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GENDER AND THE HOUSING EMERGENCY



A JOINT REPORT BY SHELTER
SCOTLAND AND ENGENDER



Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities and with other organisations to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.



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.

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This is a joint report by Shelter Scotland and Engender exploring the experiences and impact of Scotland's housing emergency in relation to women's equality. This report shines a spotlight on the gendered aspects of the housing emergency by showing how women's experiences of housing and homelessness differ from those of men. It includes a series of recommendations to address women's inequality in access to safe, secure and affordable housing, and to ensure women are able to realise their housing rights.

Women's access to housing is fundamentally shaped by structural gender inequality and other intersectional forms of marginalisation. Specific groups of women are more likely to experience housing instability, poor housing, homelessness, or negative treatment by services. This includes women in poverty, disabled, women of colour and refugee women, LGBTI women, older and younger women, women who sell sex, single parents and women who are unpaid carers.

Women's access to safe, secure and affordable housing is restricted and directly shaped by their experiences of economic inequality, unequal access to power and resources and of male violence. Housing and homelessness services often have not been designed to respond appropriately to women's specific needs. They can fail to address the additional barriers which exist for women accessing these services and lead to their housing rights not being realised.

Shelter Scotland and Engender advocate for an equality and rights-based approach to housing, underpinned by international human rights. Ultimately, women's human rights to housing will not be fulfilled without understanding and addressing structural gender inequality, which shapes access to homes and support services.¹

Key Summary

- Scotland's housing and homelessness system is not just broken, it is also biased. People with protected characteristics, such as women, are disproportionately impacted by the housing emergency and experience additional barriers to accessing safe, secure and affordable housing.
- Any response to the housing emergency in Scotland must be made from a gendered perspective to meet women's specific needs and address the additional barriers women face when accessing safe, secure and affordable housing.
- Women's unequal incomes and higher likelihood of poverty drives their experiences of housing inequality. Reversing cuts to social security and

¹ Engender (2020) [A Woman's Place: Gender, Housing and Homelessness in Scotland](#)

introducing targeted poverty alleviation methods for marginalised women are needed to improve women's access to housing.

- Women are more likely to require access to social housing. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the supply of social homes, in particular larger social homes, in Scotland. This will ensure that all women can access safe, secure and affordable housing and is a vital component and measure of progress towards gender equality.
- Official homelessness statistics cannot be solely relied on to understand the full picture of homelessness in Scotland. The nuance of women's specific experiences and how they differ from men's is rarely captured via current data sets. We need to invest in gendered research and look at what other data sets could better represent the diverse experiences of women experiencing homelessness.
- Domestic abuse is a major risk factor for women becoming homeless and is a common experience for women already in the homelessness system. This must be a central consideration when applying a gendered lens to solving the housing emergency and in the design of support and services.
- Homelessness services in Scotland often are not equipped to respond appropriately to women's specific needs, particularly around how to support women fleeing domestic abuse. In some cases, women are being put at significant risk of harm as a result. This acts as an additional barrier to these women being able to access support and realise their homelessness rights.
- All local authorities must reassess their homelessness services through a gendered lens and put women's safety at the centre of their approach.
- The constraints around supply of Temporary Accommodation (TA) in Scotland means that the needs of households are often not met. Women's caring responsibilities and concerns over safety create additional requirements in terms of the TA they need to access.
- Supply and allocation of temporary accommodation must be done using a gendered approach to remove the additional barriers women face to getting their specific needs met.

Scotland's Housing Emergency

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which is damaging lives every single day. This is evidenced by the numbers of households becoming homeless each year, the increasing instances of local authorities failing to uphold peoples housing and homelessness rights², and the record numbers of households trapped in temporary accommodation (TA) for long periods of time, particularly households with children.

At the time of writing in 2024, the Scottish Government and 12 local authorities in Scotland have declared that they are in a housing emergency. This means they acknowledge that the current housing and homelessness system in Scotland is failing and have committed to taking action to address this. The Scottish Housing Regulator has also reported that 10 local authorities' homelessness services are either in systemic failure or at risk of systemic failure³ – meaning that 47% of Scotland's population is living in areas where homelessness services are failing.

The housing emergency is further compounded by the failure to deliver the social homes Scotland urgently needs, with a significant slowdown in new social housing developments in the last year⁴. Social housing delivery is a key solution to the housing emergency. It is vital to ensure that everyone who needs a permanent safe, secure and affordable social home has access to one.

The need for a gendered lens

Scotland's housing system is not just broken, it is also biased. It profoundly entrenches gender inequality and reflects broader social structures of oppression.⁵ Groups with protected characteristics, such as women, are disproportionately affected by the housing emergency and experience additional barriers to accessing safe, secure and affordable housing.

The housing emergency is making women homeless. In 2023/24 there were 14,150 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness where the lead applicant was female. Although this is a slight decrease on the year before (-410 households) this number is still far too high and reflects the deep inequality women face in access to safe, secure, affordable housing.

² The latest Scottish Government statistics show that for the year 2023/24 local authorities failed to provide a household with temporary accommodation when they were required to do so by law 7,915 times. This was 17 times higher than the year before. During the same time period local authorities breached the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (households kept in TA which is unsuitable for their needs for longer than 7 days) 7,400 times. This is a 41% increase compared to last year.

³ Scottish Housing Regulator (2024) [Our risk assessment of social landlords: summary outcomes](#)

⁴ The latest figures show that the number of social homes completed in Scotland fell by 15% in 23/24 compared to the year before. Starts of social rented homes have decreased by 4% (220 homes) compared to the previous year. This is the lowest since 2015/16.

⁵ Engender (2020) [A Woman's Place: Gender, Housing and Homelessness in Scotland](#)

Academics have argued that women's homelessness is often considered to be a relatively minor social problem - a subcategory of homelessness⁶. Due to the limited data and research available into women's homelessness policy responses, legislation and services are not designed to respond to women's specific needs.

Recognising women's specific needs in relation to housing and homelessness will allow any response to the housing emergency to effectively address these barriers. When talking about women's specific needs in this context we are referring to issues such as:

- Women's economic inequality restricting their access to housing.
- Women being more likely to undertake caring responsibilities.
- The prevalence of gender-based violence.

⁶ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

Access to Social Housing

Economic inequality

Women's access to safe, secure and affordable homes is constrained by their economic inequality. Women are more likely to experience poverty and financial precarity than men⁷. Across the board, women's incomes are lower than those of men.⁸ Women generally have less access to well-paid and secure work and are more reliant on social security entitlements for income⁹.

Cuts to social security under austerity policies have had a disproportionate impact on women and have been critiqued for being misogynistic in their design.¹⁰ An estimated 86% of net 'savings' carved from social security payments and public services between 2010 and 2020 came from women's incomes.¹¹ By 2027, the most economically marginalised women in the UK are projected to have endured a 21% reduction in their living standards since 2010.¹² Women have less access to pensions, do not have equal access to resources within households and experience economic impacts from men's violence.¹³

Women also have higher burdens of domestic and caring commitments, making up the majority of lone parents, primary caregivers for children and unpaid carers for disabled and older people¹⁴. The poverty rate is even higher for women who are impacted by other forms of inequality. For example, almost half of single mothers in the UK fall below the poverty threshold after housing costs, and we know women make up the majority of single-parent households in Scotland.¹⁵

Women's higher likelihood of living in poverty has consequences for their ability to access housing. They are more likely to spend a higher proportion of their income than men on housing¹⁶, are less likely to own their own home or be able to access decent-quality housing¹⁷ and are more vulnerable to housing insecurity.¹⁸ Women are also more likely to rely on social security to meet their housing costs. In the UK, 60% of adults in households that claim Housing Benefit are women¹⁹.

⁷ Engender (2022) [Women and the Cost of Living: A Crisis of Deepening Inequality](#)

⁸ Close the Gap (2023) [Gender Pay Gap Statistics](#)

⁹ Engender (2023). Available at: [Parliamentary Briefing: The two-child limit](#)

¹⁰ Women's Budget Group (2024) [Social security and gender: Briefing for a new government](#);

¹¹ Women's Budget Group (2016) [The impact on women of the 2016 Budget](#)

¹² Women's Budget Group (2024) ['Poorest Women Will See Their Living Standards Drop by 21% Unless Government Acts Now, warns WBG.'](#)

¹³ Scottish Women's Aid (2022) [The cost of living crisis and the impact of women experiencing domestic abuse.](#)

¹⁴ Engender (2022) Available at: [Women and the Cost of Living: A Crisis of Deepening Inequality.](#)

¹⁵ UK Women's Budget Group (2019) [A home of her own: housing and women](#)

¹⁶ Women in the private rented sector spend an average of 55% of their income on rent, compared with 36% for men

¹⁷ Engender (2020). [A Woman's Place: Gender, Housing and Homelessness in Scotland](#)

¹⁸ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

¹⁹ Women's Budget Group (2022) [Housing and gender.](#)

Reversal of cuts to social security alongside the introduction of targeted poverty alleviation methods for marginalised women are needed to address women's economic inequality and improve women's access to housing.

Supply of larger social homes

Women are disproportionately dependent on renting social housing, so when significant cuts are made to social housing budgets, women are some of those most impacted. In Scotland, around a third of households with a female head of household are in the social rented sector (30%), compared with fewer than one in five households with a male head of household (17%).²⁰ There is also evidence that women are less likely to be able to access the quality or size of housing they need, for example, data suggests that there is a greater likelihood for women with children to be in overcrowded housing compared to men.²¹

Women who experience homelessness are more likely to have children in their care than men experiencing homelessness. In 2023/24, 75% (5,390) of single-parent households assessed as homeless were headed by women. This is in line with 92% of single-parent households being headed by women in the overall population. This presence of children often results in the need for larger social homes²².

Households with children, and particularly those headed by women, spend much longer trapped in temporary accommodation (TA) due to the lack of larger social homes available. Single men and women spend on average the same amount of time in TA - 205 days for single men, and 202 days for single women. However, when looking at single-parent households, those headed by a man spend 233 in TA on average. For single parent household headed by a woman this number rises to 280 days²³.

Data shows that 22% of all households in temporary accommodation on the 31st March 2023 had been there for over a year. When looking at larger households we can see that for households containing 4 or more people 49% of them had been living in TA for over a year. For households of 5 or more people this rose to 52%. Nearly half (46%) of these larger households are headed by single parents, the vast majority of which will be women²⁴.

There is an urgent need to increase the supply of social homes in Scotland as a key mechanism to reduce the structural inequality experienced by women. There must be a particular focus on the supply of larger social homes to reflect that women are more likely to take care of and live with dependent children.

²⁰ Engender (2020) [Gender, Housing and Homelessness: A Literature Review](#)

²¹ In the Scottish Household Survey for 2005 and 2006, and the Scottish House Condition Survey for 2005/06 to 2007/08, as reported in EHRC - 10% of female-headed households with children in Scotland compared to 6% for male households with children were shown to reside in overcrowded housing.

²² Scottish Government (2024) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2023-24](#)

²³ Scottish Government (2024) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2023-24](#)

²⁴ Additional analysis of Scottish Government homelessness statistics carried out by Shelter Scotland.

Women Missing from the Statistics

No Recourse to Public Funds

Our understanding of women's homelessness is obscured by the limitations of the official statistics and the flaws in how data is collected and understood. Outside of the recorded statistics, there are populations of women experiencing homelessness who are not represented. This is especially true for women facing intersecting forms of inequality, such as women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) who are subject to hostile immigration policies.

Women under NRPF conditions are unable to access housing support provided by local authorities and are therefore not counted in the statistics²⁵. If women with NRPF are experiencing domestic abuse and need to access refuges, they can be denied this accommodation if it is funded by the government. Women with NRPF in this situation are especially vulnerable to homelessness and at significant risks of harm.

These women missing from the official statistics have significant levels of unmet need. This has been made clear recently from evidence gathered by Scottish Women's Aid's 'Fund to Leave' pilot – a discretionary fund for women to help them leave domestic abuse situations²⁶. This is made available through local women's aid centres. A significant number of those who received funds during the pilot were women with NRPF or access statutory support, who were facing homelessness.

The majority of women impacted by NRPF accessing the Scottish Women's Aid Fund were from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds – further demonstrating how official statistics do not adequately capture intersectional inequalities for minoritised women. This means that the experiences of marginalised women are even less understood or considered in policymaking on homelessness.

Hidden homelessness

"Hidden Homelessness refers to people who would meet the legal definition of homeless if they were to make a formal application but are not represented as homeless in the local authority homeless statistics."²⁷

Even with official statistics showing gendered trends in homelessness, the full picture is also often missing because of women's experiences of 'hidden homelessness.' This includes people who are temporarily staying with friends or family, people living in severely overcrowded conditions, people sleeping rough or people in situations of domestic abuse who feel unable to seek help.

The nature of hidden homelessness means it is challenging to research and understand. However, available studies show that women are more likely than men to

²⁵ Scottish Women's Rights Centre [No Recourse to Public Funds' and migrant women living with abuse.](#)

²⁶ Scottish Government (2024) [Support to leave an abusive relationship](#)

²⁷ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Hidden Homelessness topic briefing](#)

experience this type of homelessness.²⁸ Women's experiences of homelessness do not always conform with the traditional (male) images of 'rough sleeping' in the streets. According to most UK sources, single men continue to dominate the numbers of those sleeping rough and using mainstream shelter systems. If women do sleep rough, they do so differently to men to try and manage their safety better, such as avoiding busy areas, sleeping in secluded sites like public toilets, garages, bin bays, abandoned cars or staircases, or simply disguising their homelessness status.²⁹

Also, instead of rough sleeping or using emergency shelters, women experiencing housing instability and intolerable housing circumstances can go to great lengths to find alternate, and often unsafe and unreliable forms of accommodation. Women are also less likely to engage with homelessness services, often only seeking accommodation and support through this route when they have exhausted all alternative informal options.³⁰

The lack of adequate support that women receive from homelessness services can also be linked to their avoidance of these services. Studies show that homeless women are likely to experience different kinds of stigma³¹ which can have a reinforcing, demoralising and debilitating impact wellbeing and a compounding effect on their housing situation. For example, women spoke to St Mungo's about how society expects them to be feminine, to be good mothers and to maintain a home. These gendered expectations create greater pressure on women in homelessness situations when they cannot conform to these societal norms and ideals, and they feel specifically judged or shamed.³²

Women's experiences of hidden homelessness and intersecting issues marginalised women face, such as those subject to NRPF condition, demonstrate how official statistics only tell part of the story of homelessness in Scotland and vastly underrepresent women's experiences. **There is an urgent need to invest in gendered research and explore alternative data collection that represents the diverse experiences of women's homelessness.**

²⁸ Office of National Statistics (2023) "[Hidden homelessness in the UK: evidence review](#)"

²⁹ Reeve, Kesia (2018) [Women and homelessness: putting gender back on the agenda](#) Sheffield Hallam University.

³⁰ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

³¹ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

³² St Mungo's (2014) [Rebuilding shattered lives](#)

Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Abuse

Gender-based violence is endemic in Scotland, with at least 1 in 5 women experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime.³³ Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is both a cause and a consequence of women's unequal access to power and resources across society, including in the home.³⁴ Of women experiencing domestic abuse 95% of report experiencing concurrent economic abuse³⁵. One in three survivors having to give up their home as a result of domestic abuse.³⁶

Domestic abuse is the leading recorded cause of women presenting as homeless in Scotland.³⁷ "Dispute within the household: violent or abusive" was given as the main reason for applying as homeless for 23% (3,985) of female-headed households in 2023/24³⁸. International evidence shows there is strong and consistent evidence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between women's homelessness and experiences of domestic abuse.³⁹

Domestic abuse in the form of financial abuse can severely limit survivors' ability to leave a relationship with an abusive partner. To leave, women must have access to immediate funds. However, these are often not available to women who have had their access to their finances restricted while in a relationship. Scottish Women's Aid has also evidenced the impact that a ruined credit score or rent arrears caused by their abuser can have on a woman's ability to access alternative accommodation.⁴⁰ Homelessness services and landlords need to be more responsive and accommodating of these issues when working with women who have left or are trying to leave an abusive situation.

Domestic abuse is a significant risk factor for women becoming homeless and is a common experience for women already in the homelessness system. This needs to be understood and addressed as a key part of the response to the housing emergency.

³³ Engender [Gender Matters: Violence against women](#)

³⁴ Community Research Team and Scottish Women's Aid (2017) [Change, Justice, Fairness: "Why should we have to move everywhere and everything because of him?"](#)

³⁵ Surviving Economic Abuse (2020) [Statistics on Economic Abuse](#)

³⁶ Women's Aid (2019) [The Economics of Abuse](#)

³⁷ CIH Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid (2023) [Policies not Promises: A review of Scottish social landlord's domestic abuse policies](#)

³⁸ Scottish Government (2024) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2023-24](#)

³⁹ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

⁴⁰ Women's Aid (2019) [The Economics of Abuse](#)

Housing and Homelessness Services

A lack of understanding of domestic abuse

Local authorities housing and homelessness services are failing to meet the needs of people in Scotland. Every day, Shelter Scotland works with people being denied their rights regarding access to housing and homelessness services. There is a lack of gendered approaches designing and delivering these services. Therefore, while homeless services overall are not functioning well in Scotland, women face additional barriers to accessing services that meet their needs and realising their housing rights.

Legislative and policy responses to homelessness are orientated towards the experiences of men⁴¹, with women's experiences being understood as a smaller, subcategory of homelessness. This assumption is incorrect, as there are distinctly gendered patterns in how women and men experience homelessness⁴². Without this being considered, many mainstream housing and homelessness services often do not cater to women's specific needs.

Engender identifies a significant lack of gender competency and knowledge required among housing providers, particularly on women's hidden homelessness and how to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Research by Scottish Women's Aid found that local authority staff often questioned the validity of women's experiences of abuse and failed to offer safe alternatives to moving out of the family home.⁴³ Many Shelter Scotland clients who have become homeless as a result of domestic abuse report negative experiences when they have approached local authority homelessness teams. Speaking of the fact they have felt judged and their experiences of abuse minimised.

A 2024 study carried out in multiple cities across the UK has found that services often particularly fail women affected by multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and complex needs, such as women facing homelessness, substance use, and involvement with the criminal justice system.⁴⁴ The research found that these women are repeatedly being failed by poorly coordinated services, trapping them in cycles of harm. Almost all the women who participated in the study were found to have experienced gender-based violence, such as sexual violence and domestic abuse.⁴⁵

The findings confirm international evidence that women impacted by multiple forms of marginalisation can be fearful of using services and of the potential consequences of disclosing vulnerabilities.⁴⁶ Previous negative experiences in support services can create barriers for women, such as in homeless hostels, due to the intimidating or

⁴¹ Engender (2020). Available at: [A Woman's Place: Gender, Housing and Homelessness in Scotland](#)

⁴² Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

⁴³ Scottish Women's Aid (2015) [Change, Justice, Fairness: Why should we have to move everywhere and everything because of him?](#)

⁴⁴ I-SPHERE (2024) [Hard Edges: The Reality for Women Affected by Severe and Multiple Disadvantage](#)

⁴⁵ I-SPHERE (2024) [Hard Edges: The Reality for Women Affected by Severe and Multiple Disadvantage](#)

⁴⁶ Joanna Bretherton and Paula Mayock, (2021) [Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review](#)

antisocial behaviour of other residents. The experience of hidden homelessness, and sofa-surfing in particular, was almost universal for women who participated in the study.⁴⁷

Gatekeeping practices putting women at risk

Evidence from Shelter Scotland services also reveal worrying practices in terms of homelessness services interacting with women experiencing domestic abuse. Shelter Scotland has recorded instances of women fleeing domestic abuse being denied access to homelessness services and temporary accommodation - a practice known as "Gatekeeping." These women are turned away when they attempt to present as homeless in person and instead told to book an appointment in days or weeks. This creates a significant safety concern for these women, as the point that they are most at risk is when they attempt to leave their abuser. Forcing them to return after doing so puts them at significant risk of harm.

Case study: *A Shelter Scotland client presented as homeless to a local authority. She was fleeing extreme violence, the perpetrator of which had attacked the client in the days prior to her making her homelessness application. She was gatekept (not allowed to make a homeless application) for 8 days by this local authority putting her safety at significant risk. A homelessness application was only accepted, and temporary accommodation was provided after Shelter Scotland's intervention.*

All local authorities must reassess their homelessness services through a gendered lens and put women's safety at the centre of their approach.

⁴⁷ I-SPHERE (2024) [Hard Edges: The Reality for Women Affected by Severe and Multiple Disadvantage](#)

Women and Temporary Accommodation

Women's experiences of temporary homeless accommodation (TA) are also gendered. The constraints around the supply of TA in Scotland mean that the needs of households are often not met. This, coupled with a lack of a gendered approach to inform the allocation and supply of TA, paints a difficult picture for women who are attempting to access or move on from this type of accommodation.

Women's rights not being upheld.

Women who need to access TA often have caring responsibilities for children. This creates additional requirements regarding the suitability of the TA, and further barriers to getting these needs met. Initial findings from the 'Fund to Leave' pilot show that women accessing this fund often have multiple children, and those with more than two children face barriers in accessing good quality TA that is the size that they require. Shelter Scotland services frequently see women with children housed in hotels for weeks at a time due to the lack of appropriately sized Temporary Furnished Flats (TFF) available. This clearly breaches the Unsuitable Accommodation Order⁴⁸ and shows that women's housing rights are often not being upheld.

Caring for children also creates additional pressures for women in terms of needing access to decent cooking and washing facilities - something which hotels and B&B accommodations do not provide. Shelter Scotland clients who are women frequently raise issues around the lack of cooking facilities in these types of accommodation, reporting that they do not have the money to eat out every day and that their children struggle to eat the food provided by these types of TA.

Unfortunately, in the last year we have seen a 42% increase in female headed homeless households being housed in B&B's- from 3,115 households on the 31st March 2023, to 4,420 households on the 31st March 2024⁴⁹. Many of these households are women living with their children. The latest Scottish Government statistics show that on the 31st March 2023 there were 310 children in Scotland living in B&B temporary accommodation, up for 85 on the same date the year before⁵⁰.

Case study: *A Shelter Scotland client and her 4-year-old child were kept in B&B temporary accommodation for a number of weeks. Children were banned from the communal kitchen, which meant that the client had to leave the child alone in order to cook. Both the client and her child found this experience extremely stressful, with the client often returning to find her child in distress at having been left alone.*

⁴⁸ The Unsuitable Accommodation Order states that homeless households should not be placed in temporary accommodation that is 'unsuitable' to their needs for longer than 7 days.

⁴⁹ Scottish Government (2024) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2023-24](#)

⁵⁰ Scottish Government (2023) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2022-23](#)

Shelter Scotland has recorded instances of TA being offered to women leaving an abusive relationship in the areas where the perpetrator lives or works. For example, in one case, a Shelter Scotland client was offered a TA flat directly above their abuser's place of work. This reflects a lack of gender competency among LA Housing Officers. Particularly in relation to the specific needs of women becoming homeless because of gender-based violence and is evidence of an allocation policy which is not informed using a gendered approach.

Safety concerns

There is very little appropriate TA available for women in Scotland – and this is particularly pronounced for women with children. As a result, Shelter Scotland services regularly work with women who are unwilling to access TA and rely on friends, family, or other sources of unreliable accommodation. This is backed up by national statistics which show that women in Scotland enter TA at a lower rate than men. Of the households assessed as homeless in 2023/24 where the lead applicant was female, 61% of these entered TA. By comparison, 75% of male-headed households entered TA in the same time period.

Women who have children and/or have experienced domestic abuse are particularly unwilling to be accommodated in hostels, hotels and B&Bs due to concerns about their safety in these types of accommodation. Such concerns around safety in these types of TA are not unfounded – through our services Shelter Scotland has heard very worrying allegations concerning sexual assault in hostels.

The lack of appropriate TA in Scotland violates women's housing rights and is consistently putting women's and children's safety at risk.

Recommendations

In the final part of this report Engender and Shelter Scotland set out a series of recommendations on what is needed to address the housing emergency in Scotland from a gendered perspective. Enacting these recommendations will help remove the barriers that women face to accessing safe, secure and affordable housing, and to fully realise women's housing rights.

Social housing

To improve women's access to safe, secure and affordable homes there must be an increase in the supply of social homes in Scotland. This requires a particular focus on the supply of larger social homes, to reflect that women often have dependent children living with them.

To achieve this:

- The Scottish Government must fully reverse the 37% cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.
- The Scottish Government must encourage the acquisition of larger properties specifically for households with children trapped in temporary accommodation.
- In their Strategic Housing Investment Plans, local authorities must explicitly consider the needs of larger households trapped in TA for over a year when making decisions about social housing delivery.

Social Security

Tackling women's economic inequality and poverty with targeted measures will improve their access to safe and quality housing. This includes:

- The UK Government must keep Local Housing Allowance Rates unfrozen and covering the cheapest third of rents in an area as a minimum.
- The UK Government must reform UK-wide social security systems, which are misogynistic by design⁵¹ including:
 - Removing the benefit cap and abolishing the bedroom tax.
 - Abolishing the 'two-child limit' within Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit.

⁵¹ Engender (2024) [General Election 2024: Social Security](#)

- The Scottish Government must invest in the Scottish Welfare Fund and create targeted streams of the fund to support marginalised women, including migrant women, women with no recourse to public funds and unpaid carers.
- The Scottish Government must create a permanent national 'fund to leave' for women experiencing domestic abuse.

Support for women experiencing domestic abuse

Urgent steps must be taken to address the gaps in support for women experiencing domestic abuse. This will allow for increased protection against eviction and reduce the risk of homelessness:

- The Scottish Government must fully realise the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 provisions, which will help victim-survivors escape abuse and stay in their homes and ensure implementation progresses.
- The Housing (Scotland) Bill must include extending new proposed protections for women in the social sector to women in the Private Rented Sector. In particular, that all landlords (both social and private) should have a domestic abuse policy and have to consider if domestic abuse has played a role in rent arrears before seeking eviction.
- The Scottish Government must implement all the recommendations from the 2021 working group report 'Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.'⁵² These focus on improving the practice of social landlords to reduce domestic abuse-related homelessness.
- Work to address Scotland's housing emergency must be aligned with the Scottish Government's Equally Safe Strategy, which adopts a primary prevention approach to combatting violence against women and girls.

Improvements to homelessness services

To ensure that women can access homelessness services that meet their needs, and ensure that their homelessness rights are upheld:

⁵²Scottish Women's Aid (2020) [Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse](#)

- Local authority homelessness services must improve gender competence and take a gendered approach to the design of their services. This must include developing policies, protocols and procedures in relation to domestic abuse.
- Housing Officers and front-line services must undertake mandatory training on domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.
- The Scottish Government should work with Local Authorities and third sector organisations to develop print and online resources for women experiencing domestic abuse which details their housing options and signposts to sources of support.
- The Housing Options Training Toolkit must be updated to include a focus on structural gender inequality, including access to resources and safety, and women's diverse experiences of housing and homelessness. The Housing Options Guidance should also be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- The Scottish Government needs to fully fund local authority homelessness services to ensure they are able to respond to the needs of people, including women, presenting as homeless.
- The Scottish Government must provide appropriate, safe housing and accommodation solutions for women who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Temporary Accommodation

There must be steps taken to improve women's access to TA that meets their needs. This includes:

- Allocations and supply of TA by local authorities need to be carried out with a gendered approach, taking into account women's needs in particular in relation to gender-based violence and childcare responsibilities.
- Local Authorities must seek to increase the supply of Temporary Furnished Flats to prevent the use of B&Bs, hotels and hostels as being used as TA for women and their children.

- The Scottish Government must recognise the urgent need for gendered TA in Scotland, in particular for women with children, and work with local authorities to ensure that availability of this type of TA is increased.

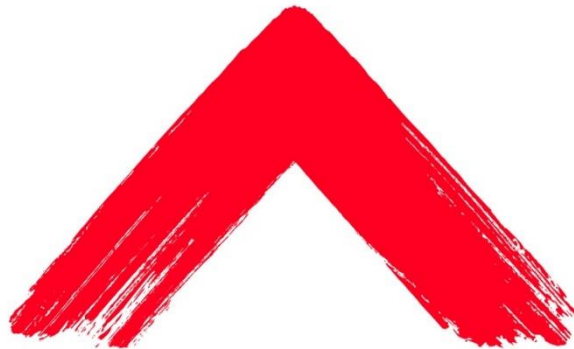
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**We exist to defend the right to a
safe home and fight the devastating
impact the housing emergency
has on people and society.**

We do this with campaigns, advice
and support – and we never give up.
We believe that home is everything.



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