

## Engender Parliamentary Briefing International Women's Day 2023 - #EmbraceEquity

7<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### BACKGROUND

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation. We work to realise a Scotland where women and men have equal access to power, resources, rights and safety. We work across Scottish, UK and international policy-making to ensure that systematic inequality between women and men is made visible and addressed.

We welcome this year's International Women's Day debate on the theme #EmbraceEquity and support the Parliament's focus on building equity for women across Scotland. We understand achieving equity for women as involving direct challenge to structural gender inequality and that policymakers have a powerful role in making this happen.

**This International Women's Day, we call on all MSPs to act for women's equity by supporting equal representation for women and marginalised groups in politics. This must involve ensuring the voices of marginalised communities are represented in positions of power and that they feel safe and supported to do so, free from violence and abuse. A more diverse cohort of policymakers must be supported to create change that furthers women's equity by mainstreaming intersectional gender analysis and competence into decision-making processes.**

### SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

#### 1. Equal Representation is Vital for Scotland to #EmbraceEquity

It is vital we see equal representation for women and marginalised groups within politics and in other decision-making positions. Having democratic bodies which reflect the general population ensures decisions are made which consider the diverse needs and experiences of Scotland's communities. We campaign actively for equal representation,<sup>1</sup> with our most recent action being the 'Making It Happen for 2027'<sup>2</sup> campaign to transform local democracy for women.

However, progress continues to be slow in diversifying the people who represent us, with men remaining vastly overrepresented in politics,<sup>3</sup> particularly at local government level. MSPs can lead the way in achieving equal representation in politics by committing to

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<sup>1</sup> Equal Representation Coalition (2023) Our Vision & Background. Available at: <https://www.equalrepresentation.scot/our-vision--background/>.

<sup>2</sup> Engender (2022) Making It Happen For 2027: Transforming local democracy for women. A Call to Action from Engender, Elect Her and Women 50:50. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/1.-making-it-happen-for-2027.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Engender (2020) Sex and Power in Scotland 2020. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engenders-Sex-and-Power-2020.pdf>.

realising the recommendations of the Scottish Parliament's recent Gender Sensitive Audit.<sup>4</sup> This Audit represents an important step forward and holds huge potential for progress, but will need to be followed by action, resourcing and targeted focus on how we best respond to the intersecting and compounding barriers marginalised and minoritised women experience.

By working together across the political spectrum, MSPs can ensure women and marginalised groups are represented in positions of influence and that the way policy is created embeds gendered and equalities approaches from the very beginning.

We also recognise that to #EmbraceEquity, we must acknowledge that women experience intersectional inequality and that certain groups of women are further marginalised in Scotland. We want to see more work done to build on the excellent work of the Gender Sensitive Audit of the Scottish Parliament to understand more about how women from diverse backgrounds and experiences can be better represented in politics.

**Engender is calling for all MSPs to:**

- **Fully commit to resourcing and realising the recommendations of the 'A Parliament for All: Report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit.'**
- **Build on the work of the Gender Sensitive Audit by supporting the creation of further research and work looking at how the Parliament works for marginalised and minoritised women.**

## 2. Combatting Digital and Media Toxicity for Women in Politics

For women to be represented in politics and use that power to challenge structural inequality, we know it is vital to combat the toxicity which exists for women and marginalised people in politics online and in the media. Engender has continually tried to spotlight the impact violence against women in digital and media spaces has on those in positions of public influence.<sup>5</sup>

We know from research that the abuse and scrutiny women face in politics is an active barrier to participation. Women politicians are at an increased risk of receiving sexist abuse,<sup>6</sup> risk that is heightened further for Black and minoritised politicians.<sup>7</sup> Experiences of misogynistic abuse and harassment – both online and offline – are increasingly cited by women leaving elected office as a motivating factor.<sup>8</sup> Together this sends a strong message that politics is not 'for' women. MSPs must work together to tackle the toxic

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Parliament (2023) A Parliament For All: Report of the Parliament's gender sensitive audit. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spcb/gender-sensitive-audit.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Engender (2022) Reading Into the News: A review of gendered representations of politicians in Scottish election coverage in May 2022. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/2.-reading-into-the-news.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Gorrell, G et al (2020) Which politicians receive abuse? Four factors illuminated in the UK general election 2019. EPJ Data Science 9(1) 18.

<sup>7</sup> Hamer, E, & Southern, R (2021) Women and minority MPs are particularly at risk of experiencing certain forms of abuse on Twitter. LSE Politics and Policy. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/twitterabuse-mps/>.

<sup>8</sup> Oppenheim, M (2019) 'General election: Women MPs standing down over 'horrific abuse', campaigners warn' The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/general-election-woman-mps-step-down-abuse-harassment-a9179906.html>.

culture in both digital spaces and in the media, so that entering political life is safe and accessible for all women and marginalised people.

**Engender is calling for MSPs to:**

- **Commit to tackling the toxic digital and media culture which exists for women and marginalised people in politics.**

### 3. Gender Mainstreaming in Decision-making

Alongside achieving equal representation in politics and creating a safe culture for a diverse set of people to influence Scottish decision-making, women's equity relies on the processes which shape decision-making to mainstream gender and equalities analysis. From our experience, we know that entrenched structural inequalities in our public institutions and biases in our decision-making architecture act as a major remaining barrier to equality. All policy and decision-making by the Scottish Government and Parliament provide opportunities for us to either adequately address inequality, act in a neutral way, or further compound and entrench inequality.<sup>9</sup> Unless we act deliberately and consistently to counter ingrained bias, then unintentional harm and entrenchment is likely to occur.

For years we have been developing research on the need for intersectional gender mainstreaming in Scotland,<sup>10</sup> and we continually provide gender expertise to push for improved gender competence in policymaking. Without mainstreaming women's needs across policymaking and budgeting in an intersectional way, we run the risk of entrenching gender inequality even more deeply – whether our politicians reflect the diversity of our population or not.

MSPs must actively advocate for Scottish Government to provide adequate resourcing and support to embed gender and equalities mainstreaming across policymaking, including clear mechanisms for accountability and monitoring. This needs to include realising the recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG), with specific action to improve existing Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED).<sup>11</sup>

**Engender is calling for MSPs to:**

- **Ensure there is adequate resourcing and support to implement the Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy.**
- **Support the implementation of the National Advisory Council for Women and Girls' recommendations, including those relating to the implementation of PSED.**

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<sup>9</sup> Engender, Close the Gap and Scottish Women's Aid (2023) Joint response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee Inquiry into Effective Scottish Government decision making. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Joint-response-to-the-FPA-Committee-Inquiry-into-Effective-SG-DecisionMaking.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Engender (2020) What Works for Women: Improving Gender Mainstreaming in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/WHAT-WORKS-FOR-WOMEN---improving-gender-mainstreaming-in-Scotland.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> NACWG (2023) Our Recommendations. First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls. Available at: <https://www.generationequal.scot/our-recommendations/>.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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## ABOUT US

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to increase women's social, political and economic equality, enable women's rights, and make visible the impact of sexism on women and wider society. We work at Scottish, UK and international level to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.