

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

*Women's
Voices
Represented*



**PROGRAMME
FOR
GOVERNMENT**

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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 this 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, aiming to raise the voices of underrepresented women.

Over the past year, the SWC has made numerous contributions to Scottish Government Consultations and Calls for Evidence. We are pleased that several of our recommendations have been included in the released Programme for Government 2023-2024, with there being a key focus on equality, opportunity and community. However, there is still significant change required for women to gain full equity in Scotland. This document provides an overview of the key pledges set out in the Scottish Government's 2023-2024 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.



Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair

The SWC has continued to work diligently across Scotland, to ensure that women's voices remain throughout decision-making processes. We work with women directly, through roadshows, roundtables and conferences in order to gather their views on a range of topics, and to understand what is important to them.

We, at the SWC, thank all of the women who have worked with us to share their experiences and views, particularly during this year of intense financial hardship caused by the cost of living crisis. The SWC will continue to do everything we can to make sure women's views are always represented within the Scottish policy-making framework, emphasising lived experience.

Work & Employment

“Even in your job, the way we work, we know that sexism takes place, we know that women do not get certain jobs. When we look at management, where are women in management?”

Within the proposed Programme for Government 2023-2024, there are multiple plans to increase the number of Scots in work, through the implementation of a ‘wellbeing economy’ approach. This economic structure prioritises the needs and aspirations of people and communities, aiming to provide good opportunities for all, eradicating poverty.

The Scottish Government have also included plans to reduce inequality in the workplace, with flexible working, such as a 4-day working week, and pop-ups to increase the number of women entrepreneurs. They have also aimed to increase industry across Scotland through community-focused work policies.

Work & Employment

Employment is an integral element of women's lives across Scotland. Through work, women can access improved living conditions, further education and a sense of purpose. Unfortunately, women have historically experienced lesser work opportunities due to engrained prejudices preventing them from entering higher education, paired with a general assumption that they will take on the bulk of caring responsibilities within the home. These barriers continue to have an effect on women's employment rates, with women being far more likely to be in part-time employment – 82.1% of part-time staff are women, compared to 17.9% of men[1]. Furthermore, of this part-time workforce, 2.6% are from an ethnic minority background, despite making up 5.8% of the working age population[2], and across the UK, BME women are around twice as likely as white workers to be employed in insecure employment[3].

Women's Voices

It can therefore be said that women are overrepresented across poor quality employment, significantly impacting their wellbeing outcomes, and it cannot be denied, that to effectively tackle high poverty rates, women must have access to improved work opportunities. This irrefutable fact of the labour industry is commonly highlighted by women we speak with, with many stating that they believe there should be more support to effectively get women into better quality work. They have suggested the enforcement of flexible working strategies by Government bodies, as well as improved childcare would greatly benefit working women to continue in employment. However, this would likely not assist women working in the aforementioned low-paid, precarious work, as they are less likely to have rigorous assessments of their working conditions or be sufficiently empowered to challenge unfair policy. We recommend increased consideration of women in low-paid work, through improved workplace policy and regular consultation with low-paid workers, to understand the reality of their lived experience.

[1] Scottish Government. (2022). Workforce Composition: Sex & Gender. Available at: https://data.gov.scot/workforce-diversity-2021/02_sex.html#Headcount

[2] Scottish Government. (2022). Workforce Composition: Ethnic Group. Available at: https://data.gov.scot/workforce-diversity-2021/05_ethnicity.html#Headcount

[3] TUC. (2020). BME Women and Work. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/bme-women-and-work>

Work & Employment

“
...flexible hours should be in all contracts or assistance from employers to pay for childcare if they can't provide flexible hours.
”

“
They should incentivise workplaces to adjust workplace contracts – flexibility, childcare vouchers, work from home ability.
”

Moreover, some women face additional barriers when accessing good quality work. As mentioned above, ethnic minority women are more likely to work in insecure employment and face racism. This racism is a clear barrier, preventing women from furthering their career prospects. Some stated that they had been overlooked for promotions, and that despite equality policies being in place, they were regularly ignored or not utilised. Within the Programme for Government there is mention of a new 'Anti-Racism Observatory', however the proposals made lack detail and we would highly recommend that such a body receives sufficient funding, as well as full scope to investigate all workplaces.

“
...I asked a lot of people if they know that in their workplace that they have equality policies...some people didn't know what I was talking about.
”

“
...my colleagues knew I was a good teacher, yet I applied for jobs, I did everything, and I was ignored.
”

Work & Employment

A further barrier to women's economic freedom is the presence of misogyny across workplaces. In June 2023 we released our 'Misogyny in Scotland' report, which included discussions around how women experience workplace misogyny. They spoke of a 'boys' club' mentality, the continuation of gendered roles, with women expected to make teas and coffees, and sexual harassment. Women explained that a combination of these issues prevents them from taking on or being offered promotions. We do note that the Programme for Government has included the acceleration of the proposed Misogyny Law, however we believe that cultural change is needed across workplaces, as well as this new law, to effectively tackle discrimination against women.

“—

There was a refusal to move the time of an early morning meeting where I couldn't arrange childcare. But they managed to move meetings to accommodate lunchtime football training.

—”

“—

I wasn't deemed as capable as my male peers and was never put up for promotions.

—”

Health & Social Care

“*I think there’s so much that we need to do. We need to set the reset button, because like they have completely not considered us for so long...women’s health needs an overhaul.*”

The Programme for Government 2023-2024 presents many different healthcare policy aims which will have a direct impact on women. For example, improved miscarriage care and the introduction of abortion ‘buffer zones’, with the Scottish Government also proposing overarching measures, like a reduction in waiting times, increased GP services and major changes to mental healthcare, through the ‘Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan’. There is also focus on reducing drug-related harms, with the establishment of ‘Safe Drug Consumption’ facilities, and wraparound care for drug users.

The 2023-2024 programme additionally presents improvements for social care workers. The Scottish Government aim to implement better workforce planning within statutory services, while also increasing the pay of social care workers to at least £12 an hour, coinciding with the proposed National Care Service (NCS).

Health & Social Care

We regularly hear from women that health and social care are both incredibly important elements of their lives, with good quality care heavily impacting their ability to access healthy lifestyles. However, not all women in Scotland are receiving full, comprehensive medical care, due to unfair structural mechanisms, the significant pressure the Covid-19 pandemic placed upon the health system, and engrained prejudices surrounding women's healthcare needs. From the Scottish Government's 'Women's Health Plan', we know that 1 in 3 women in the UK will experience a reproductive or gynaecological health problem during their lives, however just 2.1% of publicly funded research was focused on reproductive health[4]. This plan also noted that women in general will experience poorer health outcomes than men, with many issues being undertreated or ignored. These health outcomes are even worse for women who live in economically deprived communities. Women who live in deprived areas are likely to experience 22.1 less years of healthy life than women who live in the most affluent areas[5], with this being accounted to lower incomes, fewer healthy activities within a walkable distance and many other challenges associated with poverty.

Women's Voices

Consequently, how we care for women across Scotland's communities is incredibly important in the creation of a country where all individuals thrive. As stated, the Scottish Government have proposed increasing GP services and reducing waiting times across healthcare settings. These plans align with the wants of women across the country, with many stating that they do not receive timely primary care. Women living in rural areas experienced this more commonly, explaining that due to increased centralisation of services, they were unable to access vital care.

[4] Scottish Government. (2021). Women's Health Plan: A Plan for 2021-2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2021/08/womens-health-plan/documents/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024/govscot%3Adocument/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024.pdf>

[5] Scottish Government. (2021). Long-Term Monitoring of Health Inequalities. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2021/01/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities-january-2021-report/documents/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities/govscot%3Adocument/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities.pdf>

Health & Social Care

Some of those who resided in more affluent areas, however, did state that they received good quality care, further compounding the arguments made above. Overall, we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase primary care services for Scottish residents but do question whether sufficient funding will follow.

“—
| *There should be no postcode lottery for*
| *women's healthcare.* —”

“—
| *I'd say on a personal level...I definitely*
| *receive good healthcare, but...I'm just*
| *lucky with where I live.* —”

Women have gone on to explain that when accessing healthcare services, they can experience gatekeeping from healthcare professionals and indifferent attitudes. They stated that this was incredibly “off-putting” and made potentially distressing health visits more complicated. During our discussions around misogyny in Scotland healthcare was mentioned, with some women believing that misogyny acts as a key driver in maintaining women's health inequality. Women explained that due to a continued disinterest from medical professionals in women-focused health conditions, women's health has been put at risk. They also felt that despite an increase in women doctors, the overarching system made significant structural change difficult. As a result, we believe that the 2023-2024 programme has missed an opportunity to better incorporate the ‘Women's Health Plan’, through improved training for medical staff surrounding women's health.

“—
| *I'm a pharmacy student...and there's so much misogyny...But about periods, it*
| *tends to be a very dismissive tone the way it's taught, they don't really care,*
| *whatever, it's a woman's issue.* —”

Health & Social Care

With regards to more specific measures being proposed by the Scottish Government, such as ‘buffer zones’ around abortion facilities and improved miscarriage care, women showed support for both. They believed that it was incredibly important that women could access abortion services free from judgement but felt that further education around abortion was still needed. Women also gave their personal experience of miscarriage, highlighting their distress as well as accounts of sympathetic staff, but inappropriate facilities across hospitals. Overall, we believe that the proposals made within the Programme for Government 2023–2024 which cover these priority points are well-intended, and hope that through effective commitments, the Scottish Government can work to benefit the wellbeing of women.

“
| *I think it's a woman's right to choose. That's definitely a private thing for*
| *each woman, and that's the way it has to be.*
—”

Moreover, with regards to addiction, women believed that more must be done to reduce the associated harms. Due to the continued high drug-related death rates in Scotland, the SWC held a conference entitled ‘The Impact of Drugs on Women and Families in Scotland’. During this conference women expressed strong support for the use of drug consumption rooms, believing that if done effectively they could prevent further harm. However, did state that these should be coordinated with reduction services, to assist drug users to move away from drug use. Furthermore, when we have questioned women surrounding new plans to ban single-use vaping devices, they expressed support, with there being particular concern surrounding how they were being advertised to young people and children.

“
| *Provide targeted healthcare models that*
| *address both physical and mental health needs*
| *of women and families affected by drug use.*
—”

“
| *Drug consumption rooms will be*
| *good for communities.*
—”

Health & Social Care

Mental healthcare is also a regular topic with women throughout our events, and therefore, committed improvements are welcomed. Women have explained that they are consistently disappointed with the lack of mental health care available. This is felt particularly by those who have experienced increased isolation, such as disabled women, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and women who are under enormous financial strain due to rising living costs. We, therefore, welcome the publication of the new 'Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan', and encourage the Scottish Government to work with a range of individuals, ensuring that women's voices are included.

“
| *It's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I think*
| *we mostly have volunteers around here, and*
| *they have to fight for their funding.* |
——”

“
| *...the mental health care...it was*
| *excellent in some respects, but it had*
| *it's failings, being a bit too prescribed.* |
——”

A further key element of women in Scotland's lives is the provision of social care. Women make up the vast majority of social care workers and bear the brunt of the unpaid caring responsibilities within the home, therefore, changes to social care systems will disproportionately impact women. Women are in support of changes, particularly an increase in wages for social care workers, however, have stated that these plans need to be immediate, rather than delayed. This will be of value over the winter months, a period of intense strain for workers and residents requiring social care. Furthermore, we do acknowledge the inclusion of the proposed NCS, but this section lacks specifics and due to conflicting information, women require more information surrounding any developments. During conversations, the NCS has been viewed with trepidation, as women believe there should instead be a focus on person-centred, individualised care.

“
| *...I think people are emphasising people-centred services...It's significant that the*
| *Scottish Government's view is that we should have a NCS, when I think what we're*
| *saying here is that local hubs work well.* |
——”

Social Security

*“I am made to feel
like a benefit
scrounger, as if I’m
not contributing and
I’m actually a drain
on society.”*

Recently, social security in Scotland has experienced significant change, with the continued development of Social Security Scotland (SSS). This agency was established by the Scottish Government to take on certain UK Government Department of Work and Pension (DWP) responsibilities, for example Adult and Child Disability Payments and the Scottish Child Payment. It is the aim of the Scottish Government to continue the transfer of powers from the DWP, while also carrying out regular review. The Programme for Government 2023-2024 also states that the Government will invest in increased welfare and debt advice, to assist in reducing the impact of the rising costs in living.

Social Security

Ensuring that all residents in Scotland have easy access to sufficient social security is key in embedding the concept of fairness and equality across the country, particularly for women. SSS have found that 77% of claimants for benefits under their remit are women, including benefits such as Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grants and Adult Disability Payment[6]. This figure illustrates the value in building a good quality social security system, as without these integral payments, many women would be pushed into further poverty. Social security is also imperative to the recovery process, post Covid-19 pandemic, with this unprecedented event placing significant strain on public services and the population, principally the most vulnerable.

Women's Voices

Women's experiences of social security are varied, however, the vast majority of women we have spoken with have conveyed significant dislike for the DWP system. They have stated that they have faced an uphill battle when making claims, with women explaining that they are made to feel like “scroungers” when accessing vital financial assistance. Women have accounted this to a broken system, rather than deliberate malice, and believe that there must be a major overhaul of the UK Government benefit system.

“...it's undignified – there is the stereotypical view that you're scrounging or begging.”

“...the troubles that have afflicted the social security system, which I think is not deliberate, but maladministration.”

Social Security

It could therefore be argued that increasingly moving benefit payments to SSS is welcomed by women. Some have explained that they have witnessed an increase in waiting times to receive payments, however the person-centred, empathetic approach is viewed positively. Women also believed that it was important that such a system provided advocacy and guidance, and therefore, the creation of a welfare and debt advice service was appreciated. They believed that regular review of the organisation's charter allows for the system to remain dynamic and flexible to the needs of users. This level of accountability was seen as valuable, and therefore, we recommend continued evaluation, which places women's voices at the centre.



“ —
...in terms with the carry on
with SSS having taken over
disability payment and
things, the waiting time has
gone from 3 to 6 months.
— ”

Education & Childcare

“
The curriculum is still stunted; it's still focused on academia rather than what the kids are good at.
”

Due to key targets surrounding child poverty, the Scottish Government have proposed tackling the issue through educational establishments. They aim to expand universal free school meals to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils by 2026, and reduce the costs of the school day, through the removal of core curriculum charges and the uplifting of the school clothing grant by inflation in 2024-2025. The Scottish Government have also proposed sizable changes to education development processes, with a focus on including young people in decision-making.

The Programme for Government 2023-2024 also contains many policy commitments surrounding improving early years education and childcare options for families. They hope to achieve this through an increase in pay for those working in the sector, while also focusing efforts on a large recruitment drive. The Scottish Government also aim to establish a new digital service to help parents and carers to find and access childcare, with the hopes of creating a childcare system which works for everyone in Scotland.

Education & Childcare

Education comes up regularly in discussions with women about their lives. It can be seen that despite decades of continual depreciation of women's educational abilities, young women are outperforming young men at school. In 2023, 35.4% of girls achieved an A grade at Higher level, compared to 29.8% of boys, and since 2019, girls have continuously been more likely to achieve an A grade at Higher[7]. Girls are also more likely to enter university, with women making up 57% of the UK student population in 2020/21 but are less likely to be in 'Further Education' courses, including apprenticeships[8]. Despite these figures, women are still facing consistent inequality and discrimination throughout their educational experience, with this continuing into their future employment. A key barrier to women's equality within the workplace is poor childcare options, for example, 22.6% of women in Scotland who were not economically active stated that 'looking after family and/or home' as a reason for their inactivity, thus preventing them from utilising their education in a meaningful way[9].

Women's Voices

From speaking with women across Scotland, plans to reduce the cost of the school day, through increasing the availability of free school meals and clothing grants, would be supported. Mothers have explained that the additional costs of having a child at school, such as uniforms or school trips, can cause significant distress. They have also stated that due to increases in the cost of living, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide food for children, and as such it is key that all children have access to a free hot meal per day. Women are therefore in agreement with Scottish Government plans to widen the free school meal programme but believe this should be offered to all school children, including secondary school pupils. They have also expressed disappointment that the roll-out of this agenda will be delayed until 2026, two years later than the last target, which itself was delayed from 2022.

[7] SQA. (2023). Provisional Attainment Statistics – August 2023. Available at: [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/attainment-statistics-\(august\)-2023-provisional-summary.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/attainment-statistics-(august)-2023-provisional-summary.pdf)

[8] UK Government. (2022). Education and Training Statistics for the UK. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-and-training-statistics-for-the-uk>

[9] Scottish government. (2022). Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions – Protected Characteristics. Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-labour-market-people-places-regions-protected-characteristics-statistics-annual-population-survey-2021/pages/5/>

Education

“—
...we [after-school club] have teenagers...who we are making
sure we provide a really robust service on a Friday, because
they're half-day now, they don't get a hot meal...if we don't
provide that, they're often not getting one until Monday.
—”

“—
...we're [foodbank] probably seeing
more women with families now.
—”

Young women who attend school, have explained to us that misogyny remains a major issue across their education. During our 'Misogyny in Scotland' project, girls stated that they were subject to sexual harassment and demeaning language, as well as continued critique surrounding their uniform from educators. These comments were generally sexual in nature, making young women feel self-conscious and less likely to contribute during classroom discussions. Young women felt that the misogynistic environment harboured in schools had to be tackled through revised sex and relationship education, proposing that current lessons are not sufficient, lacking information on online abuse. They also stated that the online world was a dangerous space for boys, with misogynistic influencers taking advantage of young men, fostering divisive ideologies. We would therefore propose that the Scottish Government must overhaul sex and relationship education, focusing on the changing nature of young women's lived experience, through increased engagement with pupils.

“—
Our school had a 'slags page' on
Instagram where photos of girls
nearly naked...would be posted with
their name and caption.
—”

“—
When I was at school...I was sexually harassed
and sometimes groped on a regular basis. My
sister was raped, and the teachers started
treating her like she was a slut.
—”

Childcare

Similarly, within the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, is the expansion of childcare across Scotland. The Programme for Government 2023-2024 outlines a raise for Early Learning and Childcare workers to £12 per hour, as well as an aim to increase employee numbers within this sector by 1,000. The Scottish Government hope that these new workers will be easily accessible through the development of a new digital service for carers. Women regularly cite childcare dilemmas as a key barrier to accessing good quality work, explaining that workplaces do not promote flexible work schedules or provide sufficient childcare options. Those residing in rural areas face further challenges, as there is a total lack of childcare options, with long distances making these limited options unviable. Therefore, women would like to see a strong focus on altering workplace cultures so their full engagement across employment can be achieved, as well as more childminders and early learning workers.

“—
| *It's terrible, it has a huge impact on women's work, most people who have had kids really struggle to get back to work. I mean it took me about 3 years to get my son a pace.* —”

“—
| Childcare is still a big problem for working women – it's difficult to find a nursery. —”

“—
| *There should be affordable or free childcare to support mothers in employment.* —”

Housing

“
...women's experiences of housing and homelessness are very different from men's and that means that housing needs for women and girls will also be very different.”

Within the Scottish Government's plans for 2023-2024, the current difficulties facing the housing industry are briefly discussed. The Government aim to move forward with the recently proposed Housing Bill (for more information on this Bill, [please see our conference report on 'Women's Housing Priorities in Scotland'](#)), focusing on increasing housing stock through an investment of £752 million to the Affordable Housing Scheme as well as the release of a 'Remote, Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan'. There is also a focus on implementing homelessness prevention policies. They have clarified that they will continue to work on the 'Housing First' approach, offering cross-service support to those most at risk of homelessness.

Included within housing planning, is the addition of heating issues, with the Scottish Government preparing to refresh the 'Warmer Homes Scotland' scheme, which considers energy efficiency and how they can support homeowners to make changes.

Housing

Housing, or lack of housing, is a major element of all Scottish citizen's lives, with secure housing situations actively promoting good health and wellbeing. However, many across Scotland do not have access to such security, with homelessness being at an all-time high in 2022; there were 39,006 homelessness applications recorded in 2022-23, an increase of 9% compared to 2021-22. Women make up 45% of these applications, and the reasons as to how they have lost secure housing differs from that of men. They are more likely to become homeless from private rented tenancies or as a result of a violent or abusive household dispute^[10]. Of those women who do have access to a secure home, some have experienced further hardship, through poor conditions and/or high rent, and therefore, women are calling for major changes across the housing sector.

Women's Voices

To effectively tackle the housing crisis being witnessed across Scotland it is recommended that the Scottish Government work to increase social housing numbers considerably. Women have explained that cultural pressure to buy has contributed to the lack of social housing, and that they would like to see increased Government investment in this sector. They believe that through increased social housing, families would be less reliant on the private rental market, lessening the impact of the cost of living crisis on households. They highlighted that major changes must happen quickly to effectively help families, as well as long-term goal setting. This was of particular value to rural women, with the increase to holiday lets creating a total housing deficit for local people, pushing young people to the Central Belt. Therefore, women support an increase to housing numbers in Scotland but would encourage a sense of urgency to limit continued suffering.

[10] Scottish Government. (2023). Homelessness in Scotland: 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-in-scotland-2022-23/pages/characteristics-of-the-homeless-population/>

Housing

“
...the target they have set for 2040, I don't
think I'll be alive to make that target.
”

“
...we're constantly fighting to get younger
people to come in. But then you can't do that
if all the houses are Airbnb's.
”

In addition to a lack of housing, women have also highlighted concern surrounding rising heating costs. Due to a myriad of crises that have hit Scotland over the past five years, fuel prices have risen enormously, pushing women to choose between heating and eating. This is again pertinent for rural communities, as they will experience harsher winters and are more likely to rely on multiple heating types. We would recommend consideration of additional financial payments throughout the winter months, with particular focus on rural households

“
...I lived in a council flat...and
because of the location on an
island it was expensive to rent and
electric heating was very
expensive.
”



Transport

“ I frequently say to people that if we can get the trains right in this country, we can change the country... We really need a big push to improve public transport.

Access to good quality transport links is vital in ensuring good quality lifestyles for Scottish citizens. The Scottish Government have therefore proposed improved ferry services for Island communities, an evaluation of bus and rail ticket prices, through the ‘Fair Fares Review’, and an assessment of the viability of digital ticketing systems across public transport. There is also discussion of the promised road improvements between Perth and Inverness, as well as consideration of ways to reduce landslip risks at the A83 ‘Rest and Be Thankful.’

The Programme for Government 2023-2024 also acknowledges that transport contributes massively to Scotland’s greenhouse gas emissions, and as a result aims to encourage active travel options, such as walking and cycling, while also further developing the Low Emission Zones (LEZs) in Scotland’s four largest cities by June 2024.

Transport

Transport impacts the everyday life of women across the country, with each area of Scotland facing unique challenges. Recently, ferry disruption, increased bus and train ticket pricing and high fuel costs have resulted in a difficult transport situation for women. This has been made more complicated by changes in work and living habits as a result of the pandemic. Women are more likely to make use of public transport than men, as they are less likely to own a private vehicle, and when using public transport, commonly make more complicated journeys to accommodate caring responsibilities. Transport is therefore of vital importance to women across Scotland, and changes have the opportunity to make a positive transformation to their daily lives.

Women's Voices

Women have stated that they are regularly disappointed at the cost of train and bus tickets, with this being prohibitively expensive for some. Due to rising living expenditures, women have reduced household funds, and as women tend to act as 'shock absorbers' of poverty, taking on the burden of managing household finances, they are more likely to avoid using expensive public transport. This pushes women to remain within their local community, limiting their job prospects and food procurement options. Women living in rural communities have stated that this is a major issue across villages, as some families are forced to rely on limited local shops, which can be expensive and lack healthy options. Thus, a review of bus and train pricing is welcomed, however we recommend that the 'Fair Fares Review' gathers the experience of a range of people, considering the complicated journeys women often have to take.

“...I've had so many young women come to me and say that they would love to...do hospitality...but I can't get them to me...the buses are so unreliable.”

“...if you live rurally...you're using your village shop with majorly enhanced prices.”

Transport

Rural women have also gone on to state that they are not well-serviced with regards to transport. Those who rely on ferry services have grown increasingly frustrated, stating that this is having an impact on the local economy, through fewer tourist numbers and an inability to import vital resources. These women have called for a comprehensive review of ferry services, alongside a government guarantee that services will be increased.

“...the ferry, when it works, it’s good. And it had become increasingly well-used, but it became so unreliable.”

“We need an all year round ferry; it’s just ridiculous.”

Furthermore, during conversations focusing on public transport, disabled women highlighted that their needs are often forgotten. They explained that bus providers still refuse admittance to the disabled, with this being accounted to the physical limitations of many buses, as well as ableism. We believe that it is important that the Scottish Government include plans to enforce improved training around the needs of disabled women when travelling, increasing dignity for this group. It is also key that companies which are found not adhering to such rules, are held accountable.

“There was an older woman with a Zimmer frame and wanted to get on the bus, but needed the bus driver to lower the bus for her...What did the bus driver say? No.”

“The buses aren’t accessible for disabled people.”

Transport

As stated by the Programme for Government 2023-2024, the Scottish Government aim to lead a pivot from personal vehicle usage to an increase in active travel options, such as walking and cycling. Women have accepted that change is needed to reduce carbon emissions in Scotland, and that through increased active travel, this could be achieved. But they have stated that these changes must be done in a staggered manner, giving residents time to adjust. Women have also explained that due to physical and geographical restrictions, active travel may not always be a viable option, and so alternative public transport must be readily available. This was an area of contention for women living rurally, with the poor public transport on offer combining with the inability to actively travel to essential services

“...we need everything we can do to encourage people on to the buses and trains and cycling... but we have a long way to go.”

“It’s not an option for me to get a bus to take the kids to school or work, it’s not possible. I’m 5 miles from a bus stop.”

A method in which the above issues facing women could be tackled, would be through the utilisation of a feminist town planning model. Feminist town planning has recently been adopted by Glasgow City Council, placing the needs of the most vulnerable at the heart of infrastructure development. This concept has been discussed by women, with some believing that it could provide a suitable alternative to an outdated mentality when evolving towns and cities. We would therefore recommend that the Scottish Government consider this idea, and how it could be utilised across the country.

“Infrastructure designed with women in mind is so important.”

“We live in a world designed by men for men, from our health system to our work environments, to our sports and home life.”

Crime & Justice

“
We don't have enough police. Look at what's happening with the courts. We already have long waits for people in really difficult circumstances, the investment has to follow
”

The Scottish Government have outlined their plans to provide improved support across the justice sector. They have stated that court backlogs are a significant barrier to individuals accessing proper justice, and so aim to provide improved support for justice agencies. The Scottish Government have also recognised that services must be trauma-informed, hoping to expand training across judiciary professions.

Furthermore, the Programme for Government 2023-2024 states that the Scottish Government aim to bring forward legislation to criminalise misogynistic conduct, through the Misogyny Law (for more information on this Law, [please see our 'Misogyny in Scotland' report](#)). They have also proposed a wider approach in tackling domestic abuse, by establishing a national, multi-agency 'Domestic Homicide Review' model and furthering the work of the Equally Safe Strategy. The Scottish Government have also proposed the formation of a Hate Crime Strategy to reduce Hate Crime levels in Scotland.

Crime & Justice

Having access to a fair and robust justice system is vital to the workings of a well-balanced, equitable society, however, women across Scotland are not having this basic right met. It has been suggested that there are significant backlogs across Scottish courts, with a review finding that the average waiting time for the most serious crimes, such as rape and murder, has doubled since 2020[11]. These delays have been attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, with lockdowns forming significant blockades to justice. Of those who have been a victim of crimes, the continual retelling of their experience and the long waits to access courts adds to distress, and in the case of women and minority groups, can be a barrier to reporting. It is therefore clear that major change is required across judicial services to properly service the population of Scotland.

Women's Voices

Women have continually stated that the current treatment of victims of sexual and/or domestic abuse is subpar. They have recounted stories of derision from police officers and other statutory service providers, as well as long waiting times for trials as key barriers to accessing justice. Women believe that this is due to continued stereotypes directing the flow of prioritisation, pushing justice keepers away from issues which directly impact women, such as sexual and/or domestic violence. Those who work as support staff for survivors of such abuse, have told us of out-dated police tactics and an absence of trauma-informed practice, which they believe to be vital in ensuring the safety of victims and witnesses. Consequently, the inclusion of expanding trauma-informed practice, as well as directing resources to clear the current court backlog is supported by women, however, they have stated that this must be done meaningfully, with victims at the centre.

“
I think they need to get the training
[trauma-informed practice]”
”

“
...she was a victim of a gang rape, and it took 3 and a
half years to come to trial. How can anyone really give
their best evidence in court when they wait that long?
Can you imagine the trauma involved in that?”
”

Crime & Justice

The issue of hate crime has also arisen when speaking with women. They have given accounts of verbal and physical abuse, directly tied to their personal characteristics, such as race or disability. It has been estimated that there were 5,738 hate crimes in Scotland for 2022-23, with racial crime being the most commonly reported, followed by sexual orientation. This dataset also highlights that the number of disability aggravated charges increased by 3% and 2022-23 held the second highest number of charges with an aggravation of transgender identity^[12]. Hate crime levels online are also on the rise, with minority groups being clear targets for bigoted groups/individuals. Women have expressed disapproval towards the poor approach taken on hate crime, and believe that a more direct approach, which includes online behaviours is required, alongside widespread education to ensure all residents of Scotland understand the unacceptability of such behaviour. This education must extend to the police themselves, as women concur with statements from the ex-Police Scotland Chief Constable, Sir Iain Livingstone, that the force is institutionally racist and discriminatory.

“
I am constantly harassed and have even been stalked online by incels and their like. Me being a queer woman upsets them the most – they’ve sent me very detailed death threats.
”

“
...the police need to work within themselves, within the police to change, and if they’re not accepting that the system is institutionally racist, then it won’t change.
”

Crime & Justice

Relating to hate crime is the establishment of a new 'Misogyny Law' for Scotland. This Law aims to criminalise misogynistic behaviour as informed by the public consultation on Baroness Helena Kennedy KC's report, and from conversations with women, it is clear that action must be taken to remove misogyny from Scottish society. During our work on misogyny, women highlighted misogynistic behaviour across their lives, from workplaces to education, and they felt that more had to be done. There were however mixed views on a new Law, with the application of such a Law remaining elusive. Women stated that they did not believe that the police service would effectively utilise this Law, as stated above, the force itself remains institutionally discriminatory. They also stated that a widespread cultural change was needed and pushed the Scottish Government to introduce improved lessons in schools which tackled the topic of misogyny.

“
| *I have serious concerns about the police's ability to tackle misogynistic harassment...This is based on my own experiences of dealing with the police, as well as deep scepticism about Police Scotland's history.* |
—”

“
| *I feel that misogynistic behaviours need to be recognised seriously, and I feel that criminalisation would ensure that those who have these repeat behaviours...would change their way of thinking* |
—”

“
| *For me, the biggest thing is education. It always comes back to that.* |
—”

Climate

“ —

I would probably be shocked if I wasn't worried about climate change...Obviously it's a massive problem.

— ”

The Scottish Government have made clear commitments in their Programme for Government 2023-2024 to tackle climate change. They have stated that major investment is needed to further the development of renewable energy options, with onshore and offshore wind providing major opportunities in Scotland, particularly in Rural and Island locations. The Government have also committed to releasing a 'Climate Change Plan' which will encapsulate transport, housing and environmental sectors, considering the role they each play in the fight against global warming.

Climate change is an increasingly concerning issue for women in Scotland, with record temperatures and more consistent extreme weather events highlighting the real-life impact of global warming. Across the world, Governments are creating policy and emergency planning measures, as well as investigating ways in which we can reverse the effects on our planet. However, recent protests by climate-focused organisations have emphasised that change must occur quickly, rather than gradually, and that there is a growing impatience across the movement to see radical transformation. Climate change is also recognised as an issue that disproportionately affects women, as they have less access to natural resources, and when disaster strikes, such as flooding, women are less likely to survive due to long-standing inequalities^[13].

Women's Voices

When in conversation with women across Scotland, climate change can be a focal point, particularly in rural areas. These locations are more likely to directly witness the environmental impacts of climate change, for example through increased pollution on beaches, or a reduction in local wildlife. Rural women have conveyed a sense of worry and concern, with some areas relying heavily on the natural world for their livelihoods, such as fishing or farming. Through the loss of healthy levels of fish and other animals, natural food chains are disrupted and can be catastrophic to local areas. These areas can also rely on local wildlife to sustain tourism levels, thus if biodiversity is lost, tourism may be impacted.

“—
| *Our care and stewardship of the countryside, food chain and climate requires so much* |
more support. —”

Climate

Another major element of climate change prevention is the continued development of renewable energy sources, such as wind. Women from rural areas have expressed positive opinions surrounding windfarms, both onshore and offshore. They have stated however, that due to a lack of regulation, local communities do not receive sufficient financial benefit from these sites and would like to see increased Government parameters put in place to ensure that locals benefit economically.



“
| ...we say that we don't think they
| should be given permission
| unless they commit to paying
| community benefits, and/or
| community shared ownership.
|”

Equalities & Human Rights

“
...representation
matters across the
board, you know, in
terms of our lived
experience...we need to
be visible, and it
mustn't be token.”

Throughout the Programme for Government 2023-24 the Scottish Government have utilised 'equality, opportunity, community' as grounding for their plans. The focal point for this approach is the planned 'Human Rights Bill', which hopes to embed international human rights treaties into Scots law.

The Scottish Government have also made commitments to reduce inequalities faced by marginalised groups, including the establishment of an 'Anti-Racist Observatory', improved gender identity healthcare, the ending of conversion practices and the publication of an 'Immediate Priorities Plan' for disabled people.

Equalities & Human Rights

As outlined throughout this document, women's experiences of life in Scotland vary. Women's lives are highly dictated by their social and cultural background, and it is clear that women still do not encounter equity in their personal and professional spaces. Unfortunately, deeply held prejudices prevent women from achieving their full potential, with this being particularly true for who belong to one or more minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ women, ethnic minority women and disabled women. It can be said that much of society in Scotland has not been designed with them in mind, preventing Scotland from becoming a fully inclusive, equal country. This fact is accepted by the Scottish Government, and as such they have outlined multiple ways in which they can attempt to tackle discrimination in Scotland.

Women's Voices

The Scottish Government plan to implement the 'Human Rights Bill', which aims to embed multiple international human rights treaties into Scots Law. Their hope is that this will ensure public, and some private bodies, will consider the impact change of policy has on human rights, fundamentally altering the decision-making process in Scotland. Women we have spoken with believe that human rights are incredibly important to creating a more equitable country, however, also state that the plans will most likely lack impact through poor follow-through. Some explained that they often felt their voices were collected, but rarely acted upon, particularly ethnic minority women. They spoke of fatigue and frustration, pointing to repeated consultations and roundtables, adding to a feeling of disenfranchisement. These women also expressed scepticism with regards to the 'Anti-Racist Observatory' for similar reasons, stating that without proper commitment, and regular review, such a plan would be ineffective.

“—
| *They haven't done what they said they were
going to do; they didn't put it into practice* |
—”

“—
| *...there's something about an 'Anti-Racist
Observatory', but how are you evaluating it...how
are you demonstrating your commitment* |
—”

Equalities & Human Rights

Women also have stated that they believe all individuals in Scotland should have access to vital services and be free from the fear of violence and harassment. Therefore, the creation of an 'Immediate Priorities Plan' which will work to improve access for disabled people is welcomed. Through such an approach disabled women can live an improved life, however, it is key that disabled women's voices are centred throughout development, understanding the different stresses they may experience. Also, women actively support the banning of conversion therapy, stating that it is unacceptable in a modern, human-rights based society, and believe that there should be improved conditions for the wider LGBTQ+ network, giving all women the freedom to live free from prejudice.

“—
| *We are still struggling with issues such as*
VAWG, racism, transphobia, etc. —|”

“—
| *It's shocking that conversion therapy has not*
already been made illegal —|”

“—
| *It should be everybody's commitment,*
because we're all humans. —|”

Thank You

Thank you to all the women who have taken part in our discussions. None of our work would 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 never stop pushing for women's equality across Scottish society.



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