



ENGENDER

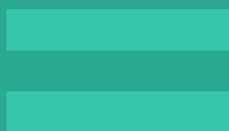
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# CONFERENCE REPORT: JOINING UP POLICYMAKING TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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Mercure  
Glasgow  
City Hotel

20.03.2025  
10:00-16:00



## **Introduction**

**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 policymaking to ensure that systematic inequality between women and men is made visible and addressed.**

One of our areas of focus is preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) before it gets the chance to occur, otherwise known as primary prevention. This work is funded through the [Delivering Equally Safe \(DES\) fund](#), which supports third-sector organisations and public bodies to contribute to the delivery of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating all forms of VAWG.

Through [our DES project](#), we explore how different areas of public policy can prevent violence from occurring by tackling its root cause: gender inequality.

Cross-sector collaboration amongst policy professionals is vital to achieving this. In 2024, we held our first conference on primary prevention of VAWG and policymaking, which brought together over 50 policy professionals from across 30 organisations. At this event, attendees expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to collaborate with professionals outwith their respective sectors to support the integration of primary prevention into their work.

Following this, Engender commissioned research into existing opportunities and gaps for such collaboration in Scotland. Kathryn Ramsay, an independent research consultant, conducted [this research](#).

This year's conference was an opportunity to share the findings from this research and to bring a range of policy professionals together once again to explore the importance of primary prevention in public policy. These issues were examined through presentations, engaging activities and practical workshops.

Attendees also heard from Councillor Maureen Chalmers, COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson and Co-Chair of the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board, about work being done to strengthen primary prevention of VAWG at the local level.

We would like to thank all who attended for their engagement and insights throughout the day. We also wish to thank our speakers, Kathryn Ramsay and Councillor Chalmers, for their invaluable contributions. Our thanks also go to colleagues from Public Health Scotland, the Improvement Service and Dundee VAWP for delivering their workshop on a public health approach to VAWG. Lastly, we are incredibly grateful to the events team at the Mercure Glasgow City Hotel for their support on the day and for accommodating our event after a last-minute venue change.



## **Conference Agenda**

10:00 Welcome

10:10 Primary Prevention and Policymaking:  
Where We Are a Year On...

10:25 Primary Prevention Approaches in  
Scotland: Good Practice and Missed  
Opportunities

10:45 Activity: Sharing Reflections

11:15 Break

11:30 Workshop 1

12:30 Lunch

13:15 Workshop 2

14:15 Break

14:30 Keynote Speech by Councillor Maureen  
Chalmers, COSLA Spokesperson for Community  
Wellbeing and Co-Chair of the Equally Safe  
Joint Strategic Board

14:50 Activity: Focusing on the Future

15:30 Wrap-up

16:00 Close

## **Morning Session**

Jade Stein, Communications and Engagement Manager at Engender, facilitated the conference. Jade welcomed attendees and invited them to reflect on the following guiding question throughout the day:

**How can I work with others outwith my team/organisation/sector to support a more joined-up approach to policymaking that embeds primary prevention?**

## **Primary Prevention and Policymaking: Where We Are a Year On...**

Hannah Brisbane, Policy Officer at Engender, gave a presentation outlining the organisation's Delivering Equally Safe (DES) project. The presentation provided an overview of primary prevention and the key components of a primary prevention approach in policymaking. These included the need for equal representation, intersectional gender analysis, and promoting women's safety in all policy areas.

Hannah also shared reflections from the previous year's conference, noting that attendees had expressed a sense of pride in Scotland's world-leading approach to addressing VAWG but were frustrated that budgets and capacity did not match the scale of the challenge they faced to address gender inequality and prevent VAWG.

Hannah ended her presentation with an overview of challenges and opportunities for strengthening primary prevention in 2025. In particular, she noted opportunities such as the new Equally Safe Delivery Plan, the Scottish Government's forthcoming Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy and a previously announced uplift to the DES fund. Challenges included growing backlash to diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives, pushback against women's rights, and potential new austerity measures coming into force.

## **Primary Prevention Approaches in Scotland: Good Practice and Missed Opportunities**

The next presentation was by Kathryn Ramsay, an independent research consultant commissioned by Engender to conduct [research into local primary prevention approaches in Scotland](#). Kathryn explained that she had interviewed 51 people, including representatives from 30 of 32 local authorities. She also interviewed other stakeholders from Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs), public sector organisations and third sector organisations.

Kathryn found several structural barriers to primary prevention work across local areas. These included a lack of authority for VAWPs, a lack of funding and resources for existing work and insufficient priority given to prevention work by leaders. Kathryn also shared other challenges beyond these, including the poor implementation of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the lack of reliable measures of progress with prevention and the use of potentially confusing terms and jargon, including terms like gender mainstreaming and primary prevention.

In the research, numerous interviewees highlighted existing Equally Safe programmes (Equally Safe at School, Equally Safe at Work, and Equally Safe in Practice) as good practice happening locally on primary prevention. Kathryn reflected that it was interesting that these good practice examples were designed and delivered by women's sector organisations.

Kathryn also found that Community Planning and Local Outcomes Improvement Plans represent missed opportunities to embed primary prevention in local planning policy, even though many of the areas covered by these strategic documents relate to key gender equality and VAWG issues, such as poverty reduction.

There were also existing opportunities to strengthen primary prevention at the local level. Kathryn gave the example of the Place Standard tool, a framework used to facilitate community consultations about places. She also noted feminist city initiatives currently being developed by Glasgow City Council and Edinburgh City Council.

Kathryn ended her presentation by highlighting that her report makes several recommendations to stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, COSLA and other public sector organisations. She particularly highlighted recommendations for the Scottish Government to:

- Act to place VAWPs on a statutory footing

- Allocate sufficient funding for prevention work
- Reform the PSED and EQIAs
- Develop effective data collection



### Activity: Sharing Reflections

Following the presentations, attendees were invited to reflect on what enabled them to embed primary prevention into their work and what blocked them from doing so.

Attendees shared a mix of existing enablers as well as hypothetical ones that could support them in achieving a primary prevention approach. One of the main enablers was adequate funding and resources; incidentally, one of the main blockers was inadequate funding and resources. Attendees also felt that gender expertise and skills, such as gender competence and intersectional analysis, were necessary for their primary prevention work.

Collaboration was also a key enabler; some attendees highlighted existing networks such as the National Violence Against Women Network, the Authentic Voices Network and the Safer, Sooner Domestic Abuse network. Attendees felt it was essential to pull resources and learn what works well in other areas. Linked to this, a few attendees noted that, when collaborating with other organisations and sectors, it is important to consider communication styles and whether accessible language is being used.

One attendee highlighted the need to hear from young people to strengthen work on primary prevention.



As mentioned, one of the most common blockers was inadequate funding and budget constraints. These potentially link to other blockers mentioned, such as short-term projects, staff turnover, cancelled meetings and organisational “protectionism” over expertise.

Attendees also identified a lack of meaningful leadership in their organisations on intersectionality and gender equality. Some also felt that VAWG is not treated as a “core issue” and, as such, is forced to compete with other issues for attention and prioritisation.

Reflecting on the state of broader society, some attendees raised the rising pushback against diversity, equality and inclusion work, as well as LGBTI+ rights and reproductive rights. Similarly, a few attendees noted the rise in incel culture and misogyny, particularly amongst young people.



## **Workshops**

### **Violence Against Women in Politics and Public Life**

Delivered by: Engender

Women remain underrepresented in politics in Scotland at all levels, and too often, their voices are missing from decision-making spaces. We know that rising levels of abuse and harassment are major deterrents to women entering politics and a leading motivator for women who leave public life. To build a Scotland where women are equally safe, they must have equal access to power and decision-

making. This workshop explored the issue of VAW in politics and public life and what can be done to address it.

### **Gender Mainstreaming and Preventing VAWG**

Delivered by Engender

Gender mainstreaming is vital for ensuring that different areas of public policy benefit women and don't perpetuate inequality. This makes it an essential strategy for preventing VAWG. Despite various legal duties and high-level commitments to gender mainstreaming, Scotland remains behind the curve compared to the European and international levels. This workshop explored the basics of gender mainstreaming and how this approach to policymaking can support the prevention of VAWG.

### **Applying a Primary Prevention Lens to Public Policy**

Delivered by Engender

For the last decade, primary prevention has been a key component of Scotland's approach to tackling VAWG. However, the concept continues to be missing from key areas of public policy, with some policies even normalising this violence. This interactive workshop explored how different public policies could better address inequality and actively promote women's safety. The session also considered the tools needed to apply a primary prevention lens to public policy.

### **Supporting Local and National Partners to Adopt a Public Health Approach to Preventing VAWG**

Delivered by: Public Health Scotland, Improvement Service, Dundee VAW Partnership

Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls recognises VAWG as a major public health issue, and commits to adopting a public health approach to tackling VAWG, which focuses on preventing VAWG before it occurs. This interactive aimed to raise awareness of what the four stages of a public health

approach involve, and how they provide a framework to progress primary prevention activities. The session showcased examples of work taking place across Scotland to embed a public health approach to preventing VAWG, and offered support and advice to attendees who are interested in adopting a public health approach within their own service/ policy area.

### **Afternoon Session**

#### **Keynote speech: Councillor Maureen Chalmers, COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson**

After the workshops, attendees heard from Councillor Maureen Chalmers, the COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson and Co-Chair of the Equally Safe Joint-Strategic Board.

In her remarks, Councillor Chalmers reflected on local authorities' opportunities and challenges in implementing primary prevention. She highlighted that COSLA and the Scottish Government have a shared vision for a Scotland free from violence and abuse, where everyone is equally safe. Embedded in their agreed approach is the understanding that a shift from crisis management to prevention is needed.

Councillor Chalmers expressed concern at the high levels of VAWG occurring in Scotland and across the globe, including the rise in digitally enabled VAWG. She added that marginalised women, including migrant women, disabled women and LGBT women, are disproportionately impacted by this violence.

The Councillor also emphasised that no sector, organisation, or individual can tackle VAWG alone; all parties must work together through strong partnerships. She welcomed Kathryn Ramsay's research, which she said COSLA will benefit from. Councillor Chalmers particularly welcomed that most research participants agreed that primary prevention is essential and want to do more of it.

The positive work happening in schools through the Equally Safe at School programme and in councils through the Equally Safe at Work

programme was also acknowledged. In addition, Councillor Chalmers highlighted work being done in Glasgow and Edinburgh on feminist city initiatives. She also noted work in Fife Council to recognise domestic abuse as a driver of women's homelessness and in Dundee on embedding a gendered approach across services.

Councillor Chalmers also underlined the need to apply a gender lens to all aspects of life, including community planning processes, as highlighted by Kathryn Ramsay's report. She explained that work is underway to strengthen community voices in planning and policymaking.

The Councillor also outlined some challenges that councils and strategic partners face in embedding primary prevention. These included difficulties with data collection and utilisation, resource limitations and economic constraints, challenges engaging communities, and the rise of digitally enabled misogyny.

Councillor Chalmers ended her speech by recognising that collaboration and multi-agency strategic partnerships are needed to close the implementation gap concerning primary prevention. The Councillor acknowledged that this will require national and local commitment and investment. Councillor Chalmers finished by again emphasising that, together, we can prevent VAWG.





### Activity: Focusing on the Future

The day's final activity was for attendees to consider what actions they would take in the next 12 months based on what they had heard throughout the day. Attendees were asked to share individual and organisational actions they had been inspired to do on Post-it notes.

One of the most common themes among the individual actions was collaboration. Many attendees wrote that they would proactively and intentionally connect with other colleagues, organisations, and agencies on gender inequality and VAWG issues.

One person noted that they would be more confident in their own knowledge of these subjects and in sharing it with others.

Similarly, attendees wrote that they would use existing networks to collaborate on addressing gender inequality and preventing VAWG, including by making space in meetings to discuss what works well regarding gender equality and how it is everyone's responsibility.

Some attendees committed to challenging gender norms and misogyny in their workplaces, communities and families. For example, attendees wrote that they would disrupt patriarchal spaces, ask uncomfortable questions and talk about gender equality with their family members.

One person wrote that they would explore how to engage with lived experience in prevention work.

A few Post-it notes expressed a desire to keep learning about these issues.

For organisational actions, many people wrote that they would share their knowledge and expertise with other organisations and partners to support prevention work. Some attendees who wrote this mentioned their area of expertise; this included research on girls in Scotland, primary prevention, public health approaches, and women's representation in politics.

A few Post-it notes reflected the importance of bringing men and boys into conversations on ending VAWG. One person also highlighted the need to recognise boys and men as victims of both violence and, more broadly, the patriarchy.

Other attendees wrote that they would ensure their organisation engaged in cross-sector collaboration on primary prevention and find ways to share good practice. Others said they would promote the use of gender analysis in their organisation's area of work.



## **Closing and Next Steps**

Jade Stein from Engender closed the conference by recapping the day and thanking attendees for their engagement.

Engender will now take time to consider how to use the findings from Kathryn Ramsay's report to push for meaningful change in relation to the implementation of primary prevention in Scotland. It is clear to us that there is a strong appetite for cross-sector collaboration on preventing VAWG. While opportunities exist to facilitate this collaboration, Kathryn's research shows that some of these are not reaching their full potential for various reasons.

We must also acknowledge one of the most common barriers to primary prevention work cited by attendees and interviewees in Kathryn's report: funding and capacity. However, many attendees also noted the potential for funding and capacity to be vital enablers when provided adequately and sustainably.

We will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to help strengthen primary prevention in policymaking in Scotland.

## **Contact**

You can find out more about Engender's Delivering Equally Safe project [here](#).

If you have any questions, please email [hannah.brisbane@engender.org.uk](mailto:hannah.brisbane@engender.org.uk).

## **Additional Resources:**

- Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls ([report](#))
- An Overview of VAWG and the Role of Public Policy in Scotland ([report](#))
- Policymaking and Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Scotland ([webinar](#))







**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
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PREVENTION/**

