



8th March 2023

Dear

As Scotland's national women's equality organisations, our ambition is for a Scotland in which substantive, intersectional gender equality is finally realised. To secure this, we need an approach to government that puts the experiences of diverse women, particularly marginalised and minoritised women, at the core of public policy development and implementation. This requires innovation, resources, and leadership to ensure that all women benefit equitably from public investment and services, that our safety and human rights are realised, that we can participate fully in culture and public life, and that our unpaid care and paid work are valued and compensated fairly.

We have worked over decades to bring about progressive change on gender equality that benefits not only women, but Scottish society. Much has been achieved, and there have been examples of ground-breaking work, including domestic abuse legislation, a national strategy on eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls and a national Women's Health Plan. However, there remains much more to do, and crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living, continue to threaten hard-won progress. Currently in Scotland:

- Women make up 60% of those who earn under the Living Wage.
- Women experience a pay gap of 12%, rising to 29% when comparing men's full-time with women's part-time average hourly earnings.
- Black and minority ethnic women (BME) and disabled women are more likely to be in in-work poverty than white women and non-disabled women.
- Women make up 60 – 70% of unpaid carers, and 92% of single parents.
- Women represent approximately 88% of applicants for devolved direct-application social security payments in Scotland.
- One in four women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime and it is the single biggest driver of women's and children's homelessness.
- Rape and attempted rape have the lowest conviction rate of any crime, and reported cases of sexual violence are at an all-time high.
- Women account for only 22% of major newspaper editors, 7% of top business CEOs, 46% of MSPs and 35% of local Councillors.

We believe that the inequality these statistics represent can change and that Scotland has the potential to be one of the safest, most equitable and inspiring countries in the world for women. Under the outgoing First Minister, we saw increased investment and more urgent policy focus on gender equality and human rights in government. Our next First Minister will need to go further and at a faster rate. This will be crucial to address the major challenges we face and secure the progress Scotland needs: addressing the cost-of-

living crisis, protecting and realising human rights, building inclusive, sustainable economic growth, healthier and safer communities and a just transition to a fairer, greener future.

We are calling on the candidates for SNP leader to commit to the following:

### **1. Incorporate CEDAW into Scots Law**

Ensure that the Human Rights Bill is laid before the Scottish Parliament and that it includes incorporation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

### **2. Support the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls**

Deliver on the recommendations of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, to embed gender equality at the heart of public policy and services.

### **3. Invest in a Caring and Green Economy**

Address the undervaluation of women's work as part of the transition to a green economy; to narrow the gender pay gap, and recognise the role that unpaid care plays in women's economic inequality and experience of poverty:

- Invest in social care, unpaid carers and the care economy as vital social infrastructure.
- Improve childcare provision so that the needs of all women and children are met.
- Centre gender equality at the heart of economic policy and implementation of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

### **4. Take Urgent Action on the Cost-of-Living Crisis**

Provide targeted support for women who are disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis:

- Create dedicated funds to support unpaid carers, women leaving an abusive partner, and those seeking asylum or with no recourse to public funds.
- Abolish non-residential social care charging.
- Mitigate the financial impacts of the two-child limit, five weeks wait and 'young parent penalty' within Universal Credit.
- Demonstrate commitment to the use of gender budget analysis within policymaking and build gendered responses to the crisis.

### **5. Protect the Right to Abortion**

Actively protect the right to abortion for all in Scotland, ensuring it is recognised as vital healthcare:

- Bring forward and implement the Safe Access Zones Bill.
- Decriminalise abortion in Scotland.
- Address widening capacity gaps in abortion care services by improving funding and staffing in line with international best practice, to ensure that no woman seeking a termination within the legal limit has to travel to England to receive care.

### **6. End Violence Against Women and Girls**

Work to eradicate and prevent violence against women and girls in Scotland:

- Implement the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 so that women's and children's rights are upheld, and they can remain in their own homes when separating from abusers.

- Implement the government-accepted recommendations from the Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Working Group.
- Continue to invest in the Equally Safe strategy and implement a need-based funding structure in line with commitments under the Istanbul Convention, informed by the Independent Review of Funding for Frontline Services for VAWG.
- Fully implement the recommendations from Lady Dorrian's review on improving the management of sexual offences.
- Introduce a new offence of misogynistic harassment as recommended by the Misogyny and Criminal Justice working group chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy.

## **7. Make Culture and Public Life Fairer and Safer**

Actively tackle barriers to women's full participation and representation in cultural and public life:

- Embed equality in implementation of Scotland's Culture Strategies and support sustainable monitoring of women's visibility and participation in public media and cultural life.
- Ensure a Government Digital Strategy that is gender competent, responsive to women's distinct needs, and explicitly links with the Equally Safe Strategy.

## **8. Realise the right to health for women and girls.**

Tackle significant gendered inequalities in health and wellbeing that undermine the right to health for women in Scotland.

- Implement and expand the Women's Health Plan to include non-sex-specific health inequalities and ensure a greater focus on marginalised groups of women.
- Ensure the mental health and wellbeing strategy responds to the growing crisis in women's and girls' mental health.

**Yours sincerely,**

Mariam Ahmed, Chief Executive, **Amina: Muslim Women's Resource Centre**

Anna Ritchie Allen, Executive Director, **Close the Gap**

Hannah Stevens, Chief Executive, **Elect Her**

Catherine Murphy, Executive Director, **Engender**

Dilraj Sokhi-Watson, Director, **Equate**

Dr Marsha Scott, Chief Executive, **Scottish Women's Aid**

Sara Cowan, Co-ordinator, **Scottish Women's Budget Group**

Agnes Tolmie, Chair, **Scottish Women's Convention**

Katy Mathieson, Co-ordinator, **Scottish Women's Rights Centre**

Sandy Brindley, Chief Executive, **Rape Crisis Scotland**

Carolyn Currie, Chief Executive, **Women's Enterprise Scotland**

Talat Yaqoob, Co-founder, **Women 50:50**

Jenni Snell, Chief Executive, **The Young Women's Movement**

Rachel Adamson and Laura Tomson, Co-Directors, **Zero Tolerance**