

Engender response to the Scottish Government's Call for Evidence on the National Outcomes

June 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to secure women's political, economic and social equality with men. Our aspiration is for a Scotland where women and men have equal access to and enjoyment of rights, resources, decision-making and safety. We were formed with the purpose of ensuring that the detail of women's lives is visible, counted, and understood in policymaking processes.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's call for evidence on the National Performance Framework National Outcomes (NPF). As the NPF is used to guide the policy aims and spending decisions of national government and local authorities,¹ it is vital that improvements are made to ensure it reflects the daily realities of women's and girls' lives.

It is beyond Engender's immediate capacity to offer the kind of detailed gender analysis of each National Outcome that we consider necessary to secure an NPF that will be transformative on gender equality. Instead, we wish to offer overarching recommendations on how the NPF should, in the first instance, be strengthened to better fulfil its stated aim of reducing inequalities in Scotland.

These recommendations represent the minimum improvements that will be necessary to ensure that the NPF works effectively to address gender and intersecting inequality in Scotland, improve the lives of women and girls and ensure that future iterations of the NPF do not further entrench existing inequality.

Beyond these basic improvements, we would also be keen to work directly with Scottish Government to build out a detailed gender analysis of a revised NPF.

¹ Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee (2022) Report on the National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action. Available at: <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/FPA/2022/10/3/a3dd32cb-f846-42db-ada6-11f7e3da9390/FPAS622R8.pdf>.

We strongly believe the NPF, and its associated outcomes, have the potential to be a cornerstone in realising intersectional gender equality in Scotland. Currently, the NPF recognises equalities in generalised terms, including “giving more opportunities to all people living in Scotland” and “reducing inequalities” within its list of purposes.² However, the current version of NPF falls far short in articulating the specific forms of inequality which exist in Scotland and ensuring the outcomes of intersectional gender equality are mainstreamed across government policymaking. Indeed, we have previously expressed concern that the NPF is not sufficiently gendered, meaning it is possible that progress is being made toward the current set of National Outcomes in a way that is, in effect, entrenching and deepening women’s inequality.

2. MAKING THE NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK WORK FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

2.1 Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5: achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls.

One of the main purposes of the NPF is to localise the delivery of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Scotland, which are largely mapped against the National Outcomes. The alignment between each SDG varies, however, and one of the least well-represented is SDG 5: achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls.

There is no direct translation of SDG 5 into any of the National Outcomes; instead, it is described as cutting across each National Outcome, respectively. Unfortunately, this has proved inadequate. It significantly dilutes the ambitions of the original global goal and runs contrary to the Scottish Government’s own commitments on equality. For instance, SDG 5 contains targets relating to issues including gender-based violence, unpaid work and equal participation in political and public life, all of which are absent from the NPF. Furthermore, SDG 5’s nine targets are measured by a total of 14 statistical indicators. The NPF does not have a comparative outcome on gender quality with appropriate national indicators.

Research by Dr Graham Long has concluded that the NPF’s alignment with SDG 5 is weak, despite official data being available in Scotland on its key indicators, including on violence against women and girls (VAWG).³ Consequently, the current National Outcomes and indicators are not driving progress towards achieving SDG 5 or reducing gender inequalities in Scotland. Therefore, a key outcome of this review of the National Outcomes must be securing detailed, appropriate alignment between the

² Scottish Government (2023) National Performance Framework: What it is. Available at: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/what-it>.

³ Long, G (2019) The SDGs and Scotland: a discussion paper and initial analysis. Available at: <https://globalgoals.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SDG-Discussion-paper-February-2019.pdf>.

NPF and SDG 5. The first step towards this would be having a dedicated outcome focussed on gender equality.

Other SDGs also contain gender-specific indicators representing the necessary twin-track approach to gender mainstreaming adopted internationally and by the UN.⁴ By contrast, just two of the NPF's 81 statistical indicators relate to gender equality. This falls far short of internationally recognised good practice on gender mainstreaming.

We would strongly encourage Scottish Government to replicate the SDGs twin-track approach that mainstreams gender across all SDGs and includes targeted measures through SDG 5. This approach is recognised as a necessary and effective strategy for achieving transformative change in intersectional equality. This would mean creating both a stand-alone outcome on gender equality with associated indicators, as well as applying a gender-sensitive approach to all other outcomes. This would require ensuring that all outcomes and indicators are subject to gender analysis and where needed, redesigned in a way that effectively captures the gendered realities of women's lives and experiences.

2.1 Gender policy coherence

In 2019, the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) found that policies seeking to benefit the people of Scotland are too often inconsistently developed or work against each other to perpetuate inequalities due to a lack of gendered policy coherence.⁵

The effectiveness of NPF is currently undermined by such incoherence, in part, due to its lacking an integrated, intersectional and gendered approach to equality. The overarching, directional position of NPF means it should be the cornerstone on which Scottish Government creates the conditions for equality in Scotland. This review of the National Outcomes is a critical opportunity to embed the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls' vision for a "Scottish Approach to Gender Policy Coherence" into the NPF and reflect its key recommendations, including on collection and use of gendered, intersectional data in policy making. This will improve the NPF's capacity to foster greater integration and competence across the Scottish Government on critical issues of gender inequality and ultimately drive progress towards its aims.

⁴ UN Women (2020) UN Strategic Planning and Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Guidance. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/How%20We%20Work/UNSystemCoordination/UN-SWAP/UN-SWAP-2-Guidance-on-UN-strategic-planning-and-gender-equality-and-empowerment-of-women-en.pdf>.

⁵ First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (2019) 2019 Report and Recommendations. Available at: <https://www.generationequal.scot/app/uploads/2022/03/2019report.pdf>.

The revised NPF must also be informed by planned work by Scottish Government to improve the operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland, create a National Mainstreaming Strategy and improve the Equality Evidence Strategy. The success of these initiatives will ultimately be undermined, and the Framework will ultimately be weakened if there is no read-across between them and the next iteration of the NPF.

There are many more examples of major equality policy commitments and aspirations that could be better reflected in NPF- that would improve momentum around their delivery, strengthen the framework and enhance overall policy coherence. For example, the National Outcome on Communities, which aims to drive progress towards “communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe”, is not well aligned with the Scottish Government’s national VAWG strategy, Equally Safe.

Equally Safe sets out a vision for a Scotland “where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse.” In addition, it includes a specific objective that “women and girls are safe, respected and equal in our communities.”⁶ The strategy has been commended for its adoption of a gendered analysis of VAWG, which understands that gender inequality is both a root cause and consequence of this violence and that women and girls are disproportionately affected.

Conversely, this gendered analysis has evidently been excluded from the NPF, despite the National Outcome on Communities sharing similar aims with Equally Safe. Indeed, the National Outcome is not well-gendered; it does not include national indicators on gender-based violence or any which capture the gendered differences in men’s and women’s experiences or feelings of safety in their communities. Indeed, the current national indicators include ungendered data from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS), which in 2019/20 wrongly concluded that “there was no significant difference between men and women who were victims of SCJS crime.”⁷ Using this data as an indicator of crime victimisation completely overlooks the disproportionate impact of VAWG, as well as the ways in which violence fundamentally changes how women and girls engage in their communities.

The NPF must adopt Equally Safe’s analysis of gender-based violence as well as SDG 5’s target of eliminating all forms of VAWG. The NPF should also be a vehicle for integrating Equally Safe’s commitment to primary prevention into the development of all public policy areas and legislation across the Scottish Government – something

⁶ Scottish Government (2018) Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2018/04/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/documents/00534791-pdf/00534791-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00534791.pdf>.

⁷ Scottish Government (2021) Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20: main findings. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2019-20-main-findings/>.

which, to date, has been a critical implementation gap in the delivery of Equally Safe. As such, we support Zero Tolerance's call for the inclusion of VAWG in a standalone gender equality outcome which will track levels of VAWG and reinforce the Scottish Government's commitment to a primary prevention approach.

2.3 Gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data

The National Outcome on Communities also demonstrates that the NPF's capacity to mainstream gender and equalities is limited by a lack of gender-sensitive intersectional data being collected or used to measure its progress.

Just two of the NPF's 81 statistical indicators measure a form of gender inequality, and while the Equality Evidence Finder aims to provide data on the national indicators through the lens of the different protected characteristics, this is insufficient. Sex-disaggregated data, which is the most limited available measure of gender equality, is not available for every indicator.

Furthermore, sex-disaggregated data, whilst useful, does not give us enough of an understanding of the gendered patterns and pressures in women's lives. It also does not give us any insight into the ways that different forms of inequality intersect to shape the experiences of the most marginalised women. The resulting failure to design or track major policy using gendered, intersectional evidence means it is likely that progress towards the National Outcomes is failing to create an impact on substantive equality in Scotland and could be further entrenching existing inequalities.

For example, the indicator on the 'skill profile of the population' is the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with low or no qualifications at SCQF level 4 or below. Modern Apprenticeships are an intermediate skills programme that acts as a key entry point to the labour market, but spend on this programme is currently widening the gender pay gap because of the starkly different experiences for women and men. If efforts to reduce the proportion of adults with low or no qualifications involve the expansion of existing skills programmes, then these may deepen the gendered occupational segregation that is a feature of the Scottish labour market.⁸

Many of the indicators currently utilised within NPF use data or measurements that are not well-gendered, including in areas such as poverty, using household and other measures that fail to capture the often unequal access to resources experienced by women within households. The enormous relevance and impact of unpaid care work on women and as a driver of gender inequality is not recognised in any of the indicators across the economy, fair work, community or health. This is a major omission that

⁸ For further exploration of this issue see: Close the Gap response to the Scottish Government consultation on the review of the National Performance Framework National Outcomes June 2023. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/NPF-Consultation-Response-June-2023.pdf>.

should be addressed in this review. Close the Gap have provided analysis of a number of additional ways the current NPF utilises ungendered data and measurements, including around labour market participation, education, training and employment, and we endorse the recommendations they make in these areas.

Identifying gaps and introducing more gender-sensitive national indicators across the range of National Outcomes is crucial. This means going beyond indicators which merely count women to increasing the number of indicators which take account of the gendered differences in men's and women's lives and the ways they experience and benefit from the National Outcomes.

In our response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Equality Evidence Strategy, we called for the next strategy to set out how gender competence, and competence across the other protected characteristics, will be built up across the public sector.⁹ It is clear to us that without the design and development of gender-sensitive intersectional data, the NPF will not benefit women in the most effective and meaningful ways, ultimately undermining progress to a more equal Scotland.

3. CONCLUSION

In this call for evidence, we have aimed to set out where the current conceptual limitations in the NPF lie in relation to reducing inequalities in Scotland and achieving gender inequality. The NPF plays a key role in shaping policy priorities in Scotland, therefore this review of the National Outcomes must address these limitations by better aligning the NPF with SDG 5, adopting the Scottish Approach to Gender Policy Coherence, and increasing the collection and use of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data. It is clear to Engender that without these improvements, the NPF will fail to deliver on its purpose of reducing inequality in Scotland and may even entrench or widen it further.

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.

⁹ Engender (2022) Engender response to the Scottish Government's Equality Evidence Strategy 2023 to 2025 consultation. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-response-to-the-Scottish-Government--Equality-Data-Strategy.pdf>.