

# THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

*Women's  
Voices  
Represented*



## PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Published 2022

# Table of Contents

**03. Introduction**

**04. Foreword**

**05. Cost Of Living**

**09. Work & Employment**

**13. Social Security**

**17. Health & Social Care**

**23. Climate**

**27. Transport**

**31. Housing**

**35. Crime & Justice**

**40. Education**

**46. Equalities & Human Rights**

**49. Conclusion**

# Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded by the Scottish Government to consult with as wide a range of women as possible. We gather lived experiences and feed them into the policy making process, pushing for equality to be at the heart of the political and legislative agendas.

We are committed to honestly representing the broad range of women's experiences across Scotland, by engaging with a range of women from different backgrounds. Our aim is to raise the voices of underrepresented women and ensure that their perspectives are taken into consideration.

Over the past, the SWC has made numerous contributions to Scottish Government consultations and calls for evidence. We are pleased that several of our recommendations have been taken on board in this year's Programme for Government, but there are still many women's experiences that are not reflected in current policy.

This document provides an overview of the key pledges set out in the Scottish Government's 2022-2023 Programme for Government, considering how these align with women's views – highlighting the real impact on women's lives and how this can further the fight for equality.



## Foreword: Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair

At the SWC, we continue working post pandemic to record women's voices and ensure they are used to influence decision-making processes. We pride ourselves on working directly with women to represent their experiences, particularly those who are so often overlooked. These women are the ones who stand to lose the most and policymakers and politicians desperately need to understand.

The cost of living crisis has highlighted the inequalities that already existed within our society. Women have been disproportionately impacted economically and socially, which shows just how precarious and discriminatory our safety nets are. There is much uncertainty about what is still to come, but one thing we are sure of is that women must be at the heart of recovery.

On behalf of the SWC, I would like to thank all the women who have trusted us to share their experiences and voices, especially while we have been unable to meet in person. The SWC will continue to do all we can to increase representation for women we will ensure we work towards decision makers at all levels to truly reflect the voices of women in Scotland and their lived experiences.

# Cost of Living

**“We keep talking about a cost-of-living crisis, and we’ve heard the strapline for years that it’s about ‘heating and eating’, but it’s beyond that now: it’s about survival.”**

The current rising cost of living has been labelled a ‘crisis’ by many, with rent, food prices and energy costs increasing regularly. These financial and psychological stressors have had a major impact on the women of Scotland, with women consistently feeling worried and upset about the future of themselves and their families. The rising cost of living underpins many of the topics discussed within this report, with it being continuously mentioned throughout.

# Cost of Living

## Programme for Government



- £294.4 million provided for family payments, including Bridging Payments, Best Start Grants, Best Start Foods, and the Scottish Child Payment.
- Continue to deliver immediate financial support to as many low-income families with school age children as possible through Bridging Payments, including a further two Bridging Payments which will support around 145,000 eligible children and be worth as a minimum £130 in both October and December.
- Subject to agreement with CoSLA, begin to roll out the provision of universal free school meals to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils, and take further action to reduce the cost of the school day for families, including reducing the cost of school uniforms through new guidance.
- £64 million of investment to extend universal provision of free school meals during term time to children in Primary 4 and Primary 5 and alternative holiday meals provision for eligible children.
- Investing a total of £161 million across Warmer Homes Scotland, Area Based Schemes, and Home Energy Scotland, cutting energy bills and climate emissions.
- Use our Emergency Budget Review to double our Fuel Insecurity Fund to £20 million in 2022–23, to help households at risk of self-disconnection or self-rationing of energy use as the energy price cap rises from October.
- Introduce our new Winter Heating Payment which guarantees a £50 annual payment to around 400,000 low-income households.
- Prioritise urgent action this winter to strengthen cash-first support, and publish a plan, grounded in human rights, that sets out the actions we will take towards ending the need for food banks as a primary response to hardship reflecting the changing context as a result of the cost crisis.
- Support more households with energy efficiency measures during this cost crisis having widened the eligibility criteria for the £55 million Warmer Homes Scotland fuel poverty programme to include more groups within the 60 to 75 years age range, further increasing the reach of this programme.

# Cost of Living

What women told the SWC:



Women have explained that not enough is being done to support vulnerable groups cope with the rising cost of living. It was felt that more could be done to help women through increased taxes and more assistance.

"I feel that not enough is being done to help those that need real help, people are going to die this winter."

**92%**

of women we spoke to labelled the rising cost of living as a 'crisis'

"Tax the upper classes more, give tax cuts for the working classes... The government needs to be spending money to support women and families."

Many women have expressed serious concern surrounding heating their homes this winter during the cost of living crisis, with some stating that they are unsure how they will manage. Some feel that the best way to tackle these problems is to ensure that proper funding is available to women and families, while addressing social inequality.

"Gas and electricity bills have more than doubled. People are choosing between food and heating: some parents are going hungry so their kids can eat."

"We need to ensure appropriate funding support is available to ensure that homes can be warm and families can cope this winter."

# Cost of Living

What women told the SWC:



Women have explained that they are also concerned about food procurement over the coming winter months. Due to poor support for food banks, some women and children are likely to go hungry this winter. To effectively combat this, it would be highly beneficial for the Scottish Government to provide free school meals for all children, but also further support food banks and third sector organisations which provide essential services for women.

**“People are struggling, and food banks are overwhelmed.”**

“I know that the Scottish Government could support organisations like ours that go out and reach these women. We go out and provide food parcels, vouchers... the cost of living has really made it difficult for them.”

There was also continued concern amongst women that due to severe cuts within local councils, community services had been majorly impacted. They felt that the pandemic only worsened this issue, with many community hubs, such as libraries or community centres, not being reopened.

“...hotspots, warm places, things like community centres and libraries, not just for the chat but just to get them out of the house, where they didn't need to put on their heating, or boil their own kettle... the Government can definitely help with that.”

**“I think there is so much more that could be done other than budgets... we need to work together.”**



# Work & Employment

**“Women are still earning less, still being paid less, still taking on the main childcare responsibility and still being valued less.”**

Women regularly face discrimination across workplaces, through low pay to decreased opportunities. Women also have intense domestic workloads, being primary carers for children, elderly parents, or disabled family members. At times these caring commitments can be barriers to entering or retaining paid employment, alongside structural issues, resulting in women having poorer employment opportunities.

# Work & Employment

## Programme for Government



- Boost entrepreneurship by opening six tech scalers across the country to provide ground-breaking support for tech founders to scale up their businesses and to create new jobs across the country.
- Respond swiftly to the whole system review being undertaken by Ana Stewart, leading entrepreneur and investor, on identifying the barriers facing women in business.
- Undertake a review of how best to significantly increase the number of social enterprises, employee-owned businesses and cooperatives in Scotland.
- Undertake research and advice to improve workplace productivity and wellbeing, including on the delivery of a four-day working week pilot and ensure that digital and technological innovation is used as a key driver for improved productivity and work standards/conditions.
- Publish a refreshed Fair Work Action Plan and introduce Fair Work conditionality for Scottish Government grants, subject to devolved competence.
- Provide funding of £300,000 over the next two financial years to The HALO Trust, a Scottish based charity specialising in removing landmines and other dangerous explosive devices, helping build capability to continue this work including a focus on employment of women.
- Develop a new Parental Transition Fund of up to £15 million each year to help tackle financial insecurity for families when parents and carers enter the labour market.

# Work & Employment

## What women told the SWC:



The current employment situation has been seriously hindered by a combination of the Covid-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living. Women have highlighted to us that these factors have had a negative impact on employment and the economy. Therefore, women would like to see the Scottish Government make further commitments to protect part-time, precarious employees: rather than focused support for entrepreneurial enterprises.

“The hospitality and retail sector were still getting over the pandemic; they’re just starting to build back again... I worry they’re going to start reducing hours, cutting days... the pubs around here can’t afford to be open 7 days a week, so they’ll probably reduce days... the workers are predominantly part-time... predominantly women, mums and grannies who are looking after kids and families... I think it’s going to be catastrophic.”

Women felt that there were still barriers in place to prevent them from entering specialised sectors: particularly STEM and financial labour markets. Young women stated that they are actively discouraged from taking these subjects at school. To tackle this disparity, it is key that the Scottish Government consider how they can better provide opportunities for young women in Scotland and change employment culture to welcome more women.

“I feel the subjects can be male dominated in schools such as physics, I was one of the only girls in the class I didn’t pursue them because I didn’t like them... but I might have, if there had been more girls in the classes.”

“I don’t feel women get the same opportunities like apprenticeships, for example girls are always steered toward hairdressing and caring roles, whereas guys get engineering, computing, medicine and STEM apprenticeships.”

# Work & Employment

What women told the SWC:



Women have also told us that improving working conditions for women could alleviate current cost of living woes. It was suggested that the current conditions women consistently work under are poor and need to incorporate better pay and flexible working schedules. This could be through 4 day working weeks, shared parental leave, work sharing and better childcare commitments.

“Employers need to ensure that they pay their staff enough to help with the crisis by ensuring they help when needed.”

“We need greater societal uptake of things like shared parental leave, child friendly employers and flexibility in working patterns would help support this.”

“A 4-day working week needs to be implemented – so does pension rights and travel concessions for workers.”

# Social Security

**“The system is fundamentally broke.”**

Women are more likely to experience poverty in their lifetime than men due to poorer employment opportunities and caring commitments. As a result, women are more likely to access social security and benefits, with many expressing a feeling of shame and guilt in doing so. The system has been described as overly complex and negative – with it being suggested that Scotland requires a friendlier, more empathetic approach.



- Award Best Start Grant, Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment automatically to eligible families in receipt of Scottish Child Payment, without the need to apply.
- Work to develop a £200 per year payment, paid for up to 10 years, for all eligible 16- to 25-year-olds with care experience to provide additional financial security as they transition towards more independent living.
- Widen eligibility for Best Start Foods by legislating to remove all income thresholds from Best Start Foods in 2023-24, supporting an additional 20,000 parents, and move to a cash payment instead of a payment card.
- Deliver the first year of the Adult Disability Payment, our replacement for the Department for Work and Pensions' Personal Independence Payment, following national introduction on 29th August.
- Invest in a no-interest loan scheme pilot to help people in Scotland access affordable credit. The scheme will enable people on lower incomes who cannot afford to repay interest, even from community lenders, to access short-term credit to meet unexpected costs.
- Continuing to support money and debt services with around £12.5 million provided in 2022-23 to support debt advice, the money talk team income maximisation service, welfare advice, and welfare advice and health partnerships.

# Social Security

## What women told the SWC:



Despite commendable efforts by the Scottish Government to provide adequate social security support for women across Scotland, there is more to be done. Women have explained to us that a major barrier to accessing support is the stigma attached to claiming benefits. This stigma is the result of continual societal shame that has existed for generations, and as such it is key that the Government aim to improve education surrounding social inequalities.

**“The system is degrading and upsetting and there is little information out there.”**

**“You don’t want to go to the job centre and beg and plead for money... you feel like a scrounger.”**

It has also been highlighted that women may struggle to access benefits as they do not always directly control household finances. In some cases, men utilise money to control partners and it is therefore imperative that the Government assess how to get money to women directly.

**“I suppose they’re trying to do stuff around the child payment, to increase that, because we know that universal credit, the way it works, if you’re on benefits a lot of the money could be going through the male purse in the house. So, I suppose it’s how they get more money directly to women, and particularly single mothers”**

# Social Security

## What women told the SWC:



Women also find that the social security system is confusing and complicated, discouraging them from claiming benefits that they are entitled to. The result of this is further poverty and financial difficulty for women, with many feeling a sense of hopelessness and anxiety. This also contributes to worsening mental health for women, with instances of depression and a poor quality of life. Some women think a good way to counter this would be to provide better online information and telephone helplines to support. It would also be beneficial to give staff within job centres better mental health training to spot those in crisis.

**“The amount of information you have to put on forms, there are pages and pages, and it is off putting.”**

**“I found it very hard to get any help that I desperately needed – such as home help, as I did not qualify for Universal Credit due to savings... So, I have been stuck fending for myself and watching all my money go, my health decline and being unable to rest, wash my own hair or clean my house. Which has made me feel more depressed, more exhausted and more shame.”**



# Health & Social Care

**“Women experience medical gaslighting as a matter of course – it’s a fight to be believed, to get the right diagnosis.”**

Women make up the majority of staff within the health and social care sector, while also taking on the bulk of caring responsibilities within domestic settings. This integral work was recently highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, yet still remains undervalued and underpaid. Women’s health itself, physical and mental, is also continuously ignored and disregarded, resulting in a poorer quality of life and mortality.

# Health & Social Care

## Programme for Government:



- Invest a further £10 million to support cancer waiting times improvements.
- Invest £50 million to help our NHS improve Accident and Emergency waiting times.
- Publish a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy in the year ahead and a new long-term suicide prevention strategy and delivery plan with CoSLA and develop a new dementia strategy.
- Continue work to reduce the public health emergency of drug deaths through our National Mission, increase the number of statutory funded residential rehabilitation placements by 300% by 2026, implement the Medication Assisted Treatment Standards, and publish a cross-government Action Plan.
- Support progress of the National Care Service Bill through Parliament, paving the way for more integrated and person-centred care, ending the postcode lottery of care that exists across Scotland under the current system.
- Appoint a Women's Health Champion to help drive forward all the actions in our Women's Health Plan, including on better and treatment of endometriosis, and better access to information and support for menopause.
- Support the development of national legislation, as quickly as practicable, subject to a forthcoming Supreme Court opinion, to safeguard access for women to healthcare facilities that provide abortion services, without fear, harassment or intimidation.

# Health & Social Care

## What women told the SWC:



Women highlighted to us that they feel that there is a crisis occurring in mental health provision across Scotland, with many falling through the cracks of a not fit-for-purpose system. The Covid-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation for women and young people across the country, with isolation and anxiety becoming more common.

“When we think about mental health, I think that could become as exacerbated as the drug problem if we don’t get a handle of it, and we’ve got to understand that each individual needs different support.”

“We have mental health waiting lists amongst children and young people of four years... that’s not a service, we need to stop saying we have a service, because we don’t.”

# Health & Social Care

What women told the SWC:



Women in rural communities have explained that they are currently not accessing good quality healthcare, feeling let down and forgotten. These health care disparities that exist across rural areas impact women's health, and it is vital that the Scottish Government do more to tackle this rampant inequality, so that women across the country receive the same quality of health care.

“I phoned 999 and because they were busy on the mainland I had to wait until they could send someone to me, even though I could see our ambulance sitting doing nothing.”

“When you ask people how the health services are, we can say that it's bad, bad, bad.”

“Our doctor has just resigned because the health board is so bad up in Stornoway, and it's been that bad for years and years.”

# Health & Social Care

## What women told the SWC:



When we spoke to women about the introduction of safeguards around abortion clinics, they welcomed this proposal openly. They stated that the harassment many women experience at centres which provide abortion services, is unacceptable and explained that this persecution is related to control over women's bodies. Some also believed it was likely that many people lacked good information around the topic, which contributed to stigma.

"I think what the Scottish Government could do is more education...have discussions about women who have miscarriages and that some have to have abortions for their own health."

"You don't have the narrative over your own body as a woman... You feel as though you don't have a choice."

# Health & Social Care

## What women told the SWC:



We also asked women about the implementation of safe drug consumption rooms, receiving a mixed response. Women felt that it was a highly controversial topic, but that it was encouraging to see the Scottish Government actively trying new techniques to reduce drug deaths. Women suggested that an interconnected approach would also help to mitigate the problem, with services collaborating. However, most agreed that instead more had to be done to tackle inequality and improve mental health.

“Dundee has the highest drug death rate in not only the UK, but in Europe, and I am very conscious of what I consider to be the absolute failure of the Scottish Government around drug consumption... it's a scourge on our society... I don't think we will be able to address it in its totality, I believe it all comes back to poverty and inequality, that's the problem.”

“I think we have to start looking at something, because what we have in place just now is outdated and people are dying... something has to change.”

“The joined-up approach... we need all sectors to be involved. It would make such a difference”

# Climate

**“I’m a bit scared... I’m a lot scared actually. They reckon we’ve got about ten years left before the damage is irreparable. We really need to get things going now.”**

The current climate crisis is a major focal point for Governments and people across the world, with Scotland being no different. It is undeniable the impact rising global temperatures are having on our lives, biodiversity, and weather. However, there is a key gendered element which is routinely ignored, with women being more likely to suffer the negative effects of climate change.



- Publish an Energy Strategy and our first Just Transition Plan, providing a roadmap for the energy sector's journey towards achieving our emissions reduction targets and securing a net zero energy system for Scotland.
- Facilitate the development of an offshore wind supply chain to make good on commitments averaging approximately £1.4 billion of investment per project, as part of the potential development of almost 28 GW of offshore wind energy through ScotWind.
- Publish the final Onshore Wind Policy Statement and a Vision for Onshore Wind in Scotland enabling up to 12 GW of onshore wind to be developed.
- Continue to support the development of the wave and tidal sector, which represents a major economic and climate opportunity for Scotland.
- Launch a virtual Public Energy Agency to drive forward increased investment in energy efficiency and zero emission heating.
- Replace the cashback element of the Home Energy Scotland funding offer with a standalone grant.
- Improve the content and extend the scope of our Green Jobs Workforce Academy and develop a refreshed Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan by the end of 2023.
- Develop our Land Reform Bill, which will include measures to diversify land ownership and empower communities to benefit from the opportunities presented by nature restoration and the journey to net zero emissions.



# Climate

## What women told the SWC:



Women across communities felt that it was important that there were improved opportunities for local children and young people surrounding renewable energy. They proposed that this would provide jobs and skills to the local economy while also being good for the environment.

“They are really going to have to push the apprenticeships for the renewables in such a small place, there’s not a single person who is trained in it. They need to offer more apprenticeships in these rural places, they need to train the kids, they’re capable but the Government need to provide the jobs.”

“Scotland produces so many renewables and yet we don’t see the benefit”

# Climate

## What women told the SWC:



It was also highlighted to us that improving education around climate change would be key in tackling the crisis. Women explained that they had regularly noticed their children, were actively driving forward climate change reduction due to a fear for the future. It became clear that women generally felt that education needed to be more focused towards older people.

“I think the young people are better than we are. Some more education needs to be done for the adult population.”

“I think it would be a wonderful idea if in every school there was a particular person who has a lot of knowledge about what’s happening with the climate, and they have a brief to do outreach with parents.”

“You don’t want to frighten them, but the teenagers and the young people are already frightened. We should all be frightened.”

Women also spoke about how important community intervention is with regards to climate change, noting that improving green spaces and encouraging sustainable transport (such as walking and cycling), can benefit people’s health while also helping the environment.

“When people ask, ‘What can I do?’, it has got to be about act locally, think globally.”

“I’m sure one step in countering climate change can be encouraging creating green spaces among more built up communities.”

# Transport

**“I don’t feel safe on public transport... if given the choice I’d drive every time.”**

Transport has regularly come up as a major issue for women in Scotland, with many feeling that the current infrastructure is not built for them, or for a modern, environmentally driven Scotland. Current transport systems are based around a male-breadwinner model, focusing on suburban to urban travel, and many women feel unsafe and disconnected within Scotland as a result.

# Transport

## Programme for Government:



- Freeze ScotRail fares until March 2023 and complete a Fair Fares Review – delivering options for a sustainable and integrated approach to all public transport fares.
- Consult on a new Islands Connectivity Plan this year, progress the small vessel development programme and continue to improve the resilience of the ferry fleet by sourcing additional vessels. We will publish the independent review of ferry governance arrangements, and set out how we can provide stronger accountability, transparency, and good outcomes for our island communities.
- Deliver record investment in active travel, including multi-year funding, with a focus on new infrastructure and storage, access to bikes through schemes such as the Scotland Cycle Repair Scheme 2 and free bikes for school-age children who are unable to afford one.
- Work with third sector partners and local authorities to consider how best to provide free bus travel to asylum seekers and refugees including displaced people from Ukraine.
- £300 million for concessionary travel, making bus travel free for over 2 million people in Scotland, including all children and young people under 22, disabled people and everyone over 60.
- Further promote free bus travel for those under 22 to improve uptake following the introduction of the scheme in January 2022. This scheme supports children and young people to travel for free, lifting the cost burden on households.
- Work with women's groups to identify and publish recommendations on women and girls' personal safety on public transport to support future access and usage of public transport.

# Transport

## What women told the SWC:



The key barrier to women utilising public transport effectively, has been issues around safety. Women do not feel that trains and buses have been designed with their needs or concerns in mind. They explained that to prevent this, more women should be involved in urban planning teams, as well as increased consultation with women when new transport projects are being proposed.

"I actually had an incident years ago, where I was accosted on a bus, and since then it's not for me, definitely not for me."

"The local authority doesn't give enough thought to how they design local transport routes and where they put houses and businesses. They're often in remote areas which make me feel unsafe."

"Train stations are always quite far out, or you have to walk through unlit paths, you don't feel safe. I think the environment isn't safe... I don't know the solution to be honest."

Women do welcome the inclusion of freezing train fares and removing fees on bus travel for young people and those over 60, with many stating current public transport prices are unmanageable, putting women off of utilising these services.

"I am a single mum of three children, and I'm working full-time but I'm not eligible for free buses and it is making it harder for me to manage. The government could really do more to support working mothers."

"Not all women drive or have access to a car or have money for public transport, we need to be offering them help."

# Transport

## What women told the SWC:



Speaking with women who reside on Scottish islands, they expressed continued disappointment with the ferry service. They spoke of constant cancellations, an unreliable service, and complicated journeys. Women also highlighted that flight services have been cut reducing travel options and has contributed to a feeling of detachment from the rest of Scotland. The combination of reduced ferry and flight services has also resulted in poorer economic opportunities as well as poorer public service provision.

“They’ve reduced the planes, we used to have a really helpful wee service between Barra and Benbecula... and people would use it for hospitals and things.”

“It’s a knock-on effect, if one ferry goes wrong it impacts the rest... they’ve got nothing spare.”

“So, we get a ferry from Barra over to Eriskay, and then a taxi gets you there, which then takes you all the way through to Benbecula, and then you’ve got to wait five hours for a plane which will take you to Stornoway.”

# Housing

**“Lack of affordable housing is the number one challenge and this impacts on everything else, from sustainability of the local economy to the provision of essential services.”**

Where we live, and how we live, are major contributors to our life quality and satisfaction levels. Whether we own our property or rent, if we live in social housing or have experienced housing insecurity, are all factors in how we access public services. As a result, housing is a continual issue women speak about, explaining that managing rent and energy bills is very difficult at the moment, with some women struggling to secure accommodation.

# Housing

## Programme for Government



- Use our Emergency Budget Review to provide local authorities with additional Discretionary Housing Payment funding to mitigate the UK Government benefit cap as fully as possible within devolved powers and give local authorities more flexibility to take into account of energy bills in their prioritisation of households for Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Providing £1.2 million of additional resource to advice organisations to support them to help household difficulty and to help households and businesses access advice and support on energy efficiency.
- Launching a Scotland-wide public information campaign to highlight help and support available to individuals as well as energy efficiency measures for households to minimise cost.
- Continue to deliver affordable high-quality homes, the majority for social rent, as we start delivery of our ambitious target of 110,000 such homes by 2032.
- Introduce a new Housing Bill before the end of this parliamentary year that will see further reform of the rental sector in Scotland and begin to deliver a New Deal for Tenants. Careful consideration will need to be given to the impact of addressing the cost crisis, which we will do by introducing emergency legislation planned to protect tenants by freezing rents and imposing a moratorium on evictions until at least 31 March 2023. The exact timings of a new Housing Bill will be kept under close review as we deliver our emergency response to support tenants through the winter months.
- Publish our Remote, Rural and Island Housing Action Plan to support the provision of homes in these areas, including consideration of funding arrangements for community housing trusts to ensure they can support the delivery of our enhanced rural home building plan.
- Provide a New Deal for Tenants with an ambitious series of reforms of the renting sector, including legislation to introduce robust rent controls for the long term, building on immediate actions during the cost crisis.



# Housing

## What women told the SWC:



Women regularly report the difficulties surrounding housing within Scotland. Many stated that getting a house can be difficult and that the social housing that is available is not enough for the needs of the wider population. Women believed that more could be done to build housing, and that some houses on offer within the rental market were not fit for use.

“There has to be more continued investment into social housing... because for all that they’re doing a good amount of work, it’s still not enough... they need to think how they’re going to make the other forms more affordable... that’s the challenge.”

“...it’s a Scottish thing about property... people are struggling to get homes and have somewhere to stay.”

When we spoke to women about the introduction of rent freezes and eviction bans over the next six-month period, they welcomed the move, stating that it would relieve pressure on those most in need. However, there was continued reference to ‘what comes next’, with March being seen with fear and apprehension. It was emphasised that during the winter months women will choose to prioritise heating and eating over rent, ultimately contributing to potentially crippling rent-arrears come March.

“I think there’s a bigger discussion around rent controls in the private sector and whether that needs to be a thing in Scotland, or whether it’s short-term. It’s just till the end of March... after March? Who knows.”

“There has to be more continued investment into social housing... because for all that they’re doing a good amount of work, it’s still not enough... they need to think how they’re going to make the other forms more affordable... that’s the challenge.”

# Housing

## What women told the SWC:



Women living in rural and island locations have explained that the housing market is insufficient to meet the needs of locals. They stated that the number of available houses was poor, and that this was worsened by individuals buying second homes to either rent out or use as holiday homes.

“...one of the real problems here is housing, it’s a massive, massive problem. There’s a lot of houses that are just empty in the wintertime”

“They need to build more houses for families. But also houses for people to buy, not just council ones, because people will have been able to save up quite a bit over the past few years and they’re always going to get pipped to the post by someone who’s just sold a house for a half a million.”

“Young people on the island are often already struggling due to high costs of fuel and competition for housing from those on the mainland for limited homes.”

We also hold concerns around the lack of consideration for homelessness within the Programme for Government, with no proposals being made which look to reduce or prevent homelessness. Women are less likely to be living rough, but instead will ‘sofa-surf’ due to poor housing security. This has been attributed to a lack of gender-specific homelessness support, which considers the needs of women: for example those escaping domestic violence.

“Trying to find safe accommodation is like banging your head against a brick wall. So often the women are more or less forced to stay where they are until something more suitable becomes available so that’s not an ideal situation.”

# Crime & Justice

**“I remember motioning something about women being taken to Cornton Vale for not paying their TV licenses... I remember at the time saying that the women are sad, they’re not bad.”**

Women and girls across Scotland are directly and indirectly impacted by crime and the justice system. They have explained to us that they do not always feel adequately protected or supported when reporting crimes, and that Scotland is not always a safe space for women.

# Crime & Justice

## Programme for Government



- Introduce legislation to abolish the not proven verdict as part of a package of reforms to the criminal justice system.
- Consult on legislative provisions to modernise justice processes including greater use of digital processes.
- Consult on specific draft laws to tackle misogynistic criminal behaviours, improving the experience and transparency of the justice system for women and victims of misogyny, with a view to introducing a Misogyny and Criminal Justice Bill later in this Parliament.
- Introduce a Bill on Police Complaints and Misconduct Handling to provide greater transparency, improve safety and empower citizens.
- Publish a new Hate Crime Strategy for Scotland.
- Develop a Bill to end conversion practices, covering both sexual orientation and gender identity
- Amend the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill to address the judgement of the Supreme Court and bring it back to the Scottish Parliament for Reconsideration Stage.

# Crime & Justice



## What women told the SWC:

Women face continued harassment and abuse throughout all sectors of society in Scotland. They have explained to us that they do not always feel safe and, after speaking with women who have directly faced domestic violence it is clear that the current justice system does not effectively protect them. It is the general consensus that major reform is required in order to tackle ingrained prejudice within the criminal justice system, as well as the implementation of trauma-informed practice.

“Dealing with the police was so traumatising. I felt like I was the abuser getting questioned quite a lot of the time... I was already so traumatised, I was already in shock, and I was expected to go through hours’ worth of interviews when mentally I was not able... and I knew that even if I did tell the police the whole truth, then what?”

“When women do come forward, they’re faced with a wall basically.”

“When I was in the police, female officers were being used to speak to rape victims and they used to ask us: ‘have you burst them yet?’ That term meant have you tried to convince them that they weren’t raped and that they maybe consented to it.”

# Crime & Justice



## What women told the SWC:

We asked women if they felt that the implementation of a Misogyny Bill would help to prevent such behaviour and received a mixed response. Women did think that misogyny was a problem within Scotland and that something had to be done in order to tackle a growing misogynistic overtone. Most women applauded the intent of such a bill, believing that it showed that the Scottish Government wanted to potentially limit the problem. However, they felt that it would be difficult to implement and would do little to deal with violence against women and girls.

“There’s some well-meaning behind the bill, but I’m a bit cynical about it... you can tell men how to behave, but that won’t stop them... and I’m not sure that the sort of convictions they’re talking about will end that... it’s about a cultural change.”

“I’ve looked at how my management have told us what to do... I just think... I’m slightly cynical about men telling us how not to be misogynistic.”

“I’m sorry but there isn’t an institution more misogynistic than the police force!  
We keep talking about making changes, but there has to be a willingness to change that mindset... it should be in our values to respect each other”

# Crime & Justice



## What women told the SWC:

With regards to the removal of the 'not proven' verdict, women again had mixed views. The general consensus was that there was a lack of clarity surrounding the three possible verdicts and that this further contributed to poor conviction rates as jury's can 'hide behind' the 'not proven verdict'. Some women stated that removing the 'not proven' verdict would assist in alleviating stress and anxiety for complainers as it is generally considered to be similar to 'not guilty': adding to distress. Whereas others believed that removing this option would have little to no effect on sexual assault conviction rates as jurors would instead choose 'not guilty' rather than 'not proven'.

"It needs to be made absolutely clear what it means... that not proven simply means there was insufficient evidence to make a not guilty verdict and not that the accused was innocent."

"...so, we need to be careful if we think that conviction rates will be higher for things like sexual assault. I don't think it'll change much to be honest; they'll just defer back to 'not guilty'."

# Education

**“I think we have a vast different in our education system in Scotland... I think every child should have the same education, and yet you look at these lists of the best schools... there is a difference.”**

Women across Scotland have strong views with regards to the current education system in Scotland. They believe that young women and girls are being routinely let down, and that major reform is required with regards to sex and relationship education. This also encompasses social media, and how educational reform must consider the changing world of technology in future planning.



# Education



## Programme for Government:

- Continue to make a significant investment – expected to be £349 million in 2022-23 – in student support including tuition fees, bursaries for the poorest students and care experienced students, while progressing our work to increase student support in line with the Real Living Wage.
- Accelerate progress to substantially eliminate the poverty related attainment gap, through implementing a refreshed approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge and an investment of up to £200 million.
- Begin a national discussion on education, creating an unprecedented opportunity for pupils and students to shape the future based on their experiences. This will begin in September 2022, and report in Spring 2023.
- Introduce an Education Reform Bill to establish world-class national bodies, focused on the needs of pupils, including work to ensure that our qualifications and assessment approach meets the needs of learners and provides support for those with additional support needs.
- Take forward the objectives set out in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation for a skills and education system that meets the demands of an ever-changing economy and society. To ensure the skills system meets these ambitions, we will commission an independent review of the skills landscape.

# Education



## What women told the SWC:

Women felt that the current education system does not adequately support the needs and ambitions of young women and girls. They explained that those in school face sexual harassment from their male colleagues, with the sheer amount of sexual harassment and violence young women experience being unacceptable.

“...there’s so much bullying, verging on sexual harassment, boys towards the girls. They’re pinching their bra straps from the back, grabbing, and groping in corridors, so that’s all going on. It’s been brought to the attention of the headteacher, and nothing is really getting done about this.”

“I have overheard conversations and heard how they [boys] speak about women, especially in school... it makes me feel uncomfortable and unsafe.”

# Education



## What women told the SWC:

Online safety was also a clear theme when speaking to young women – with many explaining that they currently face misogyny and abuse when using social media. They discussed a worrying rise in negative behaviour and attributed this to a vocal minority online who actively support the objectification and harassment of women. Young women explained that online safety was regularly omitted from personal and social education, believing this to be a major oversight.

“Social media gives men a platform to talk negatively about women, whereas previously it would have been only from people you were friends with or around at school. Now online, you could see random strangers showing hatred for women and bringing them down to a really disgusting level.”

“I did some really interesting training recently about incels: these groups of men who are completely misogynistic. What shocked me was just how many groups there are and how truly horrendous and vile the stuff they post online is. I think social media platforms like Facebook are certainly not doing enough to deal with that... it's so toxic.”

“It would be good if social media was held to account and have better guidelines with regards to what is acceptable or not. More needs to be done with regards to online safety.”

# Education



## What women told the SWC:

Young women also felt that sex education is poor within schools and women's health was stigmatised through a lack of open discussion. Women suggested that to be inclusive, sex and relationship education should start from an earlier age.

"I think the main issue is separating children at P7 when you're talking about sexual health. I mean I think most boys don't have a clue about what happens to women, such as periods, and have no understanding of us."

"There are boys our age who do not understand how periods work and they are baffled by it, they have never been taught and they should know this. They could be husbands and dads one day with wives and daughters."

"I think people accept information and facts at different times... so I think teaching it little and often, because when it's the right time for you to learn you'll ask the questions... So, I don't think primary school is too early because the ones who aren't ready to accept it won't, while the ones who are ready will."

# Education



## What women told the SWC:

With regards to wider education, we welcome moves to reduce the attainment gap – believing that all children should have access to good quality education. A key element of this however, is ensuring that teachers and support staff are properly cared for and treated with respect.

“I certainly don’t think we’re encouraging people to become teachers, with the amount of work, and the size of classes they’ve got.”

“...in my old school in another country they had a female counsellor, who gave girls discussions around sex education and their bodies, it was really helpful.”

“Teachers feel totally overwhelmed at the moment, so much keeps changing, there’s so much bureaucracy they have to deal with... I can remember being in a classroom and you were teaching from the passion you felt about empowering young people... and I don’t think teachers are able to feel that anymore.”

# Equalities & Human Rights

“I do think there are many groups who feel very disadvantaged, and obviously they’re not just groups of women, but if we look at women, and the intersectionality of women, because women go across a huge range of groups. We’re not homogenous.”

Women are not valued equally with men in Scotland. Many policies impact women differently, and disabled women, BAME women and LGBTQ+ women face yet further discrimination. There needs to be a commitment to challenging this

# Equalities & Human Rights

## What women told the SWC:



The Scottish Government have committed to creating an inclusive and diverse country, which prioritises human rights and hopes to make all peoples welcome. This approach places personal wellbeing at the forefront, with some groups: such as children and women, being centred to reduce inequalities. They hope to achieve this through improved public services and better education for young people. We commend these aims and concur that an approach which prioritises the livelihoods and wellbeing of women and children is key. However, more should be done to effectively tackle social inequality and limit the effects of bigotry and hate within Scotland. This could be done through educational reform, as well as improved training for public service professionals in relation to the intersectional nature of inequality.

“I get it at work, and I also get a lot of homophobia from male colleagues and male customers... This makes me feel rubbish... I am more than capable of doing the job.”

“My daughter is trans, so I also have experience of her transitioning and after two years I’m about to start fighting more, because we’re just not getting anywhere.”

# Equalities & Human Rights

## What women told the SWC:



Ethnic minority and migrant women have also explained that they do not feel that their needs are being met, and that instead they are discouraged from being active members of Scottish society. They have explained that those in positions of power often overlook their potential, making it difficult to gain good employment and procure appropriate health and social care.

“There is an over-representation of minority groups in minimum wage jobs, even when they have the qualifications to get better paid jobs. And because of this overrepresentation, it means people in these minorities are more likely to be poor.”

“White is the default privilege setting in western society, and white people hate admitting that.”

“It’s just gradual... there is a bit of xenophobia. I think it has to do with people feeling a bit threatened.”



# Conclusion

The proposed Programme for Government 2022-23 makes many commendable goals, with the reduction of social inequality being front and centre. The Scottish Government have accepted that more must be done in order to tackle the imminent cost of living crisis, focusing on helping those at the bottom of the economic ladder and implementing policy which will benefit women and children in the short-term.

However, throughout our discussions with women they made it clear that short-term objectives are not enough – with the inequality that exists across Scottish society being deep-rooted and as such requires long-term planning. As an organisation which prioritises lived experience, we shall conclude with the remarks of one Scottish woman:

“...it’s across the board, this short-term resourcing... the emergency legislation, the actions being taken in relation to energy are all short term... the politicians are just looking at getting through the winter, and all that does is build up a dam, creating a lake of problems ready to burst in March.”

# Thank You

Thank-you to all the women who have taken part in our discussions over the last year. The SWC will continue to represent women's voices in the policy-making process and hold the Scottish Government to account in relation to women's equality over the coming year.



## **Scottish Women's Convention**

**2nd Floor, The Albany Centre,  
44 Ashley Street, Glasgow, G3 6DS**

**0141 339 4797**

**[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)**

**Facebook, Twitter & Instagram: @SWCWomen**

The Scottish Women's Convention is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland No. SC0327308. Registered office The Albany Centre, 2nd Floor, 44 Ashley Street, Glasgow, G3 6DS. The Scottish Women's Convention is a Charity Registered in Scotland, No.SCo398525