AI data centres...there's a lot of campaigning and lobbying going on... there's quite a few that are trying to open in Scotland."

"...don't fob me off with 120 new jobs... it'll just end up as...2 programmers and a severe environmental impact."



Across the whole survey, there were **130** direct mentions of AI (artificial intelligence) and **36** direct mentions of data centres.

Emerging Issues

Additional themes were identified as being important to women in Scotland.



Climate

Women expressed strong concern about climate change and its growing impact on daily life, health, farming and local environments. They called for stronger action from governments, businesses and wealthier groups, alongside investment in renewable energy, insulation, sustainable transport and biodiversity.

Climate action should be practical, fair and shaped by local communities, with realistic alternatives, affordable costs and secure jobs. While some women questioned the extent of human influence and favoured greater focus on adaptation, there was broad agreement that environmental change is happening and responses to it must be fair and realistic.

"My recycling is a drop in the ocean compared to billionaires taking rockets to the moon."

"Public doing their best, big companies need to do more."

"It's happening. We can't stop it. We need to adapt to live with it."

"Each community knows best what they need. 'Bottom up' initiatives rather than 'top down'."

48%

of survey respondent stated that they are 'very concerned' about climate change



"I am a crofter - a custodian of the land. We can no longer cut corn or even sometimes get our tatties out of the ground."

"They are just named as 'heatwaves' instead of a change in our climate that is now seriously affecting people's health."

Conclusion

This report offers a focused consideration of women in Scotland's priorities as we enter the 2026/27 period.

On **Health**, women identified the need for improved access to healthcare appointments, and a women-centred approach to leadership, research and healthcare.

In **Education**, women called for broadened, flexible, and financially supported lifelong learning opportunities, as well as recognition and investment into practical forms of learning.

With regards to **Social Care**, women highlighted how social care has been consistently overlooked, and the implications this has had on staffing, access, and standards.

Women described **Housing** in Scotland as being in a state of crisis, with a severe lack of affordable, good quality, accessible housing, and disproportionately impacting women.

Within **Justice** system, women highlighted issues around reporting crimes and navigating court processes, particularly in relation to the problem of male violence against women and girls. In addition to this, women expressed concerns about the rise of online violence and the influence of growing misogynistic attitudes.

Finally, on **Employment**, flexible and inclusive opportunities catered to the specific needs of women were highlighted as necessary for equality of opportunity for women in the workplace.

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 have 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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