

# Girls' rights are human rights!



By Kate Nevens and Ellie Hutchinson

from the collective in collaboration

with Zero Tolerance

2024

[www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)

# Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	4
Where are girls in international rights frameworks?	5
Rights legislation, policy, and practice in Scotland	7
Girls' right to freedom from violence, harm and abuse	10
Girls' right to education	13
Girls' right to play	20
Girls' right to health	24
Girls' right to participation and voice	28
Conclusion and recommendations	31
References	34
Annex 1: methodology and what's (not) in the literature	45



# Summary

A siloed approach in Scottish policy, and a history of gender-neutral approaches to children's rights and age-neutral approaches to women's rights, mean that girls fall between the cracks in legislation, policy and practice. Girls face specific challenges and barriers in education, play, health care, freedom from violence, and public and political life.

Current approaches fail girls and siloed systems hide this negligence. As the Scottish Government advances Scottish human rights legislation and implements CEDAW and the UNCRC, there is an opportunity to address this and ensure girls' rights are realised. However, the Scottish Government must consider girls' needs at every stage when developing policy and practice. Zero Tolerance makes seven recommendations on how to do this.



# Introduction

Zero Tolerance is Scotland's expert organisation on preventing and eradicating men's violence against women and girls (VAWG). We work to tackle the root cause: gender inequality. We have a range of work focused on children and young people, because if children grow up experiencing equality in practice, they are far less likely to become adults who perpetrate or experience VAWG.

Human rights work is an important lever for realising equality, and it is essential to ensure that no one is left behind as we progress human rights legislation in Scotland. We know from international evidence that girls are at risk of being left behind by both human rights legislation for children and human rights legislation for women. This report gathers the evidence on the state of girls' human rights in Scotland. It explores their rights to safety, but also education, play, health and participation – areas which facilitate prevention of VAWG when they are gender equal. We consider these rights in turn but recognise that they are interwoven and interdependent in the lives of girls.

Girls in Scotland face multiple, overlapping barriers to their rights. While children share many challenges, girls face specific problems compared to boys, including being at greater risk of sexual violence and harassment, being more likely to experience mental health issues, feeling less safe in public spaces (Agenda Alliance, 2022: 3), and being less able to take part in play and sport (Children's Parliament, 2022).

Both government and civil society organisations are investing heavily in children's rights as Scotland moves to incorporate the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** – the UN's recommendations for legislation that ensures children are safe and supported – into Scots law.

However, little of the emerging legislation, policy, and practice designed to progress children's rights looks at girls' experiences or offers solutions to the issues that affect girls. This failure to consider the impact of gender echoes what we see in international frameworks, with girls falling into the cracks between children's rights and women's rights.

Gender and age affect whose rights are ensured. Girls can face significant challenges in realising their rights, especially when they are affected by further structural inequalities such as racism, poverty, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia.

This report looks at the main barriers for girls in Scotland in exercising their rights. It reviews the existing literature on the state of girls' lives in Scotland, drawing particularly on participatory research by Girlguiding Scotland and Girlguiding UK, Plan International and Plan UK, and the Young Women's Movement. It argues that patriarchal and ageist approaches to policymaking result in girls being left behind in Scotland. It gives seven recommendations on how we can solve this and make rights real for girls.

# Where are girls in international rights frameworks?

“Rarely are girls mentioned as a specific demographic in international law and where they are, there is a failure to fully reflect the barriers that they face.”  
(Plan International, 2018a).

Human rights are universal. They apply equally to everyone. But some communities meet more barriers than others because of structural systems of oppression, including patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, and ageism. To tackle this, the UN developed conventions specific to these communities to describe the action needed to ensure their rights are met and hold nations to account. Two of these conventions are the UNCRC, which focuses on the rights of children, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These conventions should work together to ensure the rights of girls and women at all ages, with overlapping rights to education, health, nationality, protection from violence, and others (Engender, 2020: 6; UNICEF, 2011a).

However, the separate conventions, and the specialised agencies, committees, guidelines, and practices that have developed around them, have separated children's rights and women's rights (UNICEF, 2011b). As a result, girls end up subsumed within the gender-neutral category of “**children**” or become an add-on to the age-neutral category of “**women**” (Plan International, 2018a). This legislative oversight reflects broader systems of power which sideline girls' specific needs as unimportant.

While the UNCRC applies to all children, taking a gender-neutral approach that fails to identify and address girls' specific needs disregards girls' experiences and the discriminations they face, and makes boys' experiences the default.

Similarly, although CEDAW applies to women of all ages, it mentions girls as rights-holders in the section on education only. Women's rights frameworks tend to assume that if women's rights are secured, children's rights will be secured by proxy – or they relegate girls to the status of “**future rights holders**”. The UNICEF report on Women's and Children's Rights: Making the Connection highlights this (UNICEF, 2011b). Again, this reflects broader systems of power in an adult-centric world.

## Where are girls in international rights frameworks? (continued)

International law overlooks girls' rights, failing to protect girls from discrimination and making girls invisible (Plan International, 2018a). When international law does mention girls, it often frames them as victims of violations rather than as rights-holders or agents of change.

Given Scotland's recent significant strides towards embedding human rights in legislation and culture, it is vital to be attentive to the risk that girls are lost between children's and women's rights work. As we draw on international frameworks, we must seek to learn from others' mistakes and ensure girls' rights are realised. We must use legislation to unpick the systems of power which create inequality, rather than incorporating treaties in such a way that they replicate those same systems of power.



# Rights legislation, policy, and practice in Scotland

## Human rights legislation in Scotland

Following years of campaigning by children and young people activists and children's organisations, the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament and will be incorporated into Scots Law. It seeks to ensure all children's rights are realised in Scotland.

However, Scotland's approach thus far suggests there is a risk of following international trends which leave girls behind. The 2012 progress report on implementing UNCRC failed to look at girls or gender equality (Scottish Government, 2012). The UNCRC Strategic Implementation Board (SIB) mentioned gender only twice in its minutes and only in relation to how the Gender Recognition Act might affect the UNCRC Bill's progress and budgeting for children's rights. Although women's organisations were consulted during the Bill's progress through the Scottish Parliament, no organisations advocating specifically for girls were invited to these SIB meetings.

Discussions about UNCRC incorporation have made **"participation"** a particular focus of children's rights work in Scotland. As a result, consultation with children took place in the Scottish Parliament, and the SIB invited young people from Scotland's Children's Parliament to

its meetings (Scottish Government, 2021a). The Scottish Government has commissioned Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) to support the **"Children's Lived Experience Board"** which will help inform the development of the new Human Rights Bill for Scotland. However, there is no evidence that any of the above specifically considered the participation or the experiences of girls.

The above evidence suggests that girls are being left behind in the development of children's rights policy and practice in Scotland.

Just as UNCRC legislation has developed from gender-neutral discourse about children's rights, so too has women's rights work in Scotland developed from age-neutral approaches to women's rights.

For example, in its first two editions, **"Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls,"** said little about girls in their own right, instead framing VAWG as age-neutral. Indeed, the inclusion of girl-specific language in the most recent iteration of Equally Safe was a direct result of advocacy by Zero Tolerance while this report was being written.

# Rights legislation, policy, and practice in Scotland (continued)

As Scotland seeks to incorporate CEDAW as part of the Human Rights Bill, there is a risk that international trends whereby girls are left behind are replicated in Scotland. At the time of writing, there is no clear plan for how the Human Rights Bill and UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill will work together, meaning that girls could easily become lost between the two or have to choose to seek remedy for human rights violations under one Bill or the other, rather than both. Crenshaw's foundational work on intersectionality evidenced the ways in which Black women are left behind when forced to name their oppression as being either racist or sexist, when in fact both systems work together (Crenshaw, 1989). Girls face specific barriers at the intersection of age, gender and other factors, meaning that the separation of human rights protections which ought to be interlocking poses a risk.

A history of gender- and age-neutral policy making, stemming from systems of power which render girls invisible, has shaped the context in which new Scottish human rights legislation is being developed. Currently, legislation is set to leave girls' rights unrealised.

## Working with two systems

Further tension arises from the duplication of systems. The siloed implementation of children's and women's rights leads to separate but overlapping processes and procedures.

Ahead of the UNCRC Bill becoming law, the Scottish Government reviewed non-statutory Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) which aim to measure the impact of proposed laws and policies on children. CRWIAs sit alongside the existing and mandatory Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) designed to assess the impact of a change to services or policy on people with protected characteristics, including women. Little or no attention seems to have been given to how these fit together, despite warnings from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (EHRC, 2020).

The above duties and impact assessments are key levers for ensuring that policy – and its implementation – in Scotland works for everyone, including women and children. Given the separation of these two groups, however, the risk of girls falling between the cracks is replicated here. The levers we have to quality control policymaking do not create specific space to consider girls' needs.



# Rights legislation, policy, and practice in Scotland (continued)

## Gaps, cracks and tensions in policy and practice

A lack of attention to girls has created two separate systems for children's and women's rights. This has resulted in Scottish Government policy continuing to fail to consider girls' specific needs.

This is evident in the following Scottish Government guidance on:

- **Child-rights oriented policies and practices on bullying (Scottish Government, 2017c), preventing school exclusions (Scottish Government, 2017a), and children's online safety (Scottish Government, 2017b),**
- **Mental health provision for children (Scottish Government, 2021b),**
- **Scotland's Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2013),**
- **"The Promise" for supporting care experienced children (The Promise Scotland, 2020),**
- **Supporting children in contact with the justice system (Scottish Government, 2022c),**
- **Strategies for vulnerable groups of adults, such as the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (Scottish Government, 2018b),**
- **Delivery plans for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Scottish Government, 2016).**

Most of these documents are based on principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment of all children. Yet they consistently fail to recognise the needs and experiences of girls and where these differ from those of boys and women (Agenda Alliance, 2022), leading to the needs of boys being prioritised across children's rights' issues.

This lack of focus on girls in children's rights' discourse can doubly marginalise girls who face multiple inequalities. There have been various projects and programmes to support vulnerable groups of children, such as the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) to help young Gypsies/Travellers to stay engaged in education (Scottish Government, 2012); the employment of a Scotland-wide mental health coordinator to support young carers (Scottish Government, 2012); and The Promise, Scotland's "road map" for developing "transformational change" across the care system for children (Improvement Service, 2022). However, there is no evident engagement with girls in these vulnerable groups despite mounting evidence that they have distinct needs for, and responses to, support.

In the following sections, we explore some of the gendered barriers girls face in exercising their rights, and how the gender gaps in, and gender-neutrality of, legislation and policy reinforce these barriers. The evidence shows that not only are girls' rights not being realised, but also that approaches intended to protect children's rights are pushing this realisation further away.

# Girls' right to freedom from violence, harm and abuse

**UNCRC Article 19:** the right to be safe from violence  
**General recommendations 19 and 35 of CEDAW:** on tackling gender-based violence against women

Girls have the right to be safe. In this section we explore whether girls in Scotland are free from violence, harm and abuse, and whether Scottish Government policy is effective in ensuring girls' safety.

## Harassment

- **Safety is one of young girls' top three concerns – and is a slightly greater concern for girls of colour** (Girlguiding UK, 2022).
- **1 in 5 girls aged 14 to 21 experienced public sexual harassment during lockdown, despite significantly reduced time in public spaces** (Plan International UK, 2020).
- **Girls feel less safe as they get older. 20% of 7 to 10-year-olds, 31% of 11 to 16-year-olds, and 43% of 16 to 21-year-olds say they sometimes feel unsafe outside** (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020: 21).

- **In a recent Glasgow-based report, 41% of women and girls said they didn't feel safe going out after dark** (Wise Women et al., 2022).
- **Men who catcall women of colour use both gendered and racial slurs, making women of colour feel unsafe at night, especially those between the ages of 13 and 16** (Zero Tolerance, 2022: 21).
- **80% of young LGBT women report having verbal abuse directed at them because of being a woman or girl** (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2020b).

Many girls are fearful of going out alone and being harassed while in their local area. Street harassment deprives girls of the right to be free from abuse and makes them “**feel less connection to and ownership over public places and that they do not have the same rights to participate in activities outside the home and use public places as their male peers**” (Plan International Australia, 2016: 3). It is therefore clear that Scotland is not realising girls' right to be safe in public spaces.

# Girls' right to freedom from violence, harm and abuse (continued)

## Violence online

- **71% of girls aged between 7 and 21 experienced online harm in 2020** (Girlguiding UK, 2021: 5).
- **Half of girls aged 7 to 10, nearly three quarters of girls aged 11 to 16, and 9 in 10 girls aged 17 to 21 experience violence online** (Girlguiding UK, 2021: 5).
- **Disabled girls, LGBT girls, and girls of colour are even more likely to experience online harm and sexism** (Girlguiding UK, 2022; LGBT Youth Scotland, 2020b; Mental Health Foundation, 2017; Walker and Clark, 2023).

Online, girls experience hate speech; harmful messages about their bodies and appearance; harassment and threats; bullying; sexual images or content; pressure to create and share sexual images; and coercive control through online surveillance. Girls are, therefore, not safe online.

The UK Government Online Safety Act 2023 aims to give Internet platforms a duty of care to their users. However, the original 225-page proposed Bill did not “**mention women, girls or gender a single time**” (EVAW, 2022). As a result of a campaign by End Violence Against Women (EVAW) and Glitch, Ofcom guidance is to be developed on how tech companies should reduce harm to

women and girls as part of the implementation of the Act. This is one example of where a public campaign was necessary in order for women to be considered in policy, and whether girls' safety will be adequately considered remains to be seen.

## Sexual violence and domestic abuse

- **1 in 3 13 to 17-year-old girls said they had experienced some form of sexual violence** (Scottish Government, 2018a).
- **Under 12s are the most likely to experience sexual abuse. 12 to 18-year-olds are the most likely to experience rape, and those most likely to experience harassment are 12 to 24 years old** (Police Scotland, 2023).
- **31% of LGBT girls have experienced sexual violence, including unwanted touching, sexual assault, and rape. 20% have been stalked or harassed by a stranger, and 12% have experienced specifically violent or controlling behaviour from a partner or ex-partner** (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2020b).
- **Girls experience extremely high levels of domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape, and stalking. Young women between 16 and 24 are particularly vulnerable to men's VAWG** (Agenda Alliance, 2022; Scottish Government, 2018a; NHS Health Scotland, 2018).

## Girls' right to freedom from violence, harm and abuse (continued)

When girls experience violence, harassment, and abuse, they are unlikely to report it to the police, and often feel dismissed by other public services. In an LGBT Youth Scotland's survey of young women and girls, 73% of those who experienced incidents of violence, abuse, or harassment did not report these to police. Respondents stated concerns about their experiences not being **"serious enough to report"**, not being taken seriously, being **"outed"**, and a general lack of trust in police and criminal justice (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2020b).

Young British women told the Agenda Alliance that they often **"feel dismissed by services or receive responses suggesting that they are the cause of the problem"** leading them to **"doubt the gravity of the harm that they are experiencing"**, to feel shame, and to blame themselves for any disadvantage and discrimination they experience (Agenda Alliance, 2022). According to NHS Health Scotland, young women are at high risk of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and all forms of abuse – but **"often this can be overlooked or minimised, particularly in their teenage years"** (NHS Health Scotland, 2018).

The above evidence suggests that the already alarmingly high levels of sexual violence and domestic abuse experienced by girls in Scotland are a conservative estimate. Girls not only feel unsafe in Scotland but are experiencing real harm from experiencing harassment, violence and abuse.

### Conclusion

The evidence gathered on harassment, online harm, sexual violence and domestic abuse shows that girls' right to safety is categorically not being realised in Scotland. Girls are unsafe at home, online, and in the street. Until recently, Equally Safe focused almost entirely on adult women, as discussed in the previous section. Likewise, youth violence programmes have focused largely on violence most often experienced by boys, such as knife crime (See: **NoKnivesBetterLives**). Indeed, even programmes which specifically target youth VAWG (See: **Mentors in Violence Prevention**) may be ineffective at tackling the most harmful beliefs which cause VAWG (Lindberg and Billevik, 2023). Future work on women's right to be free from VAWG and children's right to be safe must consider girls' specific needs, the types of violence they experience and what is required to prevent it.

# Girls' right to education

**UNCRC Article 28:** the right to education

**CEDAW Article 10:** ensuring women have equal rights with men in education

Girls have the right to education. In this section we explore whether girls in Scotland are safe and supported enough at school to effectively access this right.

## Violence in schools

- **64% of girls aged 13 to 21 experience sexual harassment at school** (Girlguiding UK, 2021).
- **Almost a fifth of British women aged 18 and over experienced unwanted sexual contact in or around school as young girls** (Plan International UK, 2016: 2).
- **Almost a third of 16 to 18-year-old girls have been subjected to unwanted sexual touching in UK schools (EVAW, 2010).**
- **Over 10% of girls in Scotland say fear of sexual harassment holds them back at school** (Girlguiding UK, 2022).

Fear and experiences of violence are barriers to girls fully realising their right to education. School-related VAWG correlates with lower

academic achievement; can make girls afraid to go to school; and affects their concentration in class and confidence to speak (Plan International UK, 2016). It's likely that most girls do not report the violence they experience to anyone (Plan International UK, 2016). If girls in Scotland are not safe at school, they cannot achieve their full potential, and we are failing to adequately deliver their right to education.

VAWG in school is caused by a culture of gender inequality – both in school and beyond the school gates - which can be perpetuated by broader school policies. Schools where uniform is different for girls and boys (even if not enforced so) can lead to girls wearing styles of uniform that are often more expensive, more restrictive and less comfortable than gender-neutral styles, particularly in hot weather, for playing or for PE lessons. This restricts girls' freedom, perpetuating the gender inequality which causes VAWG. There can be a more punitive response to girls who are seen to contravene uniform policy (including if there are rules about jewellery, makeup, or hairstyles). Girls report that they feel they are subjected to more rules than boys, with checks on heel height and skirt length (CYPCS, 2022b). Rules which control girls' bodies and clothes reinforce the idea that girls are responsible for the reactions of men and boys to their clothes, which contributes to victim-blaming. The everyday fabric of schools in Scotland is creating a conducive context for VAWG to thrive.

School uniform is just one example of school policy influencing

## Girls' right to education (continued)

school culture. Evidence gathered by the End Violence Against Women Coalition notes that sexist behaviour in school, teachers' sexist language, being blamed by teachers for their experiences of harassment (which is more frequently experienced by girls of colour), and the rise of online misogynist influencers all drive a culture where VAWG is allowed to continue. Cultural change, tackling multiple drivers, is essential for effective prevention of VAWG to ensure girls' right to safety is realised in Scotland.



## Girls' right to education (continued)

### Barrier to the right to education: responding to peer violence at school

In the current context, when it comes to responding to VAWG, there is a risk that girl survivors' rights are deprioritised, with the focus instead being on realising the rights of boys who have caused harm. As can be seen from the quotations below, girls and young women who have experienced violence from boys and young men are being further traumatised by institutions' responses. **"Too often such incidents are brushed aside by staff and not taken sufficiently seriously by school leaders"** (Zero Tolerance, cited by The Young Women's Movement, 2018 a).

These testimonies reflect the experiences of many girls in Scotland. Research by the Young Women's Movement found that **"Different schools take different approaches to reporting, and we heard many examples of negative experiences of reporting. These can be caused by students, and sometimes by teachers. We also heard that there can be failure to take reports seriously, or to follow through in a way that supports the victim and allows the victim a say in the process."** (The Young Women's Movement, 2018a).

“I was walking in front of the group of boys who used to bully me when three of them caught up to me and began groping my bum. When I turned around to tell them to stop, they just winked at me and laughed. I told a teacher and she did nothing.” (Everyone's Invited, Scotland, 2023)

“Wherever we go guys stare us down and intimidate us and no one does anything about that.” - S1/S2 girl (Children's Parliament, 2022)

“The teachers say they'll keep an eye on boys that frighten and hassle us, but they never do. The boys just know they can get away with it.” - Primary girl (Children's Parliament, 2022)

## Girls' right to education (continued)

- **64% of girls aged 11 to 16 say that teachers or staff sometimes or always tell girls to ignore sexual harassment** (Girlguiding Scotland, cited by The Young Women's Movement, 2018a)
- **52% say that teachers or staff sometimes or always dismiss this as just a bit of banter – “boys mucking around”** (Girlguiding Scotland, cited by The Young Women's Movement, 2018a)

The failure to take action to address violence, as described by girls, is itself a violation of their rights. Their right to safety has been violated by the person who harmed them, and is then not ensured by the institution which fails to act, which in turn impacts their right to education, as explained in the previous section.

Too often, as can be seen from girls' testimonies below, when institutions do respond to VAWG, they ask girls to move classes or schools to be safe from perpetrators, or when this is not offered girls may remove themselves from education as the only way to feel safe. The right to education does not mean the right to stay in a class with someone you have harmed – but this is how it is being interpreted in Scotland. This means that a boy's right to education is being prioritised above a girl's – even when he has intentionally caused her harm. The impact of this is that girls do not feel safe at school, cannot focus, and are re-traumatised by continued exposure to their perpetrator.

- **“He would choke me, grope me and on one occasion made sexual threats towards my infant younger brother... The school however**

**did practically nothing. I was told to “ignore him” as he continued to try to intimidate me. He was in a majority of my classes... and the school offered to have ME removed from classes and put into different classes which would add even more pressure to adjust to the other teachers so close to my exams... I was made to feel as if it was MY problem and was told, ‘we aren't going to be messing around chopping and changing,’ when I said I would try the changes of my classes as I was desperate to escape his constant harassment.”** (Everyone's Invited, Scotland, 2023)

Institutions tend to focus on the survivor's behaviour rather than that of the perpetrator. There is a reluctance to believe survivors and to place responsibility with perpetrators, or a valuing of a perpetrator's “innocence until proven guilty” more highly than a survivor's safety. Survivors are disbelieved and their stories minimised rather than supported and their claims investigated.

Restorative approaches to harmful and/or distressed behaviour have become ubiquitous in schools (Scottish Government, 2023: 10). Restorative approaches to behaviour and justice focus on collaboratively repairing the harm caused by violence. They often involve a facilitated conversation between the victim and the perpetrator, but do not always. It should be an extended process, led by trauma-informed experts, with accountability and self-led perpetrator consequences at the core. The reality does not always live up to this ideal.



## Girls' right to education (continued)

- **“I think the guidance department needs to improve as well. Add more ways to report some things anonymously. Because when you report something, you get sat in a restorative meeting with that person... Sometimes you don't really want to be put alone in a room with that person.”** S1/S2 girl (Children's Parliament, 2022)

There is a lack of consensus across the women's sector on whether restorative justice is appropriate in the case of VAWG. There are concerns it could be harmful, particularly if victims feel pressured into engaging or if not delivered by those with specialist knowledge of GBV. There is also a recognition that purely punitive approaches rarely repair the harm or prevent further perpetration. Many of the arguments are outlined in an open letter to the Scottish Government from experts in men's violence against women (Monaghan et al., no date.). NASUWT, the teachers' Union, states, **“it is clear that in principle there is no problem with restorative-behaviour practice: like any system, it can be used well or it can be abused, but at the moment, we are hearing too many instances of misuse”** (NASUWT, 2023).

- **“Teachers do not know what to do. Teachers desperately need training on how to respond to sexism and sexual negativity. I repeatedly see teachers simply ignore extremely negative language or class everything as “inappropriate” without being able to give the young person any insight. I have seen boys mime raping girls and just been kept back at lunch for a detention,**

**no explanation given to them...”** - Secondary school teacher (UK Feminista, 2017).

The current context is therefore confusing and complicated for teachers, parents, and students. The many tensions we have outlined require ongoing, transparent and thoughtful discussion about how to enable girls to realise their right to a safe education. Approaches to responding to boys' violence must seek to prevent further violence, and cannot come at the expense of girls' right to justice, safety, healing and education. We cannot continue to allow the complexity of this to be used as an excuse – implicitly or explicitly – for inaction. Inaction on VAWG is in itself a violation of girls' human rights.

## Sexism and misogyny at school

- **71% of 16 to 18-year-olds hear sexual name-calling, with terms such as “slut” or “slag” used towards girls at school on a daily basis or a few times a week** (EVAW, 2010).
- **64% of secondary teachers hear sexist language in school on at least a weekly basis** (UK Feminista, 2017).
- **52% of female students, and a quarter of male students, say they have witnessed someone at their school being treated differently because of their gender** (UK Feminista, 2017).

Girls in Scotland say they face considerable sexism, misogyny, and

## Girls' right to education (continued)

prejudice-based bullying from their peers, which can disrupt their education. This includes misogynistic name-calling; comments about appearance, body-shape or sexual reputation; spreading rumours, and behaviour that can make girls feel demeaned, threatened, or excluded because of their gender, or because they do not conform to harmful gender stereotypes (NUT, 2007: 4–10). Globally, girls with disabilities experience more bullying and teasing from their peers based on both their disability and gender (WEI, 2021).

In a report about prejudice-based bullying in Scottish schools, sexist bullying, or bullying based on gender, was among the least understood forms of bullying (Dennell and Logan, 2015: 65). Many students suggested that bullying based on gender was not as serious or as important as other forms of bullying, and that they would be less willing to report it. The groups of students who were **“very willing”** to report this form of bullying tended to be groups comprising girls only (Dennell and Logan, 2015: 65). Girls have little faith that school systems can tackle sexist or prejudiced-based bullying (NUT, 2007). This is felt even more strongly by girls of colour (NUT, 2007).

“

“Victims [of sexist bullying] experience fear, anxiety and stress, loss of dignity, humiliation and low self-esteem. The threat that this poses to victims' health and wellbeing and on their educational outcomes, is undeniable” (EIS, 2016)

Therefore, the evidence suggests that misogynistic cultures within schools in Scotland are not creating supportive environments for girls to thrive, explore, and learn. These cultures inhibit girls from fully accessing their right to education. Indeed, respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying charity, found that gender-based bullying, if unchallenged, **“may escalate into more abusive behaviours towards girls and others who do not conform to gender norms”** (respectme, cited by Dennell and Logan, 2015).

### Gender stereotypes

- **1 in 5 girls aged between 11 and 21 say that gender stereotypes hold them back in school** (Girlguiding UK, 2022).
- **37% of LGBT girls say that gender stereotypes hold them back in school, compared to 15% of non-LGBT girls** (Girlguiding UK, 2022).
- **At age 14, Scottish girls are more likely than boys to say that they feel “a lot” of pressure or “quite a lot” of pressure from schoolwork, that they “never” misbehave or cause trouble in class, and that they have skipped school** (Scottish Government, 2022b).
- **43% of girls believe there are certain subjects they are expected to take because they are girls. Those over 16 are much more likely to feel this pressure** (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020: 22).

Subject choice in Scotland is highly gendered, with girls feeling pressured to conform to gendered expectations regarding subject choice. This pressure intensifies as girls get older, with over half of girls aged 11 to 21 saying that science, technology, engineering, and

## Girls' right to education (continued)

mathematics (STEM) subjects are seen as being for boys, compared to only 13% of girls aged 7 to 10. Girls, particularly LGBT girls, are often teased for liking STEM subjects (Girlguiding UK, 2021).

Teachers can reinforce stereotypes by expecting girls to be quiet and studious, and good at reading, language, and the arts, and assuming boys are stronger at maths and sciences (Cuevas-Parra et al., 2016: 20).

Classroom materials from early years often perpetuate stereotypical roles for girls, and frequently exclude disabled girls, girls of colour, and LGBT girls altogether (Zero Tolerance, 2021).

Gender stereotypes and a lack of action to tackle them are inhibiting girls' right to education. Gendered expectations and assumptions limit girls' choices, the quality of education they receive, and their experience of school. While this is increasingly acknowledged in relation to girls' access to STEM subjects and careers, it is important

to note that girls have a right to education in and of itself and deserve to be supported to access all kinds of subjects. This has importance and value now, while they are girls, and not only in terms of their position as potential future 'women in STEM.'

### Conclusion

Girls have a right to education. But they face many barriers to exercising this right, especially if they face additional oppressions. Such barriers go unnoticed if policy focuses on women and children separately. To ensure girls' right to education, policy drawing on UNCRC and CEDAW in Scotland must consider girls' needs and prevent the violence in schools, gender stereotypes, and misogyny that limit their education.



# Girls' right to play

**UNCRC Article 31:** the right to relax, play and have fun

**CEDAW Article 13:** the right to participate in recreation, sports and culture

Girls have the right to play. In this section we explore whether girls in Scotland are able to play in a way which feels safe, free and joyful.

## Gender stereotypes in play

- **98% of parents in Scotland agree that play is good for a child's sense of wellbeing (FitzGibbon and Dodd, 2023).**
- **96% of parents agree that it helps children become more confident (FitzGibbon and Dodd, 2023).**
- **Around 1 in 5 (21%) of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say some sports are available only to boys (Girlguiding UK, 2022).**

Play Scotland defines play as, **“what I do when everyone else has stopped telling me what to do”**. Play takes place inside and outside the home, in formal park spaces, and informal green spaces.

Girls feel constrained by gender stereotypes from a very young age including gendered toys and play equipment, gendered clothing, and adults' attitudes towards what is appropriate for boys and girls (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020; Zero Tolerance, 2021).



**Data gap:** There are no specific statistics about girls' right to access play in Scotland.

Girls are often expected to undertake caring and domestic tasks in place of play when boys are not (Button, 2014: 15) and to watch from the sidelines (Women In Sport, 2021). These limit girls' access to play options, **“make it harder for girls...to be themselves,”** and ultimately place limits on career and educational aspirations (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020: 12).

There are various programmes and resources available in Scotland to support play which consider the impact of gender, including work produced by The Care Inspectorate and Zero Tolerance. However, this work is often restricted to early learning and care settings, with a particular focus on nurseries within schools, rather than informal play spaces.

## Girls' right to play (continued)

### Spaces are designed for boys

- **Research in Glasgow found that only 20% of girls felt very comfortable in their choice of park (Walker and Clark, 2023).**
- **27% of young women said their enjoyment of nature had been affected by sexual harassment (Walker and Clark, 2023).**
- **There are at least eight times as many organised boys' football teams as girls' teams in Scotland (Walker and Clark, 2023).**

As well as primary school playgrounds dominated by football pitches, spaces designed for teenagers are oriented towards boys. Facilities such as skate parks, fenced pitches, multi-use games areas and BMX tracks are almost universally dominated by teenage boys (Walker and Clark, 2023). These facilities are seen as meeting the needs of all young people. In practice they meet boys' needs, with girls (including girl skateboarders and BMXers) feeling unwelcome, that the space is not for them, and that the facilities are aligned with boys' interests (Walker and Clark, 2023). Boys dominate games pitches and are likely to exclude girls from informal kickabouts (Walker and Clark, 2023), meaning that even although all children should be equally able to engage in all activities, in reality girls are made to feel unwelcome.



**“Teenage girls have nowhere to go and nothing to do,”**  
- (Walker and Clark, 2023)

This failure of parks in fulfilling girls' needs is due to the lack of gendered analysis when play areas are designed and evaluated (Walker and Clark, 2023). Designers of our public spaces, whilst likely considering children's rights when designing play spaces, are not considering the specific needs of girls. This is inhibiting girls' right to play.

### Risk and safety

- **43% of girls and young women don't feel safe outside alone in Scotland (Girlguiding UK, 2022).**
- **Across the UK, 79% of LGBTQ+ girls and young women saw or experienced sexism in public places, compared to 65% of those who don't identify as LGBTQ+ (Girlguiding UK, 2022).**

Risk, both real and perceived, plays a role in limiting girls' access to public play areas. Girls feel like they do not have the same opportunities as boys to develop skills and learn by being outdoors in nature (Girlguiding Scotland, 2023). Young Women Lead research in Glasgow found that just 20% of 214 young participants felt very comfortable in their chosen park (YWM, 2021). The young women and non-binary people taking part cited heightened risk of assault,

## Girls' right to play (continued)

harassment, abduction or even murder as well as inadequate lighting, and increased use of alcohol and drugs by other people in the park as reasons for their discomfort (YWN, 2021).

Even though girls say experiencing nature makes them happy, one in six hardly spend time outdoors, with more than three quarters saying they would like greater opportunities to be outdoors, have adventures and try new things (Girlguiding Scotland, 2023). This is amplified for girls of colour and girls in areas of high deprivation who are less likely to spend time outdoors than their peers.

Parents' and carers' perceptions of risk inform what they allow girls to do. Girls are generally expected to play in closer proximity to adults than boys, and boys are more likely to be allowed out without an adult than girls, at all age ranges (Button, 2014). This appears to be particularly true for young Asian women who "experience considerable restrictions on their access to public recreation and play facilities due to fear of unaccompanied travel, rape, and attack" (Button, 2014).

Children from Gypsy/Traveller communities struggle to access safe public play spaces, particularly when their communities are subject to eviction (Button, 2014). One Gypsy/Traveller site had access to play facilities only via a two-mile walk along a muddy, unlit path (Scottish Government's Equal Opportunities Committee, 2013).

Again, girls' specific needs are not being considered in the design of public spaces, which is limiting their access to their right to play. This is compounded by real and perceived risk of experiencing VAWG – showing again the way in which girls' right to safety interlinks closely with other rights.

### Sport

- **43% of teenage girls who once considered themselves "sporty" disengage from sport following primary school. A fear of feeling judged by others (68%), lack of confidence (61%), pressures of schoolwork (47%), and not feeling safe outside (43%) were some of the reasons given for not wanting to participate (Women in Sport, 2022).**
- **56% of young women pupils were put off sport due to a lack of body confidence (YWM, 2019).**
- **58% of girls say they see sexism in professional sport (like the Olympics or Paralympics), and 59% of girls say they see or experience sexism when taking part themselves (Girlguiding UK, 2022).**

As with other forms of play, girls' access to sport is highly affected by gender stereotyping. Girls lack choice in sport and physical activity at their school.

## Girls' right to play (continued)

Girls told Girlguiding Scotland that this “gets worse as they get older” (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020).

“I hated being in a class with boys. They would make fun of the girls and stare at our breasts and bums. It was even worse in swimming. They would never pass the ball to us when we did sports, and they excluded us” - (YWM, 2019).

“At school it was so sexist and gender specific. I missed out greatly doing the sports I wanted to do – rugby and football. If I tried to play them, I suffered terrible bullying and abuse from both kids and teachers.”- (YWM, 2019).

Societal expectations and judging of girls' bodies impede girls' engagement in sport. Several young women who participated in the Young Women's Movement's (YWM, 2019) research reported enjoying swimming when they were younger, but that self-consciousness meant they had stopped.

## Gaming

- 30% of girls over 16 have experienced sexist comments when playing games online (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020).
- 19% of girls said they'd been told they can't play certain games because they're a girl (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020).
- 44% of girls aged 7 to 10 have had strangers message them or send them friend requests when they play games online (Girlguiding UK, 2023).

According to Girlguiding Scotland, more than half of all girls in Scotland enjoy playing games online, but “many said their fun is being spoiled by the fact that many games are sexist and reinforce gender stereotypes” and that they experience discrimination and sexist comments from the gaming community (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020: 13).

## Conclusion

Girls experience barriers to their right to play from birth to 18. This includes restrictive gender roles and stereotyping that limit choice of play, sexism in the design of play space, and lack of safety. Adequate attention to girls' specific needs is required if girls are to exercise their right to play.

# Girls' right to health

**UNCRC Article 24:** the right to the best possible standard of health, and good healthcare, food and water

**CEDAW Article 12:** the right to non-discrimination in healthcare, including access to reproductive healthcare

Girls have the right to health. In this section we explore how healthy girls in Scotland are, and whether they can access high quality healthcare when they need it.

## Mental health

- 89% of girls and young women between 7 and 21 feel generally worried or anxious (Girlguiding UK, 2023).
- Girls' happiness has been in decline over the past decade (particularly for girls aged between 7 and 10) (Girlguiding UK, 2021: 6).
- Girls in Scotland are the least likely in the UK to say they are happy with their lives (Girlguiding UK, 2021: 6).
- In a survey of 14-year-olds of all genders in Scotland in 2022, girls were more likely than boys to say they had felt depressed, had felt down on themselves, had thought about death a lot, had hurt themselves on purpose, and were "not very happy" with how they



**Data gap:** Lack of information and data on disabled girls' and minority ethnic girls' mental health

looked (Scottish Government, 2022b: 54–63).

- A Mental Health Foundation report found that young women are more than three times as likely as young men to experience common mental health problems, with young women (aged between 16 and 24) more likely to experience anxiety-related conditions, trauma, eating disorders, self-harm and suicidal thoughts than young men (Mental Health Foundation, 2017: 3).

Good mental health (or the lack of it) is of huge concern to girls in Scotland.

UK-wide, the Mental Health Foundation has found a backwards trend in policy and service focus on the mental health issues affecting young women. It states, "Initiatives in the early noughties included efforts to address domestic violence, and framed their work in terms of a broader effort for equality across a number of socio-economic dimensions" (Mental Health Foundation, 2017).

It also states, "Today, however, there is little attention to the effects of other inequalities on girls' mental health. Policy documents do not discuss the role of domestic violence or the additional



## Girls' right to health (continued)

challenges faced by women and girls who are Black, Asian and racially marginalised, LGBT, living in poverty, homeless, with long-term conditions, NEET, young mothers, those with experience of trauma and those in prison" (Mental Health Foundation, 2017: 19). It notes that in Scotland there is widespread attention to children but little mention of mental health for women and girls (Mental Health Foundation, 2017: 19).

This shows that despite the extremely high rates of mental illness among girls, they are being left behind in actions on mental health.

### Girls are seen as attention seeking when accessing mental healthcare

- 2000 young women were asked about their experiences of seeking mental health support; 33% reported being asked if they were "overthinking things", 22% feared being seen as "attention seeking", and 20% had been asked if they were on their period (Hussen, 2023; CALM 2023).
- 79% of women under 25 who died by suicide were previously assessed as low risk and as a result, did not receive help which could have been life-saving (CALM, 2023).
- Young women 24 years and under saw the largest increase in the suicide rate since our time series began in 1981 (ONS, 2022).

The literature indicates that girls who do speak up about their experiences or feelings tend to be branded – and dismissed – as "attention seeking". Adult representatives from the women's sector told the Alliance that girls seeking mental health support can be portrayed by peers and adults as being "drama queens" or their concerns put down to "hormones" (Alliance, 2020). This appears to be particularly the case for young women who are care experienced or in contact with the justice system.

In her study about girls in the care and criminal justice systems, Fitzpatrick found that, historically, female victims of sexual abuse were variously described by juvenile justice professionals as "manipulative", "hysterical" and "difficult to engage" and that care-experienced girls "may be less likely to be perceived as genuine victims" (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Fitzpatrick argues that the impact of these attitudes on girls' rights is severe, leading not only to a denial of victimhood, but, also, potentially, to unnecessary criminalisation (Fitzpatrick, 2017: 1).

Gender stereotypes about the "unwieldy" emotions of girls are allowing practitioners to ignore girls' mental health needs, meaning that their right to mental healthcare is not met.

## Girls' right to health (continued)

### Physical healthcare

- **40% of young women rated their experiences of accessing healthcare as just “okay,” 17% rated their experiences as mostly bad and a further 8% rated it as mostly awful (YWM, 2023: 3).**
- **Young trans women respondents were 57% more likely to rate their experience of accessing healthcare negatively compared to young cisgender women (YWM, 2023: 21).**

Girls report specific difficulties accessing physical healthcare in Scotland. Barriers include:

- **Being dismissed and not being taken seriously by medical professionals.**
- **Being made to feel guilty for asking for help.**
- **Inaccessibility of appointment booking, particularly for young women with caring responsibilities or neurodivergent young women.**
- **Issues with waiting times and “one size fits all” approaches often meaning those with long-term health conditions having to start at the beginning again for each referral (YWM, 2023; Alliance, 2020).**

Girls felt strongly that their negative experiences were both because they were young and because of their gender. “...this sentiment of discrimination and bias due to characteristics was echoed by young women with intersecting identities and experiences” (YWM, 2023: 19).

With women's health and children's health having their own specialisms within medicine, girls are falling between the two and their right to healthcare is not being adequately realised.

### Reproductive rights

- **Nearly 50% of young women had never tried to get an appointment for STI testing at a GP surgery (54.8%) or sexual health clinic (48.7%) (Ruth Lewis et al, 2021: 39) (Survey of 2005 young people aged 16-24 living in Scotland of which 56% were women).**
- **A 2022 survey of Scottish young people found that 21% of girls aged 15 reported that they had sex, just 75 girls of those surveyed (HSBC, 2022: 65 & 67).**
- **48% of young women in rural Scotland said free condoms were not easily accessible locally and 38% responded that they did not know if they were easily accessible (54% of 473 respondents identified as young women, and were aged between 13-18 years old) (MacGilleEathain et al, 2023).**

Inadequate access to information and education is a barrier to girls' reproductive rights. Reproductive rights and sexual health are associated with adequate and high-quality sex education (Maslowski et al, 2023; HSBC, 2022).

LGBT young women have reported difficulty in getting suitable information about sexual health, relationships, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2020b).

## Girls' right to health (continued)

Engender found that **“access to [sexual health] education issues are even more pronounced for particular groups of disabled women and girls, including those with multiple impairments, those who live in poverty or are homeless, and those in institutional care, juvenile and correctional facilities”** and that **“access to information for many girls with severe impairments is completely controlled by paid or unpaid carers”** (Engender, 2018). Stereotypes about women and girls with disabilities not being sexually active, nor needing sexual and reproductive health information, makes their exclusion from receiving adequate sexual health education more likely (WEI, 2021).

This withholding of information limits the ability of disabled girls with multiple vulnerabilities to fully exercise their reproductive rights and increases their vulnerability to sexual violence and abuse.

Another group experiencing barriers in accessing reproductive health is young mothers, who **“seem more wary of seeking formal support, and less sure about who to ask for advice”** (Scottish Government, 2014). This wariness, likely caused by the social stigma surrounding teenage parenthood, can act as a barrier for young women wishing to seek support and advice about sex, relationships, and healthcare. However, programmes such as the Family Nurse Partnership have been positively evaluated for building supportive relationships with young women and their children (Scottish Government, 2019c).

CEDAW is the only international human rights treaty to mention reproductive rights. Access to abortion and contraception is therefore subsumed under women's rights. We see this in how attempts to improve access to abortion healthcare and contraceptives in Scotland are described in terms of women's healthcare, rather than girls' rights. This can lead to the specific needs of girls and young women being missed. We must ensure that girls can easily exercise their reproductive rights too.

### Conclusion

Girls' rights to health are hindered by difficulties in accessing physical and reproductive health services; a dearth of relevant relationship and sex education; and girls' concerns and health needs being dismissed. Health policy must specifically address girls' needs.

# Girls' right to participation and voice

**UNCRC Article 12:** the right to be listened to and taken seriously

**CEDAW Article 7:** the right to participate equally in public and political life

Girls have the right to participate in public life and be listened to. In this section we explore whether girls in Scotland are listened to and taken seriously.

## Girls are not being listened to

- **53% of 11- to 21-year-olds said that older people don't listen to people their age nor respect their opinions (Girlguiding Scotland, 2020).**
- **A survey of 14-year-olds found that boys were around 10% more likely to say it was "always true" that adults "pay attention to me" and "listen to what I have to say" (Scottish Government, 2022b: 24).**
- **Half (50%) of girls and young women aged 7-21 have been patronised or made to feel stupid because they're a girl, compared to 46% in 2013 (Girlguiding, 2023).**

Children of all genders and ages express frustration at not being respected or listened to (Together, 2023). Together's **"Rights Detectives"** have found frustrations with **"adults repeatedly [asking children] the same questions but [doing] little with what they have heard"** (Together, 2022).

LGBT children report not feeling listened to about access to services and issues they face at school. Children of colour say that their experiences are often overlooked by **"adults who did not have lived experience of the issues under discussion"** (Together, 2022).

Literature on the experiences of girls suggests that they feel similar frustrations and that these are exacerbated by their gender. A recurring theme is girls feeling like they are not taken seriously and that their experiences are minimised – because they are girls (Girlguiding, 2023). For example, when girls had shared their experiences of sexism with adults (including women) they felt their experiences were minimised and dismissed (Children's Parliament, 2022). This report has already explored how this affects girls' access to healthcare; their access to support and justice following GBV; and their lack of protection from such violence.

Feeling dismissed or silenced actively bars girls, not only from receiving the services they need, but also from being able to make **"meaningful contributions to securing change in these areas"** (Plan International UK, 2016). In a study of inequalities faced by girls

## Girls' right to participation and voice (continued)

and women in Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland, Marcus found **"everyday silencing"** and individual and collective voices **"disqualified"** (Marcus, 2019).

Therefore, girls right to be listened to is not being realised. This is a challenge for all children, but more so for girls, and specific actions are required.

### Failure to engage girls

- **73% of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 think there should be more opportunities for young people to be involved in politics and decision-making (Girlguiding UK, 2020: 15).**
- **Nearly 45% of 29,000 girls and women aged 15-24 think politicians fail to understand their views. For minority ethnic, disabled and LGBTQ+ girls and young women, this figure rises to 59% (Plan International, 2022: 29).**

Guidance for decision makers on participatory work, such as the Children's Commissioner's **'Seven Golden Rules of Participation'** and Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board's **principles for participation and engagement**, has considered children who experience different forms of inequality and how this could affect their participation in policy making. However, whilst there is brief mention of gender, there has been little regard for girls' specific needs for meaningful participation.

When the Equalities and Human Rights Committee consulted with children on **"Making Children's Rights the Law"** they engaged with many groups of young people: children under 12; young people 12 to 18; young carers; young refugees and asylum-seekers; young minority ethnic people; children with additional support needs; children who don't live with their parents; LGBTI young people; and young people who have experience of the youth justice system. They did not seek girls' specific views (Equalities and Human Rights Committee, 2020). The above suggests that when children do participate, little analysis is provided about girls' experiences.

Therefore, despite efforts to listen to women and children in politics, girls continue to be ignored, meaning that the issues which matter most to them will not be adequately tackled.

### Political participation and representation

- **Despite making up 52% of the population, women in Scotland make up only 25% of public board chairs, 35% of MSPs and 29% of councillors (Women 50:50, 2023).**
- **Girls are interested in politics, with more signing petitions, speaking up, posting online, supporting campaigns on social media, taking part in protests, and writing to members of parliament now than in 2018 (Girlguiding UK, 2023).**

## Girls' right to participation and voice (continued)

- **Girls reported being active across a range of social and political areas, and over two-thirds of survey respondents said they would like more opportunities to engage in politics (THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENTb, 2018: 66).**

The right to participate includes the right to political participation and to be heard by decision makers. Girls express frustration at the lack of women in politics and the limited diversity in the representation of women, particularly young women, disabled women, women of colour, and working-class women (THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENTb, 2018: 24). They say this **"contributes to a sense of not being heard, understood or represented sufficiently in politics and policies"** (THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENTb, 2018: 24).

**"As a young and disabled woman of colour I am not represented at all in politics in Scotland" - "**(THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENTb, 2018: 24).

Girlguiding reports that disproportionate criticism of women leaders and women in politics affects girls' aspirations (Girlguiding UK, 2020).

Therefore, despite girls' clear interest in politics, they do not feel listened to. Women leaders are seen as sufficient for representing girls, showing how a focus on women's rights can often leave girls behind.

### Conclusion

Failure to listen to girls or to engage them in policy development and willingness to dismiss their concerns impedes girls' rights to participation and voice. By focusing on women's and children's participation, girls are ignored.



# Conclusion and recommendations

## 'Making rights real' for girls

Done well, the forthcoming implementation of the UNCRC, and CEDAW's inclusion in the Human Rights Bill, could secure girls' human rights in Scotland.

However, there are substantial barriers that prevent girls from realising their rights. Emerging and evolving legislation, policy, and practice do little to address the specific experiences of girls.

Girls are falling through the cracks between the dominant discourses of children's rights and women's rights. Their rights to education, play, health and participation are not being realised. As discussed throughout this report, girls' right to safety underpins all other rights, with their fear and experiences of violence playing a role in all other human rights violations.

For legislation to be transformational and child-centred, it must consider gender, including how it overlaps with other characteristics and life experiences, such as children with care experience, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups (Children's Parliament, 2019). Together (Scotland's Alliance for Children's Rights) make it clear that "decision makers should do more to identify children whose rights are at risk and then speak with these children to find out what they need" (Together, 2022: 5).

Girls need gender-sensitive approaches to make their rights real. They need "targeted actions" to resolve "the particular and intersecting challenges of gender- and age-based inequality" (Plan International, 2018a). Policy makers and practitioners must understand and address this double discrimination. Policy makers need to make specific space for girls within women's and children's rights work. Urgent action is required so that realising children's rights and women's rights means realising girls' rights too.

# Conclusion and recommendations (continued)

## Recommendations:

What decision makers need to do to take an intersectional, gender-sensitive approach to embedding the UNCRC in Scotland

We call on decision makers and duty bearers in Scotland to:

### **1. Collect disaggregated data across all areas of children's rights, and analyse the intersections between gender, age, and other protected characteristics**

We do not know enough about marginalised girls' experiences of safety, education, play, and participation in Scotland.

- **Girl-specific indicators should be developed within the existing child's rights indicators and happiness indicators within the National Performance Framework.**
- **More data must be collected on girls' participation, sexist incidents and bullying and VAWG in schools, and how girls are using public spaces.**

### **2. Use gender-specific language to make girls visible**

Girls' rights should be considered explicitly and meaningfully.

- **Policymakers should name the specific harms and risks that girls are particularly exposed to in realising their rights and "consistently use the strongest and most progressive agreed language available that enables the advancement of girls' rights" (Plan International 2018a).**

### **3. Ensure gender specialists are involved in decisions on all aspects of children's rights policy**

- **Whether within civil society organisations or statutory bodies, there should be a dedicated member of staff in each department who focuses on gender. This could be achieved by targeted recruitment of gender analysts, and regular and comprehensive training of existing staff on intersectional gender analysis.**
- **Gender specialists should be recruited to any work on children and young people policy and rights, to help ensure the application of an intersectional, gender-sensitive lens. For example, Rights Respecting Schools should examine how gender interacts with children's ability to realise their rights. Planning for play should explore how local communities can create girl-friendly activities and spaces (for example, girl-only afternoons in multi-use public play areas).**

### **4. Prioritise consulting and engaging with girls and consider how dynamics of gender should apply to participation goals and projects**

The needs of specific girls should be prioritised to enable all girls to participate.

- **There should be meaningful financial and non-financial support for girls' organisations and groups, particularly those working with disabled girls, LGBT girls, girls of colour, and girls experiencing poverty.**



## Conclusion and recommendations (continued)

- Education establishments should develop pupil groups that focus on ending girls' inequality. These groups should be supported to co-develop gender-sensitive policy and practice for their school reflecting the experiences and needs of girls.
  - Education establishments should encourage girls' participation in developing policies relating to bullying, harmful behaviour, and play and recreation. This means girl-only spaces; supporting and developing girls' skills so they can take part; and accessible, fun, and age-appropriate activities to ensure participation is meaningful and beneficial to the girls involved.
- 5. Support and fund organisations working with girls and identify ways to support vulnerable groups of girls**
- Support girls who experience specific harms and marginalisation to engage in realising girl's rights. This includes care-experienced girls, Gypsy/Traveller girls, refugee girls, LGBT girls and girls with disabilities.
- 6. Ensure that incorporation of different human rights treaties is mutually reinforcing, with a focus on girls' rights across all legislation**
- The UNCRC and CEDAW should be incorporated so that they are mutually reinforcing, with girls protected by both treaties and empowered to seek justice for discrimination on the grounds of both age and gender.
- EQIAs and CRWIAs should be completed together, and mainstreamed across all policy areas, to ensure specific consideration of the potential impact on girls.
  - Age- and- gender-sensitive support should be offered for girls to seek justice and retribution for human rights' violations.
  - Training and guidance for public bodies and practitioners on incorporating human rights treaties should include understanding the interdependency of human rights' frameworks and be informed by an intersectional, gendered analysis.
- 7. Support training and education to understand and implement children's rights from a gendered perspective**
- Increase investment in capacity building for practitioners, policy makers, and decision makers so they understand girls' rights and apply a gender-sensitive approach to implementing the UNCRC. This means that training programmes, including in-service and development opportunities, should take account of children's rights and girls' rights.

# References

**Agenda Alliance (2022) Pushed Out Left Out Girls Speak: Final report.** Available at: [https://www.agendaalliance.org/documents/128/Girls\\_Speak\\_-\\_Pushed\\_Out\\_Left\\_Out\\_-\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.agendaalliance.org/documents/128/Girls_Speak_-_Pushed_Out_Left_Out_-_Full_Report.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Alliance (2020) Gender Equality and Mental Health Satellite Wee Circle.** Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NACWG-Satellite-Wee-Circle-Spotlight-on-Mental-Health-Report-181220.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Button, D. (2014) Inclusive Play in Scotland: Context, Concepts and Current Research.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2015/10/scotlands-play-strategy-playing-quality-equality-review-inclusive-play-scotland/documents/inclusive-play-scotland-context-concepts-current-research/inclusive-play-scotland-context-concepts-current-research/govscot%3Adocument/00488164.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) The Signs Women are Struggling are Going Unseen.** Available at: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/unseen-signals/meet-the-people-fighting-for-change> (Accessed 7 December 2023).

**Children 1st (2020) Response to Equalities and Human Rights Committee's Call for Evidence on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill.** Available at: <https://www.children1st.org.uk/media/w3kd0k2m/children-1st-response-to-uncrc-bill-oct-2020-002.pdf>. (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Children's Parliament (2022) Gender Equality in Education and Learning. A Theory of Change Model.** Available at: <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/gender-equality-education-learning/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Children's Parliament (2019) "It's One of Your Rights to Know Your Rights!" Report on the Children's Parliament Consultation on the Progressing Children's Rights in Scotland Action Plan 2018–2021.** Available at: <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CRiS-Childrens-Parliament-Report-for-web-2019.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Crenshaw, Kimberle, (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.**

## References (continued)

**Cuevas-Parra, P., Stephano, M. and Zhu, Y. (2016) Unpacking Gender Equality Approach to Children's Participation. World Vision.** Available at: [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/WV-Unpacking-Gender-Equality-Approach-to-Children-Participation%2028.11.2016%20FINAL\\_1.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/WV-Unpacking-Gender-Equality-Approach-to-Children-Participation%2028.11.2016%20FINAL_1.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Cuevas-Parra, P., Stephano, M. and Zhu, Y. (2016) Unpacking Gender Equality Approach to Children's Participation. World Vision.** Available at: [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/WV-Unpacking-Gender-Equality-Approach-to-Children-Participation%2028.11.2016%20FINAL\\_1.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/WV-Unpacking-Gender-Equality-Approach-to-Children-Participation%2028.11.2016%20FINAL_1.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**CYPCS (2022a) Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility.** Available at: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/positions/age-of-criminal-responsibility/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**CYPCS (2022b) Statutory School Uniform Consultation.** Available at: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/resources/stat-school-uniform/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Dennell, B. L. and Logan, C. (2015) Prejudice-based Bullying in Scottish Schools: A Research Report. Equality and Human Rights Commission.** Available at: [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/prejudice-based\\_bullying\\_in\\_scottish\\_schools\\_research\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/prejudice-based_bullying_in_scottish_schools_research_report_0.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Disabled Children's Partnership (2021) Then There Was Silence.** Available at: <https://disabledchildrenpartnership.org.uk/then-there-was-silence/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Educational Institute of Scotland (2016), Get it Right for Girls.** Available at: <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/equality/Gender/Get%20it%20Right%20for%20Girls%202016%20WEB.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2010) YouGov Poll Exposes High Levels Sexual Harassment in Schools.** Available at: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/yougov-poll-exposes-high-levels-sexual-harassment-in-schools/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2022) Women and Girls Failed by Government Online Safety Bill.** Available at: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/women-girls-failed-governments-online-safety-bill/#:~:text=While%20parliamentary%20committees%20working%20on,or%20gender%20a%20single%20time> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2023) It's #AboutTime: A Whole School Approach to Ending Violence Against Women & Girls – Mapping Report.** Available at <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FINAL-About-Time-WSA-report-140723.pdf> (Accessed: 31 January 2024)

## References (continued)

**Engender (2018) Our Bodies, Our Rights: Identifying and Removing Barriers to Disabled Women's Reproductive Rights in Scotland.**

Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/our-bodies,-our-rights-identifying-and-removing-barriers-to-disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-in-scotland.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Engender (2020) Engender Submission of Evidence to the Equality and Human Rights Committee Call for Evidence on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation)**

**(Scotland) Bill.** Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-submission-of-evidence-EHRiC-UNCRC.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Engender (no date) Engender Submission to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee (EHRiC) for Scoping Session on Bullying and Harassment of Children and Young People in Schools.** Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-submission-on-bullying-and-harassment-in-schools.pdf> (Accessed: 3 November 2023).

**Equalities and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) (2020) Official Report Cols 28-9, 19 November 2020.**

**Everyone's Invited (2023) Survivor Testimonies.** Available at: <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/read> (Accessed: 6 December 2023).

**Fitzpatrick, C. (2017) "What Do We Know About Girls in the Care and Criminal Justice Systems?", Safer Communities, 16(3), pp. 134-143.**

**FitzGibbon, L. and Dodd, H. (2023) The State of Play in Scotland.**

Available at: [PS00105-PS-State-of-Play-in-Scotland-2023-Digital-links.pdf](https://www.playscotland.org/PS00105-PS-State-of-Play-in-Scotland-2023-Digital-links.pdf) ([playscotland.org](https://www.playscotland.org)) (Accessed: 30 January 2024).

**Fitzpatrick, C. (2022) "Challenging Perceptions of Care-Experienced Girls and Women", Prison Service Journal, 258, pp. 19-24.**

**Girlguiding Scotland (2018) Girls in Scotland 2018.** Available

at: <https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Girls-in-Scotland-survey-2018.pdf> (Accessed 2 November 2023).

**Girlguiding Scotland (2019) Call for Views on the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill: Submission from Girlguiding Scotland** [https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Period\\_Products\\_Bill\\_2019\\_Girlguiding\\_Scotland.pdf](https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Period_Products_Bill_2019_Girlguiding_Scotland.pdf) (Accessed 2 November 2023).

**Girlguiding Scotland (2020) Girls in Scotland 2020.** Available

at: [https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GGS\\_GirlsInScotland\\_2020.pdf](https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GGS_GirlsInScotland_2020.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

## References (continued)

**Girlguiding Scotland (2023) Own Our Zone.** Available at: <https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/for-volunteers/how-to-run-your-unit/challenge-badges/speak-out-campaign-2023-own-our-zone/> (Accessed 2 November 2023).

**Girlguiding UK (2021) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2021.** Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2021-report.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Girlguiding UK (2022) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022.** Available at: [https://girlguiding.foleon.com/girls-attitudes-survey/2022-report/?\\_gl=1\\*1q3jfb2\\*\\_ga\\*MTkyNDg2MzE1MS4xNjk0OTgxMDYw\\*\\_ga\\_65D-J53B2C2\\*MTY5NDk4MTA2MC4xLjEuMTY5NDk4MTI4NC4wLjAuMA](https://girlguiding.foleon.com/girls-attitudes-survey/2022-report/?_gl=1*1q3jfb2*_ga*MTkyNDg2MzE1MS4xNjk0OTgxMDYw*_ga_65D-J53B2C2*MTY5NDk4MTA2MC4xLjEuMTY5NDk4MTI4NC4wLjAuMA) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Girlguiding UK (2023) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2023.** Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2023.pdf> (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

**HSBC (2022) Findings from the HSBC 2022 Survey in Scotland.** Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C-L09FsnATKeKMSdn-rU5UCKJvOfthESa/view?pli=1> (Accessed: 25 January 2024).

**Htun, M. and Jensenius, F. R. (2020) 'Fighting Violence Against Women: Laws Norms and Challenges Ahead', Daedalus, Vol. 49, No. 1, Women and Equality, pp. 144-159.**

**Hussen, D. A. (2023) Young Women Seeking Mental Health Help called "Dramatic", UK Survey Finds.** Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/17/young-women-seeking-mental-health-help-called-dramatic-uk-survey-finds> (Accessed 7 December 2023).

**Improvement Service (2022) Tackling Inequalities, Trauma and Adversity across the Lifespan: Mapping Cross-Cutting Agendas.** Available at: [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0032/38579/Tackling-Inequalities-Across-Lifespan.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0032/38579/Tackling-Inequalities-Across-Lifespan.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Improvement Service (2023) Understanding Child Poverty as a Children's Rights Issue: Introductory Paper.** Available at: [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/42114/Understanding-Child-Poverty-as-a-Childrens-Rights-Issue-v2-Jan-2024.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/42114/Understanding-Child-Poverty-as-a-Childrens-Rights-Issue-v2-Jan-2024.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Kelly, L., Lovett, J. and Regan L. (2005) A Gap or a Chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases. Home Office Research Study 293.** Available at: <https://equation.org.uk/product/a-gap-or-a-chasm-attrition-in-reported-rape-cases/> (11 December 2023).

## References (continued)

**Konstantoni, K., Kustatscher, M., Emejulu, A. and Sime, D. (2014) Intersectional Childhoods and Inequalities: Seminar Series Briefing.** Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271698930\\_Intersectional\\_Childhoods\\_and\\_Inequalities-\\_Seminar\\_Series\\_Briefing](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271698930_Intersectional_Childhoods_and_Inequalities-_Seminar_Series_Briefing) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Lewis, R., Blake, C., McMellon, C., Riddell, J., Graham, C., and Mitchell, K. (2021) Understanding Young People's Use and Non-Use of Condoms and Contraception.** Available at: [https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media\\_781762\\_smxx.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_781762_smxx.pdf) (Accessed: 25 January 2024).

**LGBT Youth Scotland (2020a) Addressing Inclusion: Effectively Challenging Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.** Available at: <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1299/addressing-inclusion-2020.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**LGBT Youth Scotland (2020b) LGBT Young Women & Girls in Scotland 2020 Consultation – Briefing.** Available at: <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/lgbt-young-women-girls-in-scotland-2020-consultation-briefing/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Lindberg, D., and Billevik, J. (2023) Preaching to the choir: effects of the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme on 'the bad apples'.** *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 7(1), 22-37. Available at: [https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/configurable/content/journals\\$002fjgbv\\$002f7\\$002f1\\$002farticle-p22.xml?t:ac=journals%24002fjgbv%24002f7%24002f1%24002farticle-p22.xml](https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/configurable/content/journals$002fjgbv$002f7$002f1$002farticle-p22.xml?t:ac=journals%24002fjgbv%24002f7%24002f1%24002farticle-p22.xml) (Accessed 31 January 2023).

**MacGilleEathain, R., Smith, T., and Steele, I. (2023) Sexual well-being among young people in remote rural island communities in Scotland: a mixed methods study.** Available at: <https://srh.bmj.com/content/familyplanning/50/1/7.full.pdf> (Accessed 25 January 2024).

**Marcus, G. (2019) Written Evidence on Tackling Inequalities Faced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities to UK Parliament.** Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/360.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Maslowski, K., Reiss, M. J., Biswakarma, R., and Harper, J. (2023) 'Reproductive health education in the schools of the four UK nations: is it falling through the gap?' *Human Fertility*, 26: 3, 527-539**

## References (continued)

**Mental Health Foundation (2017) While Your Back Was Turned: How Mental Health Policymakers Stopped Paying Attention to the Specific Needs of Women and Girls.** Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/while-your-back-was-turned-policy-briefing.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Monaghan, F. et al. (no date) Scottish Government Proposals to Implement Restorative Justice Processes in Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Crimes.** Available at: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gosUyOelzEn84dFwXlv83mGtOB\\_ilfQL7e0Gzp0TStg/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gosUyOelzEn84dFwXlv83mGtOB_ilfQL7e0Gzp0TStg/edit) (Accessed: 3 November 2023).

**NASUWT (2023) Violence in Schools Roundtable: NASUWT Evidence to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee.** Available at: <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/static/3d6a5d1e-15b4-4c61-96ede4a521cb9c00/Consultation-Response-Scottish-Government-Violence-in-Schools-Roundtable.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**National Union of Teachers (NUT) (2007) Policy Statement on Preventing Sexual Harassment and Bullying.** Available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/29928891/nut-policy-statement-on-preventing-sexual-harassment-and-bullying> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**NHS Health Scotland (2018) What Health Workers Need to Know about Gender-Based Violence: An Overview.** Available at: <https://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2096/gbv-an-overview.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2022) Suicides in England and Wales: 2021 registrations.** Available online: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2021registrations> (Accessed: 7 December 2023).

**Plan International (2022) Equal Power Now: Girls, Young Women and Political Participation.** Available at: <https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/10/SOTWGR-2022-EN-Final-SD.pdf> (Accessed 7 December 2023).

**Plan International UK (2020) The State of Girls' Rights in the UK: Early Insights into the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Girls.** Available at: [https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-coronavirus-reportpdf/download?token=gddEAzlz#:~:text=The%20health%20pandemic%20is%20having,feelings%20of%20loneliness%20\(62%25\)](https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-coronavirus-reportpdf/download?token=gddEAzlz#:~:text=The%20health%20pandemic%20is%20having,feelings%20of%20loneliness%20(62%25)) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

## References (continued)

**Plan International (2018a) Girls' Rights are Human Rights.** Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-rights-are-human-rights/#:~:text=Girls%20Rights%20are%20Human%20Rights%20is%20an%20in%2Ddepth%20study,years%20from%201930%20to%202017> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Plan International (2018b) 7 Reasons the World Needs the Girls' Rights Platform.** Available at: <https://plan-international.org/7-reasons-world-needs-girls-rights-platform/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Plan International Australia (2016) A Right to the Night: Australian Girls on their Safety in Public Places.** Available at: <https://www.plan.org.au/publications/a-right-to-the-night/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Plan International UK (2016) Written Submission SVS0066. Evidence on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools.** Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/67935/html/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Police Scotland (2023) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.** Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/ofufdhff/violence-against-women-girls-strategy-v4.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Ravalier, J. M. and Walsh, J. (2017) Scotland's Teachers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing. Bath Spa University.** Available at: <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/Employ%20Relations/WorkingConditionsReport.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2012) Do the Right Thing: Progress Report 2012.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2012/05/right-thing-progress-report-scottish-governments-response-2008-concluding-observations/documents/00392997-pdf/00392997-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00392997.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2013) Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/play-strategy-scotland-vision/pages/9/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government's Equal Opportunities Committee: 1st Report, 2013 (Session 4): Where Gypsy / Travellers Live.** Available at: [1st Report, 2013 \(Session 4\): Where Gypsy / Travellers Live : Scottish Parliament](#) (Accessed: 14 December 2023).



## References (continued)

**Scottish Government (2014) The Experiences of Mothers Aged Under 20: Analysis of Data from the Growing Up in Scotland Study.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/experiences-mothers-aged-under-20-analysis-data-growing-up-scotland-study/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2016) A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Our Delivery Plan to 2021 for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-disabled-people-delivery-plan-2021-united-nations-convention/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2017a) Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: Preventing and Managing School Exclusions.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-2-positive-approach-preventing-managing-school/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2017b) Internet Safety for Children: National Action Plan.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-action-plan-internet-safety-children-young-people/documents/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2017c) Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children.** Available at: <https://respectme.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RESPECT-FOR-ALL-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2018a) 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> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2018b) New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022.** Available at: [https://scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/New\\_Scots\\_2018\\_-\\_2022.pdf](https://scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/New_Scots_2018_-_2022.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2019a) Children's Rights Legislation in Scotland: Quick Reference Guide.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-legislation-scotland-quick-reference-guide/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2019b) Educational Outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller Children.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/gypsy-travellers/educational-outcomes-for-gypsytraveller-children/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

## References (continued)

**Scottish Government (2019c) Family Nurse Partnership in Scotland: Revaluation Report.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/reevaluation-family-nurse-partnership-scotland/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2020) Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: attitudes to violence against women.** Available at: [Supporting documents - Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: attitudes to violence against women - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-documents-scottish-social-attitudes-survey-2019-attitudes-to-violence-against-women-gov.scot/) (Accessed: 11 December 2023).

**Scottish Government (2021a) UNCRC Strategic Implementation Board Minutes: 30 September 2021.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/uncrc-strategic-implementation-board-minutes-30-september-2021/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2021b) Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board: Principles for Participation and Engagement.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/groups/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-joint-delivery-board/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2022a) Getting It Right For Every Child (GIR-FEC).** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2022b) Life at Age 14: Initial Findings from the Growing Up in Scotland Study.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/life-age-14-initial-findings-growing-up-scotland-study/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2022c) Restorative Justice Launch.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/restorative-justice-launch/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2022d) School Attendance and Absence Statistics.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-attendance-and-absence-statistics/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Scottish Government (2023) Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research.** Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2023/11/behaviour-scottish-schools-research-report-2023/documents/behaviour-scottish-schools-2023/behaviour-scottish-schools-2023/gov-scot%3Adocument/behaviour-scottish-schools-2023.pdf> (Accessed: 6 December 2023).

**The Promise Scotland (2020) About The Promise.** Available at: <https://thepromise.scot/what-is-the-promise/about>. (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

## References (continued)

**Together (2022) The Rights Detectives Phase 1: Mapping Recent Engagement with Children.** Available at: [https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/3320/report\\_rightsdetectives\\_mapping-2.pdf](https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/3320/report_rightsdetectives_mapping-2.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Together (June 2023) The Rights Detectives Mission Update #002.** Available at: <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/3368/detect-1.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**UK Feminista (2017). 'It's Just Everywhere': A Study on Sexism in Schools – and How We Tackle It.** Available at: <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf> (Accessed 2 November 2023).

**UNICEF (2011a) CEDAW. In Brief: For Adolescents. Policy and Practice.** Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/28441/file/CEDAW-in-brief-for-adolescents.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**UNICEF (2011b) Women's & Children's Rights: Making the Connection.** Available at: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Women-Children\\_final.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Women-Children_final.pdf) (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Walker, S. and Clark, I. (2023) Make Space for Girls: The Research Background 2023.** Available at: <https://www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/resources/research-report-2023> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Weiser, D. A. (2017) 'Confronting Myths About Sexual Assault: A Feminist Analysis of the False Report Literature,' Family Relations, vol. 66, No. 1, Special Issue on Feminist Framings of Sexual on College Campuses, pp. 46-60**

**Wise Women, Glasgow Girls Club, Commonplace and Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership (2022) Women Living with Public Harassment and Abuse in Glasgow.**

**Women 50:50 (2023) Home Page.** Available at: <https://women5050.org/> (Accessed 2 November 2023).

**Women Enabled International (WEI) (2021) The Right to Education for Women and Girls with Disabilities.** Available at: <https://womenenabled.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WEI-The-Right-to-Education-for-Women-and-Girls-with-Disabilities-English-1.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Women in Sport (2021) Share the Playground; Level the Playing Field.** Available at: <https://womeninsport.org/news/share-the-playground-level-the-playing-field/> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Women in Sport (2022) Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Tackling Teenage Disengagement.** Available at: <https://womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-Reframing-Sport-for-Teenage-Girls-Tackling-Teenage-Disengagement.pdf> (Accessed: 3 November 2023).

## References (continued)

**THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (2018a) Young Women Lead Committee: Report on Sexual Harassment in Schools.** Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6413232bf29ba901ed614415/t/6436814576df1c11269a569d/1681293639304/YWL+17-18.pdf> (Accessed: 6 December 2023).

**THE YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (2018b) The Status of Young Women in Scotland 2018.** Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6413232bf29ba901ed614415/t/647df432b0e137134620bdbf/1685976118234/SYWS18+%281%29.pdf> (Accessed 17 November 2023)

**Young Women's Movement (YWM) (2019) Young Women Lead.** Available at: <https://www.youngwomenscot.org/young-women-lead> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Young Women's Movement (YWM) (2021) Young Women Lead 2021: Glasgow: A Feminist City?** Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6413232bf29ba901ed614415/t/64367fbd46b4f85cb868823c/1681293269338/YWL+Glasgow.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Young Women's Movement (YWM) (2023) The Status of Young Women in Scotland: Experiences of Accessing Healthcare.** Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6413232bf29ba901ed614415/t/644627b9a4c2fd7092a4df40/1682319303577/SYWS+22-23+Experiences+of+Accessing+Healthcare.pdf> (Accessed 17 November 2023).

**Zero Tolerance (2022) Future Tales Report.** Available online: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Future-Tales-Report.pdf> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

**Zero Tolerance (2021) Children's Book Audit Results 2021.** Available at: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/news/news-events/childrens-book-audit-results-2021-/> (Accessed 3 November 2023).

# Annex 1: methodology and what's (not) in the literature

Zero Tolerance commissioned Kate Nevens and Ellie Hutchinson from the collective to undertake a review of girls' rights in Scotland.

This paper is based primarily on desk research, supplemented by a few informal conversations with people working in the children's and women's sectors in Scotland. For the desk research, we explored a range of mainly grey literature and documents from across the equalities and rights sector in Scotland and, to a lesser extent, the UK, as well as Scottish Government and UN policy documents and guidelines from the last two decades.

Overall, we found very little in the way of literature or studies that directly examine barriers to girls realising their rights in Scotland, let alone studies that explore the rights of girls with multiple, overlapping experiences of inequality, such as disabled girls, Black, Asian and minority ethnic girls, migrant girls, or LGBT girls. In fact, there is very little literature at all that looks beyond two intersections, and as others elsewhere have noted, "there is a considerable theoretical and methodological gap in our understandings of how to use intersectionality to effectively explore and understand children's social identities and multiple inequalities" (Konstantoni et al., 2014). Including some UK-wide research and literature helped expand the pool of evidence on girls' experiences and rights a little, including

papers and studies that focused on intersectional data. But often these resources either didn't analyse Scottish data separately, or didn't have many Scottish respondents.

However, there are several organisations collecting information about the experiences of young women and girls in Scotland more broadly, including Girlguiding Scotland and The Young Women's Movement, as well as equalities organisations such as LGBT Youth Scotland and Intercultural Youth Scotland. Reports by these organisations are not always explicitly rights-framed (they are often more broadly about social inequalities) but are enlightening on some of the gender and age barriers and discriminations that girls face. These studies are more likely to be designed or authored by girls or young people, or to centre the voices of children. Studies and surveys by these organisations have collected disaggregated data on protected characteristics over time. In the past five years, these organisations endeavoured to present a more intersectional analysis of the data. While we're not able to provide in-depth comprehensive analysis of these intersectional experiences, we've tried to highlight, where possible, where girls are grappling with interconnecting challenges relating to prejudicial treatment based on their identity(ies) and social and structural inequalities.

## Annex 1: methodology and what's (not) in the literature (continued)

While for the purposes of this paper, we looked at girls from birth to 18, in line with the UNCRC, the term “young people” is often used in Scotland to refer to boys and girls aged between 11 and 26. For example, see the age categories in “Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls” (2018). This means that for some of the literature reviewed, if it doesn’t present analysis by age group, we’ve made assumptions about what is likely to relate to girls under 18.

There is a considerable volume of Scottish Government policy documents, guidelines, practice guidance, and working groups, focusing on children’s rights and the UNCRC. Similarly, many third sector organisations working with and for children are producing a wide variety of resources about the UNCRC and children’s rights, including workshops, conferences, web pages, and consultation documents. However, while the vast majority of these reference principles of non-discrimination and the need to treat all children equally, we found that very few focus specifically on the rights of girls. We expand further on what this means for legislation, policy, and practice in Scotland in the relevant section.



# Girls' rights are human rights!



1 Papermill Wynd, McDonald Road, Edinburgh EH7 4QL  
info@zerotolerance.org.uk  
Scottish Charity No. SC023484

[www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)