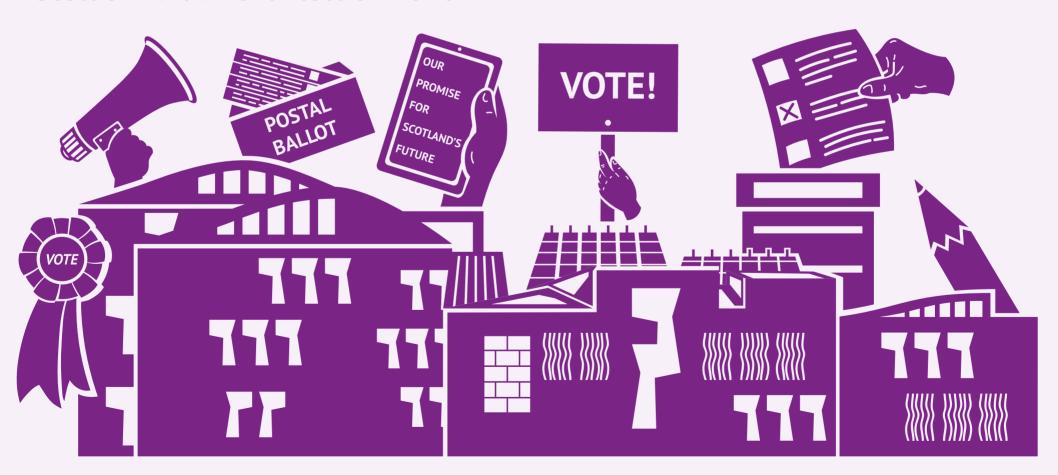
Investing in Women, Transforming Communities

Engender's Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Election 2026





66 If we design for the most marginalised, we actually design for everyone. 99

Cynthia Enloe, feminist writer and theorist

Engender is Scotland's leading intersectional feminist policy and advocacy organisation. We have worked for over 30 years towards securing women's social, political, and economic equality in Scotland. Our ambition is for Scotland to be a global leader on gender equality and a beacon for the protection of human rights internationally. We want to build a country where everyone, regardless of their sex or gender, can access the opportunities, support and resources they need to fulfil their potential, enjoy a high standard of living, and feel safe from harm.

Most importantly, we want to create a landscape where the needs of marginalised and minoritised women are met by government and public bodies, where their enormous contribution to communities is valued both socially and economically, and where their rights are fulfilled. It is our strong belief that if the next Scottish Government shapes its policies and investment to meet the needs of the most marginalised women in Scotland, then our whole society will benefit.

To secure this vision, we will need an ambitious range of action in the next Scottish Parliament, and we are keen to work with new and returning parliamentarians to achieve this. The Parliament's current session has seen shoots of progress that we hope will mature and grow. Scotland's National Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, 'Equally Safe', is world-leading in how it recognises the interconnections between gender inequality and

violence. The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls has undertaken a range of innovative actions to increase the breadth of policymaking that works for women and to identify ways to improve delivery. The Women's Health Plan has also broken new ground in terms of how it has increased the profile of gendered health inequalities in Scotland.

Yet, when we speak to women and girls, they tell us that they need change to happen faster and on a more ambitious scale. Far too many women in Scotland report that their lives are increasingly impacted by financial insecurity, that the disproportionate burden of caring responsibilities they carry continues to go unrecognised and be undervalued, and that their fundamental rights increasingly feel at risk. The fallout of over a decade of reduced funding for public services, the debilitating legacy of the pandemic and years of a continuing cost of living crisis are compounding and deepening existing inequalities for the most marginalised women in our communities. By 2027, the most economically marginalised women in the UK are projected to have endured a 21% reduction in living standards since 2010, with single mothers, Black and Asian women, and disabled women most severely impacted.



The sharp decline in living standards for many women is occurring against a backdrop of increasing polarisation, challenges to equality, diversity and inclusion measures, and attacks on gender justice and women's rights globally. Gender and intersecting inequalities are the root cause of poverty. If we lose hard-won gains on equality in the years to come, it will not only harm individuals, but will also damage social cohesion, worsening financial insecurity and our economic outlook.

Our next Scottish Government and Parliament must be bolder and braver in defending equality for all and acting to transform women's lives for the better. We want to see MSPs from all parties work together across the chamber to ensure that policy and public investment translate into real change for the most marginalised in our communities. The evidence is clear that investing in women's equality and improving the lives of marginalised people reaps huge benefits for society.

Gender inequality is not inevitable. The recommendations in our manifesto, across 10 vital areas, are realistic steps Scotland can take to improve the lives of the most marginalised women in our communities. We ask for your support to make the 2026 election a hopeful moment of change for all women, and to help build a future Scotland that upholds, protects and progresses women's rights.

Catherine Murphy, Executive Director





1. Scotland is a place where women live free from poverty and financial inequality...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Create a 'Women's Equality Fund' designed to provide targeted crisis financial support for marginalised groups of women, with a focus on unpaid carers, women with experience of domestic abuse, women with No Recourse to Public Funds, and disabled women.

Why does this matter?

Scotland's cost of living crisis is causing profound harm to women and increasing their risk of living in poverty. This continuing crisis comes against a backdrop of sustained cuts to UK social security and funding for public services, which have hit women's lives the hardest. A recent study found that women are almost twice as impacted as men by the decrease in life expectancy in the UK that has resulted from austerity measures. The most marginalised women, who are impacted by other forms of structural oppression, are bearing the brunt of this regression, with too many falling through the cracks or being failed by current systems of support.

Unpaid carers are being pushed further into poverty, and they
cannot access the financial support they need. The deep <u>poverty</u>
rate for unpaid carers is 60% higher than for those who do not
provide unpaid care. Women make up the majority of unpaid carers,
and the <u>latest figures show</u> that one in four female carers in
Scotland report struggling to make ends meet.

- Women who experience domestic abuse are at particular risk from financial insecurity, with over 95% facing economic abuse. This results in victim/survivors having a lack of resources needed to leave an abusive partner, with a 2024 study finding it costs on average £50,000 to separate. Evidence shows that the current social security system does not consider the impacts of domestic abuse and can even be used by abusers as a tool to exert further control.
- Women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) continue to be forced into destitution because they cannot access statutory financial support. This disproportionately affects women, with 73% of families with NRPF supported by local authorities across the UK being female-led single-parent families. The NRPF condition increases women's risk of experiencing gender-based violence, as their insecure immigration status and lack of access to funds can be weaponised as part of domestic abuse.
- Disabled women are seeing <u>devastating cuts to funding</u> for their health and social care packages, and will be hardest hit by the <u>UK</u> <u>Government's reforms to disability benefits</u>. Financial support provided has also consistently failed to consider the additional costs that disabled people have, such as equipment and care costs, resulting <u>in larger numbers of disabled women struggling</u> to meet rising costs.

These critical gaps in support require targeted crisis funds to meet the immediate needs of the most marginalised women and their families. This action is intertwined with tackling child poverty, as children's living standards are deeply impacted by mothers' access to a liveable income. Nine in ten single-parent families in Scotland are headed by women, with nearly half of children in single-parent families in the UK living in poverty. Women are often primary carers of children and focus their spending choices on children's needs. Yet, existing action through the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 does not provide sufficient support for marginalised groups of women.

What would this involve?

The Scottish Government has the power to invest in targeted financial interventions to tackle the escalating crisis of women's poverty, which is caused by intersectional gender inequality. Our proposal for a 'Women's Equality Fund' could be delivered using the learning we have from existing crisis and mitigation funds administered using Scotland's devolved powers. These schemes, including the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments, are not currently designed in a gendered way to meet women's specific needs. The 'Women's Equality Fund' should be an additional, ring-fenced investment by the Scottish Government to combat the most severe impacts of gendered financial inequalities.

The Fund should be targeted to address poverty and destitution experienced by the most marginalised women and their children. This would be designed in line with evidence demonstrating where there is insufficiency and gaps in social security provision, so that the Fund can

provide direct financial support to women who are most at risk of falling through the gaps of currently available entitlements. This would initially include, though not be limited to, unpaid carers, women with experience of domestic abuse, women with NRPF and disabled women. The existing 'Fund to Leave' pilot managed by Scottish Women's Aid is an example of a targeted model to provide financial support for a specific group of women facing severe gendered financial inequalities. The pilot successfully supported 1,109 women and children facing domestic abuse, and we continue to support calls for this to be expanded and made permanent.



2. Scotland has a social security system that works for women...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Address the misogynistic design of our social security system and ensure an adequate level of support to meet the rising cost of living, including work to:

- Mitigate the two-child limit.
- Increase the level of the Scottish Child Payment to £55 by the end of the next Parliament.
- Introduce individual payments of Universal Credit.

Why does this matter?

Women are the majority of primary carers and second earners in households, which means they are far more likely than men to rely on social security. Women continue to make up the majority of applicants (82%) of devolved social security payments relating to children, such as the Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant, and Child Disability Payment. Our current social security system fuels economic hardship and inequality. Levels of entitlements are diminishing in terms of adequacy, with the design and delivery of much of the system generating financial insecurity rather than the initially intended safety net.

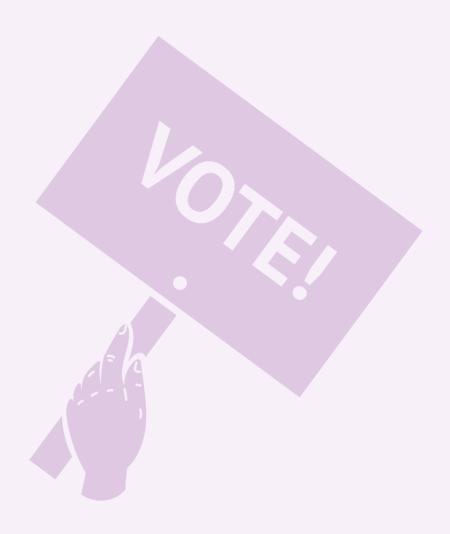
The UK social security system has been heavily criticised internationally for its misogynistic design and unfair impact on women's lives. The UN Special Rapporteur previously described Universal Credit by saying, "If you got a group of misogynists together in a room and said, 'how can we make a system that works for men but not women?' they wouldn't have come up with too many other ideas than what's in place." Action to address this ingrained gender injustice is urgently needed.



The next Scottish Government must recognise that investment in tailored social security is a vital cornerstone of achieving women's equality. Devolved powers provide scope for a social security system that supports women most at risk of poverty and living on low incomes. Further action should include introducing payments to mitigate the two-child limit in Scotland, which systematically discriminates against women, penalising them for their reproductive and family circumstances.

The Scottish Child Payment has already demonstrated the impact of how devolved payments can reduce child poverty. However, <u>experts</u> <u>have recommended</u> that the payment needs to be increased to £55 per week (in 2024/2025 prices) by the end of the next Scottish Parliament, alongside ending the two-child limit to reduce relative child poverty by six percentage points in 2030-31, to keep Scotland on track to meet its Child Poverty targets.

The current policy of single household payments of Universal Credit (UC) also assumes that resources are shared equally within households and <u>undermines women's access to an independent income</u>, greatly increasing risks of poverty and domestic abuse for women and children. The next Scottish Government should urgently ensure the long-standing commitment to individual payments of Universal Credit in Scotland is implemented to better protect women and their children.



3. Scotland values the unpaid care women provide in our communities...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

- Improve the Carers Support Payment, increasing its value and extending access for young carers, older carers, those in education and employment, and those with multiple caring roles.
- Introduce multi-year pilots of the 'Minimum Income Guarantee' by 2029, with a focus on unpaid carers, regardless of age, employment and education status.

Why does this matter?

Unpaid care work is overwhelmingly carried out by women in Scotland, with the Carers Census showing they are nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who provide care support for family members and friends without any pay. Women are twice as likely as men to give up work to carry out unpaid care and are more likely to juggle caring with often lower-paid employment, to hold multiple caring roles, and to provide care for more than 35 hours per week. The disproportionate burden of unpaid care is a significant driver of poverty for women, leading to financial insecurity throughout their lives. Research shows that unpaid carers from Black and minority ethnic communities are substantially more likely to be in poverty in Scotland, with 67% of those surveyed experiencing financial difficulties due to caring. Unpaid carers in rural areas and those caring for disabled people also face specific additional challenges.

Social perceptions around care remain highly gendered. The value of unpaid caring to Scotland's economy is estimated at £15.9 billion, approximately a quarter of the national budget. This crucial care work props up the economy, saving billions in health, social care and other public services. Yet, women are expected and socially pressured to provide this labour for free, and this enormous social contribution is underestimated and overlooked.

This inequality is reflected in a social security system where support for unpaid carers is provided at the lowest rate compared to similar entitlements.



The Scottish Government's 'Carer Support Payment' (CSP) and 'Carer's Allowance Supplement' amount to a maximum of £2.66 per hour for essential and skilled care work. The Real Living Wage in the UK is currently £12.60. The 'earnings threshold' for CSP is set at £196 per week, restricting unpaid carers to low-wage employment and increasing the risk of poverty in retirement. Women are 70% of those in receipt of carers' social security payments.

What would this involve?

The next Scottish Government has an opportunity to rectify historic weaknesses and inequity in the support provided to unpaid carers. Currently, there are restrictions on who can access the new Carer Support Payment (CSP), which discriminate against young women and girls, who make up most young carers, and older women, who are more likely to experience 'pension poverty' than men. There is an urgent need to extend eligibility for the CSP to 16-to-19-year-olds in full-time education and create a new support payment for older carers. The financial support the CSP provides should be changed so that it can, in effect, amount to a Real Living Wage for carers that truly reflects the value of unpaid care to Scotland's communities and economy.



4. Scotland has modern laws that ensure quality abortion care for all...

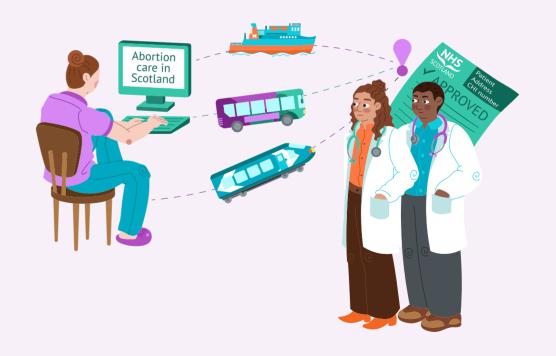
We call on all political parties to commit to:

Safeguard reproductive rights in Scotland through modernisation of abortion law by removing it from the criminal justice system and replacing the Abortion Act 1967 with a health and human rights-based framework.

Why does this matter?

Abortion is routine healthcare that is accessed by around one in three women in their lifetime in the UK. Yet, despite being one of the most common and safest health procedures, women and pregnant people in Scotland currently have no legal right to end a pregnancy. Instead, that power lies in the hands of doctors, two of whom must approve any request for an abortion, despite there being no medical rationale or evidence base for such a barrier. Without this authorisation, abortion remains illegal across Britain, and women, healthcare providers and people assisting someone to have an abortion can be subject to prosecution. This situation layers needless complexity into the delivery of abortion healthcare, creating avoidable delays and draining capacity in a pressurised NHS. Marginalised women can face greater challenges as a result, including women living in remote and rural areas who may only have one local doctor, or who may have to travel long distances to access abortion services.

International human rights and health standards are clear that access to safe, legal and timely abortion should be protected and must never be regulated through criminal law or penalties. Our legal framework is a patchwork of outdated laws stemming from as far back as the 17th century, which reflect harmful gender stereotypes of the eras in which they were introduced and reinforce abortion stigma. Public concern over the sharp increase in prosecutions for abortion-related offences in England shows the public agrees that the law does not uphold women's rights to privacy and health. The majority of people in Scotland are in favour of abortion rights, with quarterly YouGov polls demonstrating between 83%-97% agree that 'women should have the right to an abortion.'



The Scottish Government established an 'Abortion Law Review Expert Group' in 2024 to recommend necessary legal reform. The next Government must build on this work and bring forward proposals to realise the full decriminalisation of abortion and to replace the Abortion Act 1967 with a health and human rights-based framework. Scottish law, related policies, and regulations need to be modernised to ensure no one is punished for accessing abortion, for providing safe abortion, or for assisting someone to have an abortion with their consent, and to ensure quality and timely access to abortion care for all who need it. Malpractice, unsafe and non-consensual abortion should be dealt with through existing medical regulations and general law.



5. Scotland is a place where every woman's health needs are met...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Invest in the next phase of a Women's Health Plan, focusing on improving outcomes for marginalised women and closing the significant health divide experienced by women impacted by poverty.

Why does this matter?

Women and girls in Scotland <u>experience health inequalities</u> caused by gender discrimination and deeply ingrained medical misogyny within our health systems. Women wait longer for pain medication, are more likely than men to have physical symptoms attributed to mental health issues, have heart disease misdiagnosed, and become disabled after a stroke. Women who experience intersectional forms of oppression have worse outcomes, with severe differences for women of colour, LGBTI+ women, disabled women and poorer women. Women in the most deprived areas of Scotland experience good health for 25 years less than women in the most affluent areas.

Significant gaps remain in levels of understanding across general healthcare on how women experience health differently and how gender inequality impacts women's health outcomes. Health issues mostly affecting women receive inadequate funding and attention. Women's health experts have expressed alarm over the severe underrepresentation of women in UK clinical trials, with 67% more

male-only than female-only studies. These knowledge gaps have real consequences, creating a "vacuum of evidence", and increasing the likelihood that women's specific health needs will continue to be poorly understood, minimised or ignored.

We supported the first <u>Women's Health Plan 2021-24</u>, which laid important groundwork towards tackling women's health inequalities. However, its early rollout coincided with a global pandemic, which limited its impact due to the unprecedented strain on health services. Major issues in diagnosis and care for women remain. For example, Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) prescribing rates have <u>decreased to rates lower</u> than before the pandemic, and it still takes on average <u>8.5 years to get a diagnosis</u> for endometriosis in Scotland.



The Scottish Government must ensure that the next stage of the Women's Health Plan has real and lasting impact. To do this, it needs to take a stronger intersectional approach to address the specific health experiences of marginalised women. It will require financial investment to secure cultural and systems change within the NHS and health systems. Specific funding should be made available for health boards to pilot projects that focus on tackling the most severe health inequalities impacting women living in poverty in Scotland. Successful projects can then be scaled up across the NHS.

The next Women's Health Plan must also include improved monitoring, evaluation and accountability measures. These should focus on tracking changes to spending on women's health and include effective monitoring of how outcomes for women are improving. This evaluation must take an intersectional approach to understand whether the plan is effective for addressing health inequalities for the most marginalised women.



6. Scotland is a place where women live in safe, secure and affordable housing...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Create a new action plan to tackle women's homelessness and housing insecurity in Scotland that ensures that women's specific needs are addressed in all key housing policies and strategies.

Why does this matter?

Women's access to safe, secure and affordable housing in Scotland is significantly impacted by their experiences of gender inequality and intersecting forms of marginalisation. Specific groups of women are more likely to experience housing instability, poor quality housing, homelessness, or negative treatment by services. This includes those experiencing poverty, domestic abuse, disabled women, women of colour, refugee women, LGBTI+ women, older and younger women, single parents, unpaid carers and women selling sex. Yet, Scotland's leading policies and strategies on housing and homelessness continually fail to recognise the gendered causes of women's housing insecurity and their different experiences of homelessness.

Around a third of households headed by women <u>live in social housing</u> (30%), compared with fewer than one in five households headed by men (17%). This means they are disproportionately <u>impacted by Scotland's 'Housing Emergency</u>, which has left <u>99,000 households on waiting lists</u> for a social home. <u>Women are less likely to own their own</u>

homes and spend a higher share of their income on rent. In 2023-24, single-parent households headed by women spent on average 280 days trapped in Temporary Accommodation. Women experiencing homelessness are less likely to engage with statutory homelessness services and are more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness' meaning they use temporary alternatives including 'sofa surfing' or staying with partners, family or friends rather than rough sleeping.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most significant factors impacting women's chronic housing insecurity. The Scottish Government <u>has already recognised</u> that "a safe, secure, and affordable home is a major protective factor for women experiencing all forms of VAWG."



Yet, there is a chronic lack of understanding of how housing and homelessness policy in Scotland could transform women's lives by combatting systemic gender inequality and making women's lives safer. Women experiencing domestic abuse are <u>up to four times more likely</u> to face housing instability than other women, and <u>one in eight women in the UK who held a joint mortgage</u> in the last two years experienced economic abuse. Yet, services and policies have often not been designed to respond appropriately to domestic abuse. They also often fail to address how VAWG and other forms of intersectional gender inequality create additional barriers for women trying to access support when facing homelessness.

What would this involve?

The next Scottish Government must develop a new action plan focused on addressing and preventing women's housing insecurity and homelessness. This should allow the Scottish Government to bring together in one place the targeted actions required to improve women's lives across housing and homelessness strategies and policy. This plan must ensure that public policy responds to the needs of diverse groups of women and girls in Scotland. This would link with existing Scottish Government strategies such as the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan and Housing 2040 to ensure they lead to real change in women's housing outcomes. It must acknowledge and address the additional barriers women face in accessing housing and integrate primary prevention approaches to violence against women across all housing policy, as outlined in the Scottish Government's 'Equally Safe Strategy'.



7. Scotland has public services and policies that create a more equal society...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Reform the Scottish Specific Duties of the Public Sector Equality Duty in co-production with equalities organisations, delivering new regulations in place within the next parliamentary term.

Why does this matter?

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in Scotland places legal duties on our public bodies to take action to achieve gender equality. It holds vast potential to change women and girls' lives and benefit communities. Changing the way our public sector designs and delivers services to better serve women's needs is crucial. Women rely more on public services and make up most of the public sector workforce, including three-quarters of all jobs in the UK's health and social work sector. This means their lives are disproportionately impacted by how the public sector functions. Scotland's PSED regulations urgently need reform to be fit for purpose. Evidence shows extremely poor compliance with the duties, and they do not drive public bodies to develop equalities competence, data collection and use, and decision-making to improve the lives of people with 'protected characteristics'. There is no accountability for these failures.

Women tell us how public bodies and services do not meet their needs or reflect the realities of their lives. The lack of intersectional,

gender-sensitive design and planning in areas of public policy, including public transport and housing, actively undermines women's access to resources and safety. For example, women's access to public transport is often limited by a delivery model largely designed for male commuters, rather than women providing unpaid care. The cumulative toll of the cost of living crisis, the pandemic, and austerity policies on public services is disproportionately affecting our most vulnerable communities, and particularly marginalised women. We cannot allow the work of promoting and safeguarding equality to fall down the priority list of our public institutions.



Scotland's Public Sector Equality Duty <u>must be reformed</u> to ensure a more effective regulatory framework for equality in the public sector. This should involve <u>strengthened regulations</u> to improve mainstreaming activities - rather than a focus on reporting requirements - and to integrate intersectionality, including: new duties regarding intersectional data; gender budget analysis and equalities competence; and empowered scrutiny and accountability mechanisms. Rather than remaining a largely procedural exercise, a reformed PSED would become a powerful catalyst for change across our public services and in women's lives.



Scotland values and invests in women's participation in the economy...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Designate childcare and social care as crucial growth sectors and recognise the care economy as key infrastructure in economic policy, including in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET).

Why does this matter?

Despite the vast potential to improve women's economic situation and address poverty, we have yet to see an intersectional, gendered approach to economic development in Scotland. The current National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) relies almost entirely on an economic model and definition of growth that obscures women's contribution. Women's unpaid care and domestic work prop up the economy in Scotland, yet it is not recognised within Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Investment in physical infrastructure, like roads and bridges, is considered capital spending that brings economic returns. Yet spending on social care infrastructure is considered only as a cost to the state. This skews investment towards male-dominated sectors.

Increasingly, <u>evidence shows</u> investment in health, child, and social care can deliver more GDP growth than investment in physical infrastructure. Women's unpaid care work props up Scotland's economy, whilst also driving the high levels of women in part-time and insecure

jobs. The Scottish Government's own research conservatively estimates the value of unpaid care to be around £36 billion annually. Women make up most of the paid social care and childcare workforce, sectors which contribute around £3.9 billion every year, accounting for around 3.2% of the overall economy. Lack of access to childcare and social care support is the most immediate barrier to women being able to work, study and train, yet the 'care economy' is largely absent from NSET. This is unsustainable given the sector's significance to our ageing population.



The next Scottish Government must address the omission of both the social care and childcare sectors from economic strategies. This should include an overhaul of the current policy and the designation of these sectors as infrastructure to allow for increased investment. This is crucial to ensure women can benefit equally from Scotland's economy and that our current national ten-year strategy doesn't ultimately work to worsen gender inequality. Ultimately, investment in childcare and care for disabled people and older people should be at the heart of our efforts to create a sustainable economy and cohesive communities across Scotland.





9. Scotland is a place where women have an equal seat at the table...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Create a new fund targeted towards women and underrepresented groups in politics to overcome barriers to political participation.

Why does this matter?

Women's unequal access to power remains a fundamental obstacle to gender equality in Scotland, with women comprising just 35% of local councillors and 45% of MSPs. While we <u>lack robust data on the diversity of our representatives</u> across other protected characteristics, we know that certain groups of women experience even greater rates of exclusion, including women of colour, disabled women, LGBTI+ women, working-class women and young women. This democratic deficit means critical voices are missing from decision-making spaces, <u>despite</u> evidence that women's political leadership delivers positive societal outcomes. The absence of diverse representation deprives Scotland's political institutions of valuable lived experience, perspectives and expertise. This is happening precisely at a time when the complex challenges we face demand innovation and fresh insights from our political leaders.

Women face specific, gendered barriers to political participation that require targeted intervention, and these are especially pronounced for women facing intersecting inequalities, such as disabled women and

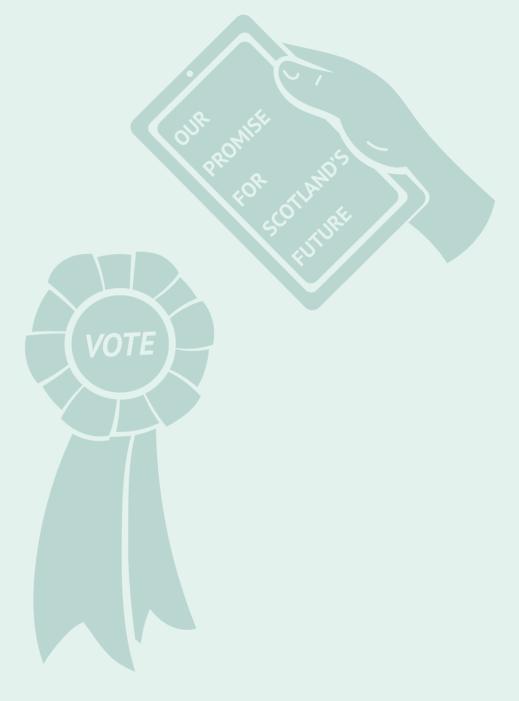
women of colour. <u>Our research shows</u> that everyday sexism, including inappropriate comments and gendered stereotypes, remains commonplace for women in politics. 24% of the women we surveyed who were selected as political candidates experienced sexist language or bullying. <u>Over 70% of participants in our study</u> reported experiencing online harassment during campaigns, with only 11% feeling "very safe" during their campaign period.



Caring responsibilities were also identified as a significant barrier women face as political candidates, with just 4% in our study reporting receiving financial support for costs such as childcare or travel expenses. The heightened vulnerability to harassment and abuse, particularly online, and lack of support for costs such as childcare can leave women candidates feeling overwhelmed and burnt out by campaign demands, as well as creating significant practical and financial obstacles for women candidates.

What would this involve?

Building on the success of the existing 'Access to Elected Office Fund' for disabled candidates, we propose a complementary fund specifically designed to address women's barriers to political participation. This initiative would provide crucial financial support for childcare and other caring responsibilities, as well as funding resources to protect candidates' security and safety. By prioritising support for the most underrepresented groups of women, including women of colour, disabled women, and single parents to stand for political office, this fund would help transform Scotland's political landscape into one that truly reflects our communities. Supporting this initiative would demonstrate a meaningful commitment to strengthening our democracy at a time when achieving and sustaining equal representation is becoming more challenging.



10. Scotland is a global leader in securing gender equality for all women...

We call on all political parties to commit to:

Commission a third phase of the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls and fully implement the Council's recommendations to date.

Why does this matter?

When women and girls thrive, communities benefit enormously. To see a Scotland where all women and girls can achieve their full potential, the next Scottish Government must invest in designing policy and distributing budgets to this end. Gender inequality is still persistent in Scotland. This is evident in women's unequal access to financial resources compared to men, the lack of value placed on the paid and unpaid care they provide, and continued misogyny and violence against women and girls. We need dedicated leadership, accountability and resources to drive progress to tackle these deep-rooted issues and improve how public policies and services perform for women and girls.

Established in 2017, the National Advisory Council for Women and Girls (NACWG) serves as a critical mechanism to ensure the Scottish Government delivers on gender equality commitments, rather than leaving them as hopeful words on paper. The Council was set up to provide independent strategic advice on how to achieve gender equality and given the authority to make ambitious recommendations

and scrutinise and drive forward change within government structures. It allows Scotland's leaders to hear directly from gender experts and better understand women's lived experiences through targeted research and properly resourced participation work. The Council has achieved a great deal in its first two phases, but the job of ending gender inequality is far from complete and requires a longer-term commitment.



By investing in the next phase of the NACWG, Scotland's next Government can show it is serious about achieving intersectional gender equality. Over the first two phases, the Council has developed significant insights and expertise on the government structures and cultural change needed to enable better outcomes for women and girls. However, the challenges to overcome are deeply ingrained within political and public sector culture, and ongoing resources and buy-in from political leadership will be vital. With the current phase ending in 2026, we need a long-term commitment to build on the steady progress made so far. Investing in a third phase of the NACWG, with a continued focus on intersectionality, will ensure there is an independent body of gender expertise available to the next Government to champion effective mainstreaming and policies that tackle deep-rooted gender equality in Scotland. It also shows Scotland's women and girls that our political leaders care about them and will commit to improving their lives.



Published August 2025

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