

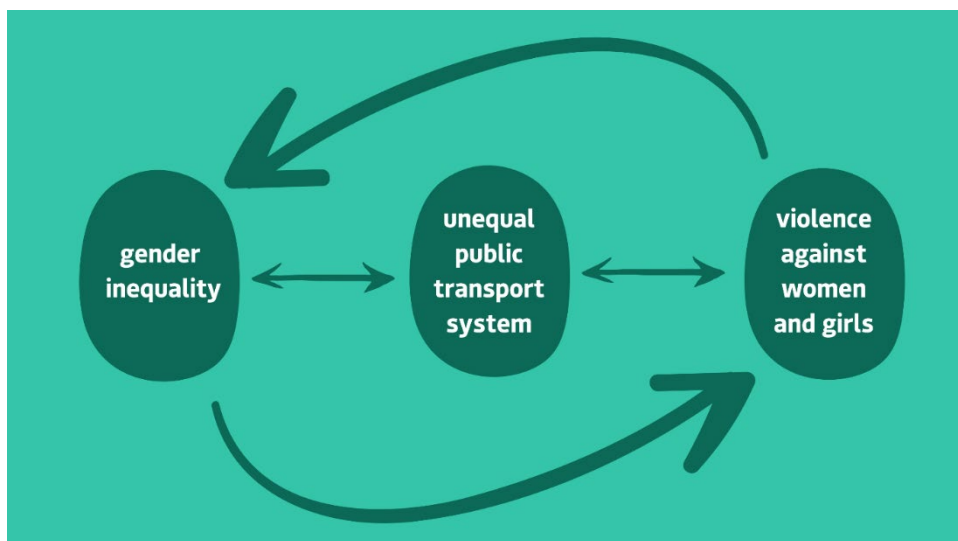


PRIMARY PREVENTION AND PUBLIC POLICY SPOTLIGHT:

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

OVERVIEW

Public transport is critical for women's access to vital opportunities like education, employment and essential services, all of which impact gender equality.¹ However, Scotland's public transport system fails to serve women's distinct travel needs, thereby limiting their access to these opportunities and reinforcing gender inequality. Gender inequality is the root cause of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Therefore, creating a safe, sustainable and accessible public transport system for everyone is essential for advancing women's equality and preventing VAWG once and for all.



WHAT IS PRIMARY PREVENTION?

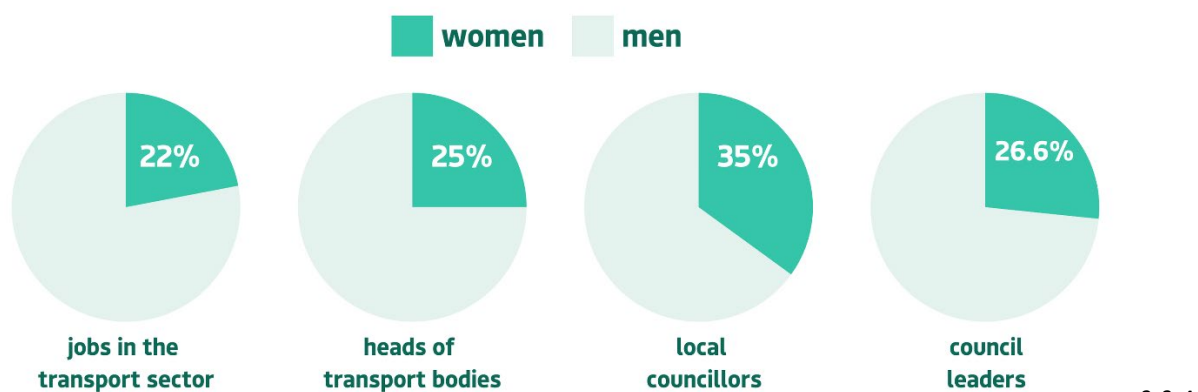
Primary prevention of VAWG focuses on stopping this violence before it occurs by tackling its root cause: **gender inequality**. Mainstreaming gender equality in all areas of public policy is, therefore, vital for preventing VAWG.

The **three requirements** for achieving a **primary prevention approach in policymaking** are:

1. Women are equally and fairly **represented** in policymaking and decision-making roles
2. Policymakers consistently apply **intersectional gender analysis** to their work
3. Policymakers mainstream **primary prevention** in all areas of their work

1. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN TRANSPORT ROLES

Women's perspectives are vital to the equitable design and delivery of public transport. Yet, women remain underrepresented in critical roles in Scotland's transport sector.



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There are significant data gaps in understanding the diversity of the transport workforce. Available evidence suggests that minoritised women, including Black and minority ethnic women (BME) and disabled women, are severely underrepresented in the transport sector; this is especially acute in policy and leadership roles.⁵

2. INTERSECTIONAL GENDER ANALYSIS IN TRANSPORT POLICY

Intersectional gender analysis examines how different groups of women could be affected by a particular policy to ensure it systematically promotes equality and doesn't inadvertently disadvantage different groups.

Despite the highly gendered use of public transport, this analysis is routinely absent from Scotland's transport system's design, management, and operation. More so than men, women's journeys are influenced by gender inequality, norms and stereotypes, including:

- **Unequal access to private transport:** women are less likely to own a car or hold a driver's licence.⁶
- **Unpaid work:** Women undertake a higher proportion of caring and household responsibilities,⁷ meaning they often travel more frequently with dependents and prioritise employment opportunities with shorter commutes.⁸
- **Part-time working patterns:** The majority of part-time workers are women, which can require them to travel outwith peak times.⁹
- **Poverty and low incomes:** Women experience higher rates of poverty and are more likely to be on a low income, making them more likely to rely on public transport.¹⁰
- **VAWG on public transport:** Experiences and perceived threats of VAWG are more likely to shape women's travel behaviour.¹¹

Marginalised women, including disabled women, minority ethnic women, lone parents, unpaid carers and women on low incomes, are more likely to experience these inequalities due to intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression. These women also face additional barriers to public transport:

- LGBT women and BME women are at a greater risk of experiencing sexual violence and harassment on public transport and also experience homophobic and racist abuse.¹²
- 84% of refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland have been unable to use public transport due to ticket prices.¹³
- Disabled people in the UK make 38% fewer trips than non-disabled people because of the lack of accessible transport options.¹⁴

These factors mean women are more reliant on public transport and more likely to need flexible services for multiple short trips throughout the day across local communities. These differ from men's typical travel patterns, which involve fewer but longer work-related journeys at peak times.¹⁵

Transport planning in Scotland has historically prioritised services for able-bodied commuters, working 9am-5pm and travelling from the suburbs into city centres without dependents. This disproportionately benefits men while women are left without safe and accessible transport options when and where they need them.¹⁶

In a survey of women’s experiences of transport in Scotland, nearly half (48%) of respondents said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with public transport timetables, while 36% said the same about public transport routes.¹⁷ Respondents expressed particular frustration with:

- Unreliable services, including frequent train and bus cancellations
- Lack of space and inaccessible vehicles for wheelchair users and women travelling with prams
- Lack of connected services, particularly when travelling across different modes of public transport
- The need to take long indirect journeys to get to their destinations due to a lack of orbital routes

Without safe and accessible transport options, women’s access to critical economic and social opportunities is limited, reinforcing gender inequality, which ultimately enables VAWG.

3. PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VAWG IN TRANSPORT POLICY

Primary prevention of VAWG aims to stop this violence before it occurs by tackling its root cause: **gender inequality**. Applying a primary prevention approach requires policymakers to actively address gender inequality **and promote women’s safety** in all areas of public policy, including transport.

Women’s safety on public transport remains a significant concern and barrier to women’s mobility:

- About a third (32.3%) of women in Scotland say they are concerned about their personal safety on public transport, compared to 21% of men.¹⁸
- Fear of VAWG influences women’s travel choices and can lead them to reject employment, education and other opportunities, particularly when required to travel at night.¹⁹

In 2023-24, the British Transport Police recorded:



on the UK railways.

- In 2020, more than a quarter (28%) of people in the UK who had experienced sexual harassment in the previous year said they experienced it on public transport; of these, 62% said it happened on a bus.²⁰

- In the UK, 62% of women say they change or adapt their behaviour on public transport to avoid sexual harassment, compared to 35% of men.²¹
- Minority ethnic women in Scotland experience more extreme verbal abuse on public transport, including abuse that is both sexist and racist.²²
- Women in Scotland report altering their journey, changing what they wear, avoiding public transport when possible (especially at night), and moving to 'safe' seats and spaces to avoid experiencing VAWG.²³

The absence of intersectional gender analysis in transport planning can undermine women's safety through:

Lack of regular and reliable services

The gap between women's travel needs and available services often forces them to switch between unconnected services and routes, leading to longer waits at stops and interchanges.²⁴ This is especially common for women in rural areas where services are more infrequent, routes take longer, and transit points are isolated.²⁵ Service delays and cancellations also cause longer waiting periods, especially if women miss their connections. Waiting at transit points heightens women's risk of experiencing VAWG²⁶ and commonly makes them feel unsafe, especially when travelling at night.²⁷ Minority ethnic women are also more likely to feel unsafe when waiting both during the day and night.²⁸

Design of vehicles and transit points

Research shows that the design and surroundings of public transport environments can enable VAWG due to factors like crowded spaces, inadequate lighting and the transitory nature of public transport.²⁹ Over a third of women have experienced sexual harassment on their commute. According to BTP data, most reported sexual offending occurs during the evening rush hour (5pm-7pm) on busy train carriages.³⁰ Overcrowded trains can embolden perpetrators due to the proximity to other passengers and anonymity provided by the crowd.³¹

In addition, poor lighting at transit points is a significant safety concern for women in Scotland, especially at bus stops, which can become very dark and are more likely to be in isolated locations.³² Disabled women also experience additional risks related to their physical safety onboard public transport due to the lack of access and space for people with wheelchairs, mobility aids or visual impairments.³³

Staffing levels

Unstaffed stations and services heighten women’s insecurity when accessing public transport, especially when travelling at night.³⁴ Reduced staffing levels also disproportionately impact disabled women’s personal and physical safety, who already face higher rates of sexual assault on public transport than non-disabled women.³⁵ In a Disability Equality Scotland survey, 95% of respondents opposed Scotrail's proposals to reduce the opening hours of 117 ticket offices and close three ticket offices altogether. Many respondents expressed concern about being less safe in unstaffed stations because of the greater potential for anti-social behaviour.³⁶

STEPS TOWARDS ACHIEVING A PRIMARY PREVENTION APPROACH IN TRANSPORT POLICY:	
1. Women are equally and fairly represented in policymaking and decision-making roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve pathways for women, particularly minoritised women, into the transport sector and career progression opportunities • Ensure inclusive working environments in the transport sector by implementing flexible working procedures, anti-discrimination and harassment policies and women’s leadership initiatives
2. Policymakers consistently apply intersectional gender analysis to their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect intersectional gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data on women’s travel patterns, safety and satisfaction • Conduct Equality Impact Assessments at the outset of transport policy development to ensure this informs policy and planning decisions at all stages
3. Policymakers mainstream primary prevention in all areas of their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase opportunities for co-designing transport strategies with women, especially those with lived experience of VAWG on public transport • Embed women’s safety considerations into transport planning, including in decisions on service provision, the design of infrastructure and staffing levels

USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Women in Transport Scotland](#)
- [Transform Scotland](#)
- [Gender Equality Toolkit in Transport](#)
- UN Women Online Training: [Gender Equality in Transportation](#)

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- ³³ Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) Women's Survey 2023. Women's experiences of travel and its cost.
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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ABOUT US:

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.