

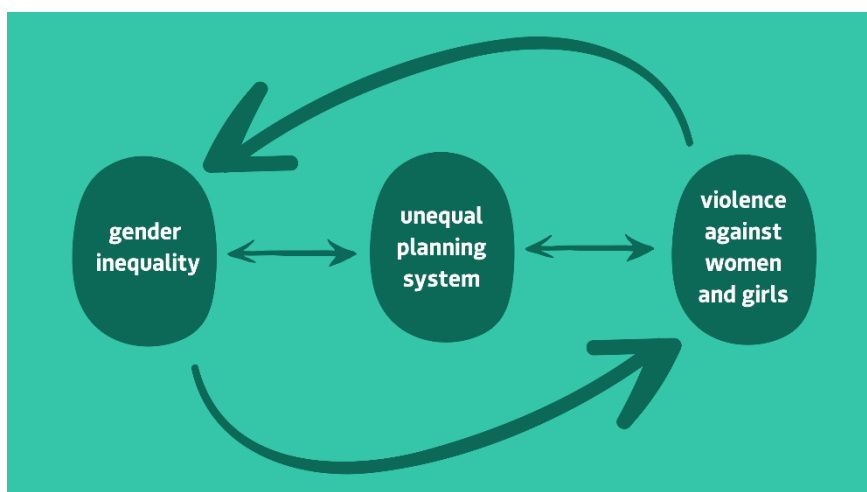


PRIMARY PREVENTION AND PUBLIC POLICY SPOTLIGHT:

PLANNING

OVERVIEW

Women and girls face the highest risk of gender-based violence in private spaces, such as the family home. However, they also regularly experience and fear violence in public spaces, which significantly impacts their freedom of movement. Historically, the way our cities, towns and rural settings have been designed has prioritised white, middle-class, able-bodied men's needs. This has resulted in public spaces that make women and girls less safe while also restricting their access to social and economic opportunities. Gender inequality is the root cause of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Therefore, it is essential that our public spaces are inclusive and accessible to address this inequality and ultimately prevent VAWG once and for all.



WHAT IS PRIMARY PREVENTION?

Primary prevention of VAWG focuses on stopping this violence before it occurs by tackling its root cause: **gender inequality**. Mainstreaming gender equality in all areas of public policy is, therefore, vital for preventing VAWG.

The **three requirements** for achieving a **primary prevention approach in policymaking** are:

1. Women are equally and fairly **represented** in policymaking and decision-making roles
2. Policymakers consistently apply **intersectional gender analysis** to their work
3. Policymakers mainstream **primary prevention** in all areas of their work

1. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PLANNING ROLES

Women's perspectives are vital for creating safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces. However, available data indicates that women, especially marginalised women, experience barriers to key roles in the planning and built environment sectors:

1 in 5
companies
working in the
built environment
say they have
never hired a
woman for
a senior
role.

48%
of women
responding to the
same survey had
experienced gender
discrimination in
the workplace.

- In local decision-making, women only account for 35% of local councillors and 26.6% of council leaders.¹
- In the UK, less than half (40%) of town planners are women.²
- Three-quarters of women planners say they have experienced barriers to career progression because of their gender.³
- Only 31% of registered architects in the UK are women, including less than 5% who are BME women.⁴
- Women make up just 15% of the UK construction workforce and 16% of senior management positions.⁵ Only 8% of all construction workers identify as disabled, and 6% come from a BME background.⁶

2. INTERSECTIONAL GENDER ANALYSIS IN PLANNING POLICY

Intersectional gender analysis examines how different groups of women could be affected by a particular policy to ensure it systematically promotes equality and avoids inadvertently disadvantaging different groups. This analysis reveals how gender inequality causes women to navigate public spaces differently from men.

In particular, the way women engage with public spaces is more likely to be affected by:

- **Poverty:** Women in Scotland experience higher rates of poverty and are also more likely to be on a low income.⁸
- **Disability:** Women are more likely than men to have a disability and are also more often the providers of care (paid and unpaid) to disabled people.⁹
- **Unpaid work:** Women undertake a higher proportion of childcare, care for other relatives and household responsibilities.¹⁰
- **Part-time working patterns:** The majority of part-time workers are women, as they balance unpaid work and face other barriers in the labour market.¹¹
- **Provision of local services:** Women use public services more often than men and are the majority of public sector workers.¹²

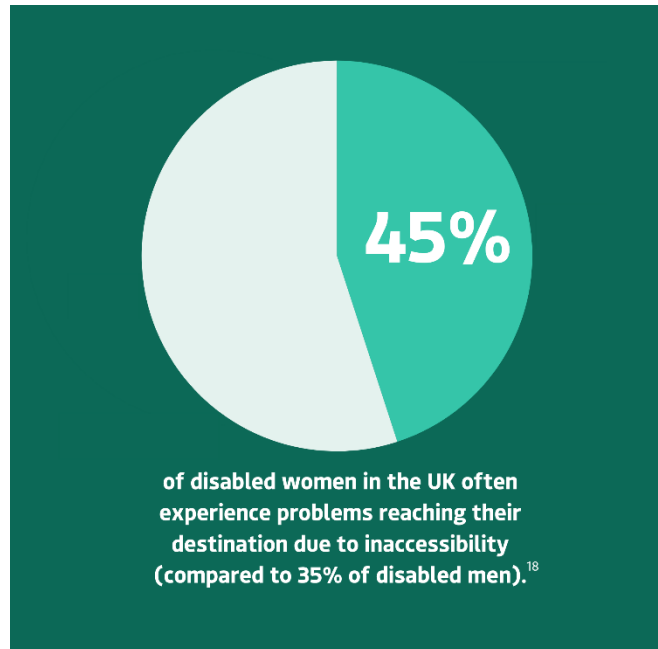
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Two-thirds of women in the UK say they change or adapt their behaviour to avoid sexual harassment in an outdoor public space.¹³

Intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression exacerbate these factors for marginalised women, including disabled women, BME women, migrant women, lone parents, unpaid carers, LGBT women and women on low incomes. These factors also create additional barriers to access to public spaces:

- Most (97%) young women (aged 18-24) in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public.
- In a survey of disabled adults in the UK, 76% of respondents said they have avoided going somewhere because there was no accessible toilet.¹⁴

- Systemic racism is present in all levels of the built environment, from neighbourhoods that lack access to services and the erasure of culturally significant sites to planning decisions based on racist stereotypes.¹⁵
- A lack of accessible public spaces can undermine migrant women's sense of belonging and reinforce social inequalities in their community.¹⁶
- In a survey of LGBT people in the UK, of those who had experienced anti-LGBT violence, 94% said this had negatively affected them, including by restricting their mobility and causing them to change the way they act or look in public.¹⁷



Public spaces that fail to address these issues risk excluding and marginalising women and girls. For example, women are:

- **Poorly served by public transport:** A lack of safe and accessible public transport can cause women and girls to miss school, travel far away from their homes for work, give up their jobs, and struggle to access health or childcare.¹⁹
- **Adversely affected by public service cuts:** Women are more likely to fill gaps in local provision of services with their own unpaid labour, and/or are forced to travel further to access services elsewhere.²⁰
- **Disproportionately impacted by a lack of public toilets:** An estimated 60% of public toilets have closed since 2010; a lack of public toilets forces women, especially disabled women, to avoid certain places, stop going out altogether or dehydrate themselves.²¹
- **Less likely to cycle:** Women (12%) in Scotland are half as likely to cycle once a week compared to men (24%).²² More than half (58%) of women in the UK believe their cycling is limited by safety concerns and a lack of suitable infrastructure.²³
- **Designed out of parks:** After the age of eight, boys use parks four times as much as girls.²⁴ Teenage girls in the UK report that parks are unsafe and offer them little to do that meets their preferences.²⁵

- **Underrepresented in public statues and monuments:** Tributes to women in the form of statues, plaques and street names normalise celebrating women's achievements in the public realm, but available figures suggest just 2.7% of statues in the UK are of historical, non-royal women.²⁶

3. PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VAWG IN PLANNING POLICY

Primary prevention of VAWG aims to stop this violence before it occurs by tackling its root cause: **gender inequality**. Applying a primary prevention approach requires policymakers to actively address gender inequality and **promote women's safety** in all areas of public policy, including planning.

Although it is generally in private spaces, such as the home, where women and girls face the highest risk of VAWG, women's safety remains a significant concern that affects their use of public spaces:

43% of girls and young women in Scotland don't feel safe outside alone.²⁷

- Women and girls regularly conduct 'safety work' when navigating public spaces to not only avoid gender-based violence but also being blamed for experiencing it. Examples include changing routes, choosing 'safe' seats on public transport and changing their appearances to avoid attention.²⁸
- Dark spaces, poor lighting and the layout of streets contribute to women's feelings of insecurity in public.²⁹
- Almost three-quarters (71%) of women in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space.³⁰
- In a survey of young women in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, respondents said they do not feel safe when visiting parks at night (95%) or waiting for public transport (70%).³¹
- Minority ethnic women in Scotland experience more extreme verbal abuse on public transport, including abuse that is both sexist and racist.³²



- Muslim women and girls in the UK experience a greater risk of gendered violence and Islamophobia. Muslim women wearing religious clothing are most likely to be targeted.³³
- Women with a disability are twice as likely to have experienced a form of sexual assault as women without a disability.³⁴

A lack of intersectional gender analysis in planning can undermine women and girls' safety through:

Lack of consideration in planning processes

The majority of outdoor facilities for young people in the UK cater to the interests of a minority of boys and young men; for example, multi-games areas (MUGAs), skate parks, BMX tracks and grass pitches.³⁶ By contrast, teenage girls consistently indicate their preference for facilities like social seating, large swings, trampolines and hammocks, and playful equipment, all of which are rarely provided.³⁷ Consequently, boys use parks four times as much as girls after the age of eight. When girls do use existing facilities, they report experiencing sexual threats and aggression from boys territorialising these spaces.³⁸ This means that from an early age, parks and outdoor facilities signal to girls that they have less of a right to public space than boys, contributing to the normalisation of VAWG.

Inadequate provision of public services

Women are more dependent on public services than men and, when these services are unavailable, are more likely to fill provision gaps with their unpaid labour. The closure or reduced opening hours of services like local libraries and leisure centres also increases women's isolation, particularly for deprived women and migrant women.³⁹ A lack of available and accessible public services reduces women's time for economic, political and social opportunities in the public realm. This restricts

women's independence and control over their lives in and out of the home, which increases their risk of experiencing VAWG.⁴⁰ Indeed, domestic abuse in rural areas has been found to last 25% longer than in urban settings; the poor availability of public services in these areas is a significant contributing factor, as it enables perpetrators to isolate and control victim-survivors.⁴¹

Lack of inclusive cycling infrastructure

Women and girls face physical and socially constructed obstacles to cycling, including isolated or poorly lit routes, barriers to cargo bikes and trailers, bike parking facilities in secluded areas, and gendered expectations of how women should present themselves.⁴² Cycling infrastructure rarely addresses these, and instead historically favours the needs of the “male breadwinner” commuting from the suburbs into the city centre on a standard bike.⁴³ Women's journeys are more varied, may be slower and more commonly involve travelling with children. Consequently, a lack of inclusive cycling infrastructure entrenches gender norms that reinforce men's entitlement to public space while challenging women's.⁴⁴ This ultimately normalises public VAWG, particularly misogynistic and sexual harassment, which is rooted in controlling women and their movements. Research from London found that 93% of women cyclists there had been intimidated by drivers, echoing findings from UK-wide research, which found women cyclists are twice as likely to be abused or harassed as male cyclists.⁴⁵

STEPS TOWARDS ACHIEVING A PRIMARY PREVENTION APPROACH IN PLANNING POLICY:	
1. Women are equally and fairly represented in policymaking and decision-making roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve women's pathways and career progression opportunities, particularly for minoritised women, in the planning, construction and built environment sectors • Ensure inclusive working environments in these sectors, for example, by implementing flexible working arrangements, anti-discrimination and harassment policies and women's leadership initiatives
2. Policymakers consistently apply intersectional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and publish intersectional gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data on barriers to women's use of public spaces and public services

gender analysis to their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Equality Impact Assessments are conducted at the outset of new planning processes and that these are informed by intersectional gender-sensitive data • Create opportunities for girls and women, particularly marginalised groups, to co-design planning projects in their local area
3. Policymakers mainstream primary prevention in all areas of their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase opportunities for co-designing planning projects and developments with women with lived experience of VAWG • Embed women's safety considerations into planning and design processes and decisions • Fund research into marginalised women's experiences of safety in public spaces

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- [Women in Planning: Central Scotland Branch](#)
- [Equate Scotland: Industry Guide for the Construction Sector](#)
- [Sustrans Scotland](#)
- [Make Space for Girls](#)
- [Girlguiding Scotland Own Our Zone](#)
- [Women On Wheels](#)

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Contact: Hannah Brisbane, Policy Officer (Delivering Equally Safe), Engender
Email: hannah.brisbane@engender.org.uk

ABOUT US:

Engender is a leading feminist policy and advocacy organisation working to secure women's social, political and economic equality and realise women's rights in Scotland. We aim to make visible the impact of structural inequality on women and wider society and work at Scottish, UK and international levels to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.