

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Thursday 10 September 2026

3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Equalities roundtable

Overview

1. At its meeting on 25 June the Committee agreed to start the autumn term by holding three separate roundtable evidence sessions covering the three parts of its remit.
2. The intention of these sessions is to provide members with an overview of key issues for stakeholders and to help inform discussions around future work programme priorities.
3. At its [previous meeting on 3 September](#), the Committee held its first roundtable discussion which considered matters relating to civil justice.
4. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to inform the second of these discussions which will focus on equalities.
5. At this meeting the Committee will take evidence from:
 - Heather Fiskien, Chief Executive Officer, Inclusion Scotland;
 - John Kirkpatrick, Chief Executive, Equality and Human Rights Commission;
 - Jennifer Laughland, Head of Scotland Legal, Equality and Human Rights Commission;
 - Susan McKellar, Manager, The Scottish Women's Convention;
 - Susan Smith, Director, For Women Scotland;
 - Adam Stachura, Director of Policy and Communications, Age Scotland;
 - Vic Valentine, Scottish Trans Manager, Equality Network; and
 - Carol Young, Deputy Director, CRER - Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights.
6. Further information on key themes expected to arise in the discussion can be found in the SPICe briefing which is attached as an annexe.

Next steps

7. At its next meeting on 17 September the Committee will hold a roundtable discussion covering the human rights part of its remit.
8. The Committee will then have the opportunity to explore issues raised in all three evidence sessions with the Minister for Equalities and International Development and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety at its meeting on 24 September.

Conclusion

9. The Committee is invited to consider the information provided in this paper in its roundtable discussion on matters arising under the equalities part of its remit.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe



Equalities roundtable

The purpose of this session is to hear from equality stakeholders regarding their priorities for session 7 of the Scottish Parliament.

This paper identifies potential themes for the Committee's equality roundtable. It sets out the policy and evidence context; refers to recent work by the stakeholders; and highlights cross-cutting issues that members may wish to explore further.

Key issues for Session 7

The Committee has already begun to consider its priorities for session 7. This roundtable provides an opportunity for the Committee to hear directly from equality and human rights stakeholders about the issues they consider should shape scrutiny during Session 7.

The focus will be on equality with an opportunity to focus on human rights at the roundtable session on 17 September 2026. However, equality and human rights are often interwoven, so there is likely to be some overlap:

- equality is about equality of opportunity and equality outcomes
- human rights are about the basic rights and freedoms all humans are entitled to, including the prohibition of discrimination in the enjoyment of these rights and freedoms.

SPICe previously identified key issues based on the Committee's [legacy report](#) from session 6, [key issues identified by SPICe for session 7](#) and the Scottish Government policy commitments in its previous [Programme for Government 2025-26](#). The key issues were:

- Operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty
- EHRC Code of Practice on Services, Public Functions and Associations
- Conversion Practices legislation
- Human Rights Bill
- Asylum Seekers
- Racism
- Neurodivergence/LDAN

- Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Other specific themes in which members have expressed an interest include: addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG), especially online abuse; racism and community safety; disability rights; and human rights scrutiny.

Cross-cutting themes which are relevant to this committee but will also be of relevance to all committees: hostile public rhetoric towards certain groups; loss of confidence in delivery by Parliament and government; the need for meaningful involvement of lived experience; equality evidence and data gaps; funding pressures across the equality and human rights sector.

Suggested themes for the roundtable discussion

The session may help to identify areas where there is broad agreement across stakeholders, areas where closer scrutiny of Scottish Government delivery may be required, areas where views differ, and areas where further evidence would be useful.

- 1. Priorities for Session 7: the equality issues stakeholders consider should be highest priorities for Committee scrutiny.**
- 2. Implementation and accountability: the gap between legal or policy commitments and people's lived experience, and how delivery should be monitored.**
- 3. Funding and organisational capacity: the sustainability, independence and adequacy of funding for equality and human rights organisations, especially where they are expected to support policy development and scrutinise delivery.**
- 4. Evidence and intersectionality: gaps in data and analysis, particularly where people experience discrimination based on more than one protected characteristic.**
- 5. Embedding rights in public services: how equality and human rights duties are being embedded across public services, including service design, budgets, decision-making and outcomes.**
- 6. Public attitudes and social cohesion: trends in discrimination, hate crime, misinformation, polarisation and respectful public debate.**
- 7. Contested rights and legal clarity: areas where stakeholders may hold different views, including sex, gender and single-sex services, and where guidance or further evidence may be needed.**
- 8. Stakeholder engagement: how lived experience and specialist expertise can inform the Committee's Session 7 work programme outside formal evidence sessions.**

Programme for Government

The [First Minister set out his Programme for Government](#) (PfG) on 1 September 2026. It is a five-year PfG with a focus on:

- Eradicating child poverty
- Growing the economy
- Tackling the climate emergency
- Delivering high quality and sustainable public services.

Notably, it also says that Scotland faces many challenges from the behaviour of populists:

“Our country has not been immune from the threats of populism promoted by opportunistic and bad faith actors who aim to stoke division, hatred, and harm - often directed squarely at the most marginalised groups and falsely claiming to protect women and girls.”

To “stand up to the divisive behaviour of populists” it argues that three issues must be addressed:

- tackling the cost-of-living crisis
- tackle violence against women and girls
- promote community cohesion.

Given the Committee’s remit, action to tackle VAWG and promote community cohesion are likely to be of interest. Tackling the “cost of living crisis” is likely to be a running theme for many committees.

Commitments for 2026-27 to tackle VAWG include:

- **Implement and embed the Equally Safe primary prevention framework** tackling VAWG as a public health issue.
- **Develop a sustained multi-year public health campaign to address attitudes** towards misogyny and VAWG.
- **Invest in targeted interventions to challenge and change problematic misogynistic attitudes and behaviour in boys and young men** so they understand harmful influences and behaviour, before it escalates and women and girls are harmed.
- **Ensure effective legal and justice responses that hold perpetrators to account** and improve victims’ experiences of the justice system, bringing forward a **Misogyny Bill** to ensure harassment and abuse based on misogyny is outlawed, **consulting on implementing Domestic Abuse**

Protection Orders, and engaging with Police Scotland on training needs on domestic abuse.

- **Develop an approach to technology facilitated VAWG.** This will include conducting research on survivors' experiences of tech-enabled abuse in daily life.
- Work is also underway to **create a blueprint for a Scottish Centre for Gender Equality in Social Attitudes** to develop and test robust and evidence-led approaches to changing public attitudes towards women and girls and towards gender equality.

Commitments for 2026-27 to promote community cohesion include:

- Establish a **Ministerial Taskforce on Community Cohesion** to strengthen preventative action.
- **Increase investment in the Community Cohesion Fund to £500,000**, supporting grassroots community initiatives across Scotland to address shared challenges such as social isolation, the cost-of-living crisis, inclusion, employment and housing support and community dialogue.
- **Continue to address interpersonal and institutional racism in education** through the Anti-Racism in Education Programme.
- Through the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning, the National Approach to LGBTQI+ Inclusive Education and the Digital Discourse Initiative, **continue to build an education system that promotes belonging, mutual respect and understanding, in line with the rights and principles of the UNCRC.**
- **Publish a refreshed New Scots Delivery Plan** to ensure the actions of the Scottish Government and its partners remain relevant to the challenges being faced by refugees and people seeking asylum.
- **Continue its work to end conversion practices in Scotland** in partnership with the Welsh and UK Governments and states that "Should the UK Government fail to deliver we will not hesitate to bring forward Scottish legislation." The Minister for Equalities and International Development, Simita Kumar MSP, [wrote to the Convener on 4 September with an update](#). It states that the Scottish Government is committed to working with the UK Government to explore whether the [UK Government's draft Bill](#) could extend to Scotland. This would follow the draft Bill's pre-legislative scrutiny period, which is expected to take six months. The Minister said she believes there is strength in England, Wales and Scotland working together. However, it restates that if the UK Government "fail to deliver", the Scottish Government will introduce its own Bill to end conversion practices in Scotland.

There is a **commitment to introduce a Human Rights Bill in year 2 of the session**, aimed at protecting and enhancing the rights of everyone.

The PfG also states that the Scottish Government will **take action to address discrimination and inequality experienced by LGBTQI+ people through legislation, policy and partnership working**. It will also **invest £3.5m each year in the Disability Equality Plan**.

The PfG does not refer to the **Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill**. In a [letter to the Convener](#) (1 September 2026), Maree Todd MSP, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs, said that Ministers have concluded that progress is needed through policy reform, service improvement and targeted investments. This will be the focus for now, while retaining the option of future legislation. The PfG does include commitments to reflect this approach including:

- improving neurodevelopmental support so people can access the right support at the right time
- expanding Learning Disability Annual Health Checks
- delivering the Coming Home Action Plan.

Scottish Social Attitudes 2025: attitudes to discrimination and positive action

The [2025 Scottish Social Attitudes survey](#) (SSA), undertaken by [NatCen](#) (National Centre for Social Research), explores current attitudes towards discrimination and positive action in Scotland. It has been tracking views and opinions since 1999 on a range of topics.

NatCen reports the [key findings](#) as follows:

- General attitudes to prejudice and diversity
 - In 2025, 65% of people said that ‘Scotland should do everything it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice’ – a slight decrease from 2015 (69%), and a similar level to 2006 (65%) and 2010 (66%).
 - Around one in three (31%) said that ‘Sometimes there is good reason for people to be prejudiced against certain groups’ which is higher than in 2015 (22%).
 - Nearly half (45%) of people said they would prefer to live in an area ‘with lots of different kinds of people’, while 31% said they would prefer to live in an area ‘where most people are similar to you’.
- Equity and participation in the labour market
 - Most respondents thought that both mothers (95%) and fathers (92%) of children under five definitely or probably should be entitled to take up to five days paid leave to look after their child when they are ill. A higher proportion thought that mothers ‘definitely should’ be entitled to this (75%) compared with fathers (68%).

- A quarter (26%) of people said that older people should be made to retire to make way for younger age groups, and 72% said it is wrong to make people retire just because they have reached a certain age.
- Promoting equality and positive action
 - Four in ten (40%) thought that attempts to give equal opportunities for women had 'not gone far enough', compared with 32% thinking this about Black and Asian people and lesbian, gay and bisexual people.
 - One in ten (10%) thought that attempts to give equal opportunities for women had 'gone too far', compared with 23% thinking this about Black and Asian people and 26% think this about lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Four groups were identified as being at **particular risk of discrimination in 2025: trans people, Gypsy/Travellers, people with severe and enduring mental illness, and older people.**

Muslims, Jewish people, people who experience depression, and gay, lesbian or bisexual people were all facing less direct discrimination than in 2010, however, fewer people in Scotland were happy that a close family member married or formed a long-term relationship with each of these groups in 2025 than they were in 2010.

Three distinct groups in Scotland can be identified in terms of the extent to which they hold discriminatory attitudes:

- Those who have discriminatory attitudes towards a range of different minorities. They tend to prefer to live in areas with people similar to themselves and have a negative view of the impact of immigration. They are more likely to be male, older, heterosexual, and have a religious identity.
- Those who hold very few discriminatory attitudes, are largely in favour of immigration and positive action in the workplace, like to live in diverse areas, and would be happy to be related to all sorts of people or have someone from a minority group teaching their children. They are more likely to be younger, female, not religious and gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- The majority who demonstrate some discriminatory attitudes, have concerns in specific situations or about specific groups, but these are not deep-rooted. Many of these people agree that Scotland should do all it can to eliminate prejudice, hence they may be willing to adjust their own behaviour and attitudes.

Hate Crime in Scotland

Latest data on [hate crime in Scotland, 2025-26](#), from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal (COPFS) shows that:

“... the total number of charges reported containing at least one element of hate crime was 7,115, an increase of 17% compared to 2024-25. This is the highest number reported over the period since 2003-04 when figures first became available. The number of charges reported increased in most categories of hate crime.”

The number of charges reported in 2025-26, by hate crime category were:

- 3,990 - race
- 2,062 - sexual orientation
- 1,370 - disability
- 537 - religion
- 104 - trans identity
- 44 - age
- 6 - variations in sex characteristics.

Stakeholders at the roundtable

Age Scotland

[Age Scotland](#) is the national charity for older people in Scotland, working to improve later life through advice, community support, research and campaigning.

Recent work includes its campaign for the next Scottish Government to [reinstate a dedicated Minister for Older People](#). It has wider campaigns on [active ageing](#), [older people's champions in local authorities](#), and increasing uptake of financial support through its [“Check in, Cash out” campaign](#).

Age Scotland also undertakes the [‘Big Survey’](#) every three years. It explores a range of issues facing people over the age of 50, including health and wellbeing, access to services, the cost of living, technology and ageism. The results of the Big Survey 2025 are yet to be published, but in its call for a Minister for Older People, it states:

“Age Scotland is highlighting a growing unhappiness among older voters about the apparent lack of interest or care from politicians about issues affecting older people. More than three quarters – 76% - said they wanted to see a Minister for Older People in the next government.”

It also reports that:

- 66% of respondents said they were not satisfied or not at all satisfied with the actions or care of politicians on issues affecting older people.
- Almost 70% told the charity they did not feel valued by society.

Age Scotland also supports:

- [Scottish Ethnic Minority Older People Forum](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Scottish Older People's Network](#)

CRER (Coalition for Race Equality and Rights)

[CRER](#) is a strategic racial equality charity based in Glasgow, focused on eliminating racial discrimination and harassment and promoting racial justice across Scotland.

Recent reports:

- [Racial Inequality in Scotland: State of the Nation – Volume 1](#) (November 2025)
 - This report marks 25 years of CRER. It is intended as a searchable evidence base on the impacts of systemic racism on Black and minority ethnic communities in Scotland. It covers statistics and trends across employment, housing, mental health, criminal justice and community cohesion. Volume 2 will expand on this and include disparities in areas including education, social security, experience of crime and health and social care.
- [Tackling online hate and extremism](#) (2025)
 - This report argues that online hate and extremist content have real-world impacts for minority ethnic communities in Scotland. It highlights the role of social media platforms, government and public bodies in preventing online hate from escalating and calls for better evidence, stronger accountability and more consistent responses.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The [EHRC](#) is Great Britain's equality regulator and has a Scotland office which advises on equality and human rights law, policy and practice in the Scottish context. It was established under the Equality Act 2006 and is a reserved body funded by the UK Government.

Recent work included:

- updated statutory [Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations](#) (2026)
- consultation on [updates to schools' technical guidance](#) (10 June – 30 September 2026) – see the [consultation for schools in Scotland](#).
- [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Scotland Fairer?](#) (2023) – this provides a review of equality and human rights in Scotland since the previous report in 2018 and covers each of the protected characteristics.

Equality Network/Scottish Trans

The [Equality Network](#) works to improve LGBTQIA+ equality and human rights in Scotland; Scottish Trans is part of Equality Network and focuses specifically on trans equality, rights and inclusion.

Recent work includes:

- the [Scottish LGBTQIA+ Manifesto 2026–2031](#), produced with Leap Sports, LGBT Youth Scotland and LGBT Health and Wellbeing. It sets out joint priorities which include trans healthcare, ending conversion practices, the incorporation of international human rights treaties, and the adoption of a human rights compliant approach to policy and practice following the Supreme Court judgment in *For Women Scotland v Scottish Ministers*.
- [Why are we waiting: The Case for a Scottish Conversion Practices Bill](#) – this presents an analysis of the [UK Government's draft Conversion Practices Bill](#) and how it compares to proposed Scottish legislation.

For Women Scotland

[For Women Scotland](#) is a campaign group which describes its purpose as protecting and strengthening women's and children's rights, with a particular focus on the interpretation of sex in law and policy and the operation of single-sex services and spaces.

It has pursued legal action against the Scottish Government:

- Following decisions of the Court of Session of [18 February](#) and [22 March 2022](#) (and which had effect from 19 April 2022) in the judicial review and reclaiming motion brought by For Women Scotland, the definition of 'woman' was removed from the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018. For background see the [Gender Representation on Public Boards \(Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#).
- In April 2025, the UK Supreme Court gave judgment in [For Women Scotland Ltd v Scottish Ministers](#). It held that the terms "woman", "man" and "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refer to biological sex for the purposes of the Act. The judgment arose from a challenge to Scottish Government statutory guidance on the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018.
- On [19 June 2026](#) the Court of Session ruled that the Scottish Prison Service policy and guidance on trans prisoners is unlawful. The policy had allowed some trans women prisoners to be housed in the women's prison estate.

Inclusion Scotland

[Inclusion Scotland](#) is a national Disabled People's Organisation, led by disabled people, which works to remove barriers and secure disabled people's full inclusion as equal citizens.

Recent work includes:

- [Manifesto for Inclusion 2026](#), which sets out seven priority demands on independent living, adequate income, involvement in decision-making, education and employment, climate justice, accessible communities and human rights protection.
- [Where Are Disabled People in Scotland's Pandemic Preparedness?](#) – which critiques the Scottish Government's [UK Covid-19 Inquiry - Module 1 report: progress update - July 2026](#). Inclusion Scotland states that disabled people and representative organisations are still being excluded from the processes designed to protect them.
- It has [sought views on disabled people's experiences of third spaces](#) (closing date was 21 August 2026). Third spaces includes community spaces such as libraries, community centres, parks, museums, leisure facilities and places of worship.

Scottish Women's Convention

The [Scottish Women's Convention](#) works with women across Scotland to ensure their lived experiences inform policy and decision-making.

Recent work includes:

- [A Mandate for Change: 2026 Scottish Parliament election manifesto](#), which calls for action on issues including fair work and economic justice, healthcare, housing, safety and childcare.
- Infographic on the results of its [survey on Violence against Women and Girls 2026](#), which reported that 100% of women held the view that it should be illegal to create, or ask someone to create, fake intimate images of a person without their consent.

Funding

The sustainability of funding may be an issue for some third sector organisations working in Equality and Human Rights.

The Scottish Government's [Equality and Human Rights Fund](#) supports a portfolio of 47 organisations delivering work focused on tackling inequality and discrimination, furthering equality, and advancing the realisation of human rights in Scotland.

The fund is [administered by Inspiring Scotland](#).

Five of the equality stakeholders have received funds as follows:

Organisation	Total funding for 2021–2026	Purpose/project
Age Scotland	£2,325,004	Supports post-Covid-19 recovery planning for older people and contributes

to the national helpline and information sources, helping older people access their rights and entitlements.

CRER	£792,142	Supports the development and implementation of the Race Equality Framework and other priority areas for race equality through evidence-based policy, research and advocacy input aimed at improving the lives of BME people in Scotland.
Equality Network	£2,767,985.50	Works to create lasting improvements for LGBTI people in Scotland through policy development, advice and guidance for policy-makers, good practice guidance and training, and community engagement.
Inclusion Scotland	£4,562,500, plus a further £163,585 marked as Disability Equality Plan funding	Supports diverse disabled people across Scotland to secure their human rights, participate in decision-making and become decision-makers themselves, including through participative research and policy development, support for local Disabled People's Organisations and work with the Scottish Government and public sector.
Scottish Women's Convention	£1,081,667	Communicates and consults with women in Scotland to influence public policy and decisions affecting them, helping to shape policy locally, nationally and internationally and supporting the mainstreaming of equality for women and girls in Scotland.

The EHRC and For Women Scotland do not receive Scottish Government funding. The EHRC is a statutory body funded by the UK Government. For Women Scotland is a not-for-profit company and does not receive public funding.

SPICe Briefing September 2026

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.
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