

Engender Parliamentary Briefing: Each for Equal: Celebrating International Women's Day 2020

International Women's Day 2020

1. Introduction

Engender is pleased to welcome this annual International Women's Day debate in the Scottish Parliament and the opportunity to highlight the position of women in Scotland in March 2020.

As Scotland's feminist policy organisation, **Engender's vision is for a Scotland – and world – where women have economic, social and political equality with men; where their human rights are realised, and they have equal access to resources, safety and power.** While we have welcomed significant actions towards gender equality from this parliament, this briefing outlines the continuing impacts of sexism, male bias in policy-making and the under-representation of women in public life as significant barriers to this vision, and challenges the Scottish Parliament to pursue further ambition action.

2. *Each for Equal*

This International Women's Day adopts the theme ***Each for Equal***,¹ offering those of us committed to gender equality around the world an opportunity to reflect on our **individual contributions towards securing women's equality**, including challenging bias and stereotypes. **The theme also recognises that gender inequality is not just a social issue, it is an economic one.** There is overwhelming evidence that women's expertise is good for growth² and that commercial entities with a gender balance outperform those dominated by men.³

However, Scotland will not see these benefits without greater challenge to gender inequality and gender-blind decision-making which see collective effort to pass legislation and make policy which understands and responds to the lives of women and girls from all cultures and throughout their life-cycles.

Sex & Power in Scotland

1. How does gender inequality affect women in Scotland?

¹ <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/Theme>

² McKinsey & Company (2015) The Power of Parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12tn to global growth

³ Morgan Stanley's HERS ranking, see <<https://www.europeanceo.com/business-and-management/gender-diverse-companies-outperform-male-dominated-rivals-morgan-stanley-finds/>>

Scotland has seen considerable action in recent years towards gendered policy and legislation which makes meaningful differences to women's lives and equality, for example the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan launched one year ago, and the world-leading Domestic Abuse Act.

However, we remain some distance from a Scotland where women have equal access to resources, safety and power. **Scotland's Gender pay gap remains 13.3%**⁴ and women continue to provide the majority of unpaid care and childcare. **Between 59% and 70% of unpaid care is delivered by women in Scotland**, worth approximately £10.8 billion to the economy per annum.⁵

The UK-wide social security system actively discriminates against women, including mandating the number of children they may have through the two-child limit. HMRC data shows that in the two years to April 2019, **8,540 families in Scotland were affected by the family cap**. In total **480 families received an exemption and of those 50 households in Scotland were affected by the rape clause**.⁶ These figures of course represent only the women able to put themselves through such an affront to their dignity and their privacy, or those for whom the alternative to utilising the exemption is even graver.

Men's violence against women remains pervasive, preventing women and girls from living a good life. **At least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime and an average of 3 rapes is reported per day**. The number of rapes reported to the police between 2018-2019 increased by 8% from 2017-2018.⁷ Good work to tackle violence against women must be sustained, funded and expanded if these patterns are to be fully disrupted.

Engender works across Scottish, UK and international policy frameworks to draw attention to the gender dynamics that affect women's inequality. Our current policy focuses include:

- Hate crime and the need for a misogynistic hate offence in Scot's Law;
- The impacts of ungendered policy and practice for women's access to housing and women's homelessness;
- Advocating for women's rights in a social security and 'welfare' system which actively maintains their poverty;

⁴ ONS (2019) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/annualsurveyofhoursandearningsasgenderpaygaptables> >

⁵ Carers UK (2015) Valuing carers 2015

⁶ Child Tax Credit and UC claimants: statistics related to the policy to provide support for a maximum of two children, April 2019, July 2019

⁷ Scottish Government (2019) Recorded crime in Scotland: 2018-2019, Table A1: Sexual crimes⁵ recorded by the police, Scotland, 2009-10 to 2018-19

- Highlighting the invisibility of women's health and inequalities in accessing basic healthcare and rights such as contraception;
- Gendering the economy, for example, pushing the Scottish National Investment Bank to develop a gender equality strategy and recognise childcare as infrastructure investment.

2. What do we know about women and power in Scotland

Earlier this year, Engender published *Sex & Power 2020*, an analysis of women's representation among the 3115 position of power in Scotland.⁸ **As 52% of the population, women should be equally represented in civil and public life**, with equal access to decision-making in the roles that affect all of us, including political office, media editorship and judicial authorities. **Engender found that out of these 3115 offices, women hold just 996 of senior roles across our political institutions, public sector, media and cultural bodies, and corporate world.**

Of the 39 different spheres we researched, **only 5 had achieved 50% women, and only 1 of these exceeded it**, with 11 women and 9 men. Transport, temporary judges at the Supreme Court, trade union Scottish secretaries and chief executives of national sporting bodies all had fewer than 20% women. **There are no women as CEOs of Scottish-based FTSE 100 and 250 companies, and just 2 women out of 50 head up 'top' Scottish companies.**

On the other hand, we have seen progress in some spheres, such as government, with improvements in the Scottish Parliament, Local Council Leaders and Committee Conveners, Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Police Officers. **However, some of these improvements have been minimal** and in the case of newspaper editorship, which increased from 0 to 1 woman, short lived.⁹

The report shows that in Scotland's political roles:

- **Women account for just 36.4% of Scotland's MSPs**, placing Scotland 30th in the current global rankings, down from 27th in 2016;
- Of the 14 SPADs advising Scottish Ministers, just 4 are women;
- Only **29.1% of Scotland's councillors** are women, and just 22.9% of council leaders;
- Only **31% of MPs** returned to Westminster from Scottish constituencies at the 2019 general election were women.

Across other institutions equal representation is similarly distant:

⁸ Engender (2020) Sex and Power, available at

<<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engenders-Sex-and-Power-2020.pdf>>

⁹ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18167403.power-gap-562-women-still-missing-scotlands-corridors-influence/>

- Since our 2017 report was released, the number of women heading public bodies has increased by just 16, increasing the total percentage of women to 35%, despite 2016 figures which suggest that 64% of the Scottish public sector workforce are women;
- **The Scottish Government Strategic Board exceeded 50% women at 55.0%, but this actually represents a drop in women's representation**, from 66.7% in 2017;
- Women are 64% of secondary school teachers in Scotland but only 43% of head teachers.
- **Women are 30.4% of health service chief executives**, so while 70% are led by male chief executives only 23% of the overall NHS Scotland workforce are men;
- Only **12.5% of Scottish transport body heads** are women;
- **Women represent just 26.5% of the judges at the supreme courts**, 17.7% of temporary judges at the supreme courts, 33.3% Sheriffs Principal and 22.2% of Sheriffs;
- Of the **37 unions** representing Scottish workers that are affiliated to the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), **only 27% are led by women**.
- Women are **16.7% of the directors of major museums and art galleries** in Scotland and 22.2% of the directors of national arts and culture bodies.

Statistics can only ever show part of a story, and Sex and Power simply counts the number of women and men employed in certain positions. It does not count numbers of women of colour, of disabled women, of lesbian, bisexual or trans women.¹⁰

3. Why does women's underrepresentation matter?

Our 2020 report showed a marginal increase of 4% since our 2017 report was written, as of the 3115 positions researched, 2119 (or 68%) were held by men and 996 (or 32%) were held by women (at the time of writing). This represents 562 women who are 'missing' from leadership roles across politics, the public sector, media, culture, and business in Scotland.

The figures paint a bleak picture of unequal access to power, decision-making and participation throughout all areas of public life, which undermines gender equality in two key ways. Firstly, **women are not able to participate fully in society and to exercise equal citizenship** as men when they do not have the same access to opportunities. Secondly, the impacts of **cultural gender roles and inequality for women's lives and the resulting diverse perspectives are lost within the public and private sector bodies that impact enormously on our society** and on all of our lives. The narrow perspective of white, non-disabled men does not represent or reflect the

¹⁰ Sex & Power 2020 uses the Gender Representation on Public Boards methodology, which ensures that non-binary people are not counted as either men or women for the purposes of ensuring gender-balance. However, no public or private body has yet reported any non-binary people in senior leadership.

needs and desires of the Scottish population, and perpetuates inequality for women and other marginalised groups.

Equal representation and participation is a goal, but not only for its own sake. More women involved in decision making processes, and vitally, more women from a range of groups and experiences, will result in more representative decision-making and priorities. **For example, we have a woman as First Minister, and have had a gender-balanced cabinet since 2014**, and personal leadership has seen initiatives such as the First Minister's National Advisory Council Women and Girls which focuses on women's lives and gendered institutions.

4. How do we secure change?

Progress is possible. For example, 2019 saw Scotland elect a 50-50% balance of women and men as MEPs. However, this progress cannot continue to be glacial. To secure progress in other sectors will require commitment, resources and strategic action from government, political parties, public bodies, and private sector employers.

The over-representation of white, non-disabled men will continue without concerted and deliberate action to change our assumptions about who leads, makes decisions, and has responsibility for what gets spent where. Women face persistent barriers to achieving leadership roles, such as a lack of flexible work, unlawful harassment and discrimination, and an insidious cultural assumption that women just don't belong around decision-making tables. Unpicking these is vital in ensuring a pipeline for women to reach decision-making roles.

Scotland should also follow the recommendation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee and **“take specific targeted measures, including temporary special measures, to improve the representation of women, including “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic” women and women with disabilities, in Parliament,”**¹¹ which Engender believes includes pushing for Westminster to transfer powers to the Scottish Parliament to legislate for quotas, particularly around access to political power.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ABOUT US

Engender is a membership organisation working on feminist agendas in Scotland and Europe, to increase women's power and influence and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve gender equality and justice.

¹¹ Engender (2019) CEDAW UK Examination: annotated concluding observations