



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## CPA CWP Scotland Branch Group Session ahead of International Women's Day

### Background

1. In November 2023 the Steering Committee of the [Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians](#) (CWP) [British Islands and Mediterranean Region](#) (BIMR) agreed to host an event to mark International Women's Day as part of the CWP BIMR Conference, taking place in Malta in March 2024. The objective of the event is "to bring together young women in groups across the BIM region to discuss the issues which are seen as the challenges faced by young women today; to collect these responses and report as a region, creating a blueprint of issues facing young women; to consider replicating the process across the Commonwealth for the betterment of women and girls. Each country in the region that wishes to participate will host a session with young women in February 2024 before a plenary session on 8th March 2024 at which countries will report back, and an appointed rapporteur will create a summary report to send to the CWP Secretariat".
2. As a result, on 19 February Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP hosted a group session bringing together a group of young women to discuss the issues which are seen as the main challenges faced by young women in Scotland today.
3. The Scottish Parliament worked in collaboration with the Young Women's Movement to shape the session and identify participants to take part. The participants ranged from 19-30 years old and came from different parts in Scotland both urban and rural.
4. The session ran for just under two hours, including both group discussions and breakout rooms, allowing to the participants to speak freely and openly about a wide range of issues. The conversation and topics were steered by the participants and initiated through two focus questions: "What issues would you look at if you were First Minister?" and "What would an ideal Scotland look like in 2050?". Below is a summary of the findings from the session.

### Report findings

#### Equality

5. The group felt that we need to sort out patriarchy and institutionalised misogyny present today. Women should be as respected as men, and not criticised just because they are women. There should be equal pay and a recognition that there are additional barriers experienced by women.

#### Intersectional approach

6. The group discussed the importance of joined up thinking, taking into account the experiences and effects that women encounter due to intersectionality, such as

racial identity, gender, sexuality, disability and nationality. It needs to become second nature ensuring people understand what an intersectional approach entails.

#### Policy scrutiny

7. Improving policy scrutiny, ensuring that policies work for both rural and urban areas, for people from all demographic backgrounds and that policies are supported by robust research.

#### Accessibility

8. The group discussed the importance accessibility of not just buildings but also access to services such as high-quality language and interpretation assistance. Also a more connected Scotland in regard to transport links and digital access, etc.
9. They also highlighted the importance of freedom of movement and freedom of expression. They want to make Scotland an accessible and welcoming country to come to, where language is not a barrier, and it is safe to reside.

#### Childcare

10. The group were very positive about recent improvements made towards access of free childcare in Scotland but more still needs to be done in order to prevent women having to choose between a career and having a family. Scotland has an aging population which will cause issues if more women are choosing a career over family. Childcare should be shared across the whole family and not just left to women.

#### Healthcare

11. The group discussed how many women feel they are not taken seriously or are badly treated when seeking healthcare. Many women do not access healthcare services due to healthcare inequality or a lack of knowledge by doctors of female health issues.
12. There was also a sense that schools need to do more to teach pupils about our bodies and possible health implications.
13. The group also discussed that there needs to be an improvement in data collection of issues affecting women, both directly and indirectly. In particular for conditions that are seen to primarily affect men, such as autism. Furthermore, more research needs to be done on how other aspects, such as ethnicity, impact on women's health.
14. Health inequality needs to be tackled and a more individualised, rather than homogenous, approach needs to be taken, which looks at the individual person in order to provide the best care.
15. Improvements also need to be made relating to mental health care and the stigma around it. It needs to become easier to access mental health care and more research needs to be done as to how to assess all individuals.

### Welfare system

16. The group discussed the inequality of the welfare system in Scotland and that poverty and inequality drive many other factors, including women's issues. A more compassionate response is necessary. Reforming or boosting the social welfare system would make a significant difference for women and create greater caring communities.

### Safety

17. The group agreed that safety was a key issue that needs to be addressed, particularly Violence against women. Many felt unsafe walking outside in dark areas and even felt they were not able to leave their house during the long winter months due to this. Improvements need to be made to create safer spaces for women and children and gender-based violence needs to be eradicated.

### Justice system

18. The group highlighted that institutionally the justice system is very misogynistic and reform is required. The justice system needs to understand the dynamics of gender-based violence and respond in an appropriate way. Women should be able to access justice swiftly and in a manner that is not traumatising. If women did not face all the implications of gender-based violence, they would be participating fully in the economy.

### Climate change

19. The group said that decision makers need to make concerted efforts to hear all voices in relation to climate change and to put it in the heart of all policy areas, even if they are unrelated to the environment.

### Confidence

20. A big issue raised by the group was that many working environments are considered to be toxic for women. For example, many of the participants said that they would not consider going into politics because it is such a toxic environment. Media also plays a big part in aiding the toxicity. The way women are treated and how the media talk about women in politics is a major barrier.

21. Women need to feel more confident and empowered to go into 'big' roles, such as becoming directors, doctors, politicians etc and feel that they are supported, encouraged and not scrutinised or bullied. More work needs to be done to support women working or considering working in these environments through mentorship programmes, leadership training, building women's confidence and providing support networks to overcome toxic environments. The positive work of Elect Her was mentioned.

22. It was also discussed that politics does not need to be a career for life. Many young people have more than one employer now and it needs to be highlighted that you can dip in and out of politics. Furthermore, it was highlighted that you do not need to be in the limelight to take part in politics, but can also support from the side line, by for example becoming a researcher.

### Engagement

23. The group agreed decision makers need to engage more with a wider range of young women to co-design policy. It is often the 'usual suspects' who engage with organisations such as the Young Women's Movement and the Scottish Youth Parliament. We need to do more to champion youth women roles and encourage a wide range of women from a diverse range of backgrounds to take part, for example, by approaching sport clubs. The reality is that there are a lot of women who will not engage in official forums and it is important to also have informal ways to engage and have their voices heard. It also needs to be seen to be a genuine engagement, if engagement goes nowhere then it is really damaging.
24. Finally, the group spoke about the need for men to be involved in these conversations to help fight inequality.

### **Next steps**

25. The findings in this report will be shared at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians British Islands and Mediterranean Region Conference, taking place in Malta in March 2024.

### **Thank you**

26. We would like to thank the participants for taking the time to take part in the session and their willingness to be so open and honest.
27. We would also like to thank the Young Women's Movement for their assistance with facilitating this session.

**International Relations Office  
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