Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 5 November 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2247: Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang based abuse

Introduction

Petitioner	Joanna Kerr
Petition Summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, gang based abuse (abuse involving two or more perpetrators) and asylum status. This data is not currently reliably collected or communicated. I believe that collecting and communicating such data reliably would enable cases involving grooming gangs of predominantly Pakistani heritage to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted. I also believe that it is relevant with regards to other group based child sexual abuse networks involved in trafficking.
Website	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2247

1. This is a new petition that was published on 25 August 2026.

2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.

3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,024 signatures have been received on this petition.

4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.

5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.

6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
November 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2247: Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang based abuse

Petitioner:

Joanna Kerr

Date published:

28 August 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, gang based abuse (abuse involving two or more perpetrators) and asylum status. This data is not currently reliably collected or communicated. I believe that collecting and communicating such data reliably would enable cases involving grooming gangs of predominantly Pakistani heritage to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted. I also believe that it is relevant with regards to other group based child sexual abuse networks involved in trafficking.

Background information:

I previously lodged petition PE2208 calling for mandatory collection and publication of child sexual offender data. The petition was closed as Police Scotland was working to align recording systems to capture nationality data for suspects; the issue of data collection is being considered in the work being done by the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group; and the Scottish Government committed to establishing a public inquiry into Scotland's response to group-led child sexual abuse and exploitation. Police Scotland indicated that it intended to capture data on nationality, but not religion, ethnicity or asylum status. It also indicated that it was not intending to flag gang-based abuse.

Police Scotland has subsequently advised me that it may take up to three years before it gathers data on nationality.

I believe Police Scotland not collecting, communicating or publishing this data reliably means that grooming gangs of predominantly Pakistani heritage (and others) are invisible in Scotland.

On 1 June 2026 there was a Westminster Hall debate on a petition on child sexual offender data. The petition gained significant public support.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing

Scottish Parliament Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2247: Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang-based abuse, lodged by Joanna Kerr

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner is calling for Police Scotland to be required "to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, gang-based abuse (abuse involving two or more perpetrators) and asylum status".

They suggest that such data:

- "would enable cases involving grooming gangs of predominantly Pakistani heritage to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted",
- "is relevant with regards to other group based child sexual abuse networks involved in trafficking."

It refers to the petitioner's previously lodged petition PE2208 calling for the mandatory collection and publication of data on the nationality, ethnicity, immigration status and religion of child sexual offenders.

Background on "gang-based abuse"

The foreword to Baroness Casey's report on the National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse commented that the term 'group-based child sexual exploitation' is a sanitised version of what it is. Adding that:

> "I want to set it out in unsanitised terms: we are talking about multiple sexual assaults committed against children by multiple men on multiple occasions; beatings and gang rapes. Girls having to have abortions, contracting sexually transmitted infections, having children removed from them at birth."

In response to the national audit, an independent Inquiry into grooming gangs in England and Wales, was an announced in December 2025.

In February 2026, the Scottish Government committed to establishing a Scottish Inquiry (see Scottish Government news release). This will be led by Professor Alexis Jay, who led the independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (see further information on this below). The Inquiry will focus on the prevalence of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. It will be separate from the work of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry which is investigating the abuse of children in care in Scotland.

Giving evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee, on the same day as the announcement (25 February 2026), Professor Jay explained that she does not think the use of the terms 'grooming' or 'gangs' is accurate and said it is more appropriate to call them 'networks':

> "… because that term encompasses a much wider range of issues, people and settings. "Gangs" has a certain connotation, and it would be wrong and far too restrictive to think that that is the only way in which the sexual exploitation of children takes place."

In a Scottish context, potential offences relating to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation could include:

1. Sexual offences set out in the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (e.g. rape, sexual assault and sexual coercion). There are specific provisions relating to young children (under 13) and older children (under 16).

2. The offence of human trafficking set out in section 1 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 (e.g. where the trafficking relates to prostitution and sexual exploitation).

3. Crimes of violence such as common law assault.

England and Wales recommendations on data collection

Several reports investigating this issue in England and Wales have made recommendations relating to data collection (and ethnicity data in particular).

The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (October 2022), chaired by Professor Jay, considered the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have discharged their duty to protect children from sexual abuse. The report said that the scale and extent of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation are difficult to ascertain as data collection is poor.

The report set out the importance of collecting data on ethnicity in particular:

> "Accurate data on the ethnicity of victims and perpetrators play an important part in enhancing understanding of child sexual abuse and the context in which such abuse occurs. The data assist the relevant statutory agencies to target resources appropriately, including, for example, enabling the police to engage with communities where child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation occur. Victims and survivors may require culturally sensitive support from the statutory authorities." (page 137)

One of the recommendations of the report was for a single set of core data relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. It recommended that children's social care and criminal justice agencies should produce "consistent and compatible data" which includes "the characteristics of victims and alleged perpetrators of child sexual abuse, including age, sex and ethnicity" (page 148).

The Inquiry also produced reports on Child sexual exploitation by organised networks (February 2022) and Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities (June 2020) which consider these issues and include similar statements.

A National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, conducted by Baroness Casey of Blackstock (report published June 2025), stated that:

> "This audit is the latest in a long line of reports, reviews, recommendations and strategies into child sexual exploitation. All of which say the same things about system failures on information sharing, training and other processes, risk factors for victims and **a need to collect data and information on the perpetrators, including on ethnicity and culture**." (page 19, emphasis added)

On data collection, in particular, it stated: "National data on the demography of victims and perpetrators is poor […] Ethnicity is shied away from despite being a question for many years" (page 61). Chapter 4 of the audit report covered this in more detail and concludes:

> "Many inquiries and reports have been saying more needs to be done to examine the ethnicity issues associated with group-based child sexual exploitation. It plays into the hands of groups with divisive political agendas not to examine or deal with these issues conclusively. This does everyone a disservice, including Asian and Pakistani communities.
>
> Far more importantly, it is continuing to let down the victims and survivors of such abuse, many of whom have already been failed multiple times by the people who are there to protect them.
>
> Despite the lack of a full picture in the national data sets, there was and is enough evidence available in local police data in three areas which we examined which show disproportionate numbers of suspects from Asian ethnic backgrounds, as well as in the significant number of perpetrators of Asian ethnicity identified in local reviews and child sexual exploitation prosecutions across the country, to warrant further examination. More effort is required to identify the nature of group-based child sexual exploitation and why it appears men of Asian and Pakistani ethnicity are disproportionately represented in some areas, in order to understand it better, and to tackle it more effectively" (page 87).

Recommendation 4 of the audit is: The government should make mandatory the collection of ethnicity and nationality data for all suspects in child sexual abuse and criminal exploitation cases and work with the police to improve the collection of ethnicity data for victims.

The UK Government has published a response to the audit and in relation to recommendation 4 has committed to making it a requirement for the police to collect ethnicity and nationality data of perpetrators of group-based child sexual exploitation.

Scottish context

The petition refers to the National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group. This was established by the Scottish Government in 2024 to increase national level coordination and capability to address risks and harms of child sexual abuse and exploitation by scrutinising evidence and practice to agree actions. It considered the National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation report at an Extraordinary Meeting in July 2025.

The petition also refers to the public inquiry into Scotland's response to group-led child sexual abuse and exploitation. In response to a question on the "grooming gangs inquiry" (18 June 2026), chaired by Professor Jay, the First Minister said:

> "… the Government has established its leadership and work is under way to ensure that the terms of reference are finalised and that the inquiry can start its work at the first available opportunity."

The Scottish Government's response to petition PE2208 (the petitioner's previous petition) points out that an arrested person is not required to disclose their ethnicity, immigration status or religion – see section 34(4) of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 which provides:

> "The person is under no obligation to answer any question, other than to give the following information—
>
> a) the person's name,
>
> b) the person's address,
>
> c) the person's date of birth,
>
> d) the person's place of birth (in such detail as a constable considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of establishing the person's identity), and
>
> e) the person's nationality."

This indicates that changes to primary legislation may be required to give effect to the petitioner's request. The response to petition PE2208 also states, in respect of nationality (which an arrested person would be obliged to provide under the 2016 Act), that: "Police Scotland has confirmed that in around 50% of the cases the individuals do not have a recognised nationality e.g. the field has either been left blank or it has been filled out using the following information: other, unknown, not stated."

Key Organisations

- Police Scotland
- Scottish Government

- National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group (and members of the Group which includes, for example, groups representing children and child protection services)

Mhairi Gavin and Nicki Georghiou
Senior Researchers
28 September 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2247/A: Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang based abuse

Scottish Government written submission, 29 September 2026

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The Scottish Government does not accept the assertion that cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) are not properly investigated or prosecuted in Scotland. Allegations of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) are treated with the utmost seriousness by the criminal justice system in Scotland. All reported offences are rigorously investigated by Police Scotland, with victims and safeguarding considerations at the forefront. Where investigations identify sufficient evidence of criminal conduct, cases are reported to the independent prosecution authorities for consideration and prosecution through the courts. The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting a robust criminal justice response that prioritises victim protection, pursues offenders, and ensures accountability for those responsible for these abhorrent crimes.

As the petitioner notes, the petitioner previously lodged petition PE2208 calling for mandatory collection and publication of child sexual offender data. The Scottish Government's response to this previous petition set out some of the limitations with mandating the collection of the specified data. These are set out again below, with some additional details regarding Police Scotland accountability.

Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, responsibility for the policing of Scotland rests with the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, who is accountable to the Scottish Police Authority rather than directly to Scottish Ministers. These arrangements are intended to safeguard the operational independence of policing and to ensure public confidence that decisions relating to policing are made free from political direction or Ministerial influence. These are operational matters for the Chief Constable, subject to oversight by the Scottish Police Authority

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 states that following arrest, a person is under no obligation to answer any question apart from their name, address, date and place of birth and nationality. The arrested person is not required to disclose their ethnicity, immigration status or religion. Recording an ethnicity requires Police Scotland to either rely on the arresting officer's observation or on the arrested person providing this data

Police Scotland record information based on operational needs or where a legal requirement exists. They do not hold coded data on nationality, immigration status or religion as it is not required unless the specific circumstances of the offences make it relevant to the prosecution of the case.

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

There is a huge amount of action in this area as Committee members will be aware.

National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group

Protecting children from harm is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government. Child sexual abuse and exploitation are abhorrent crimes with devastating impacts on the victims and their families. Our recognition of this abhorrent crime is why we formed the expert National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group which brings together key services and expert stakeholders to inform and strengthen our collective action against this horrendous form of abuse. It is uniquely positioned to assess current challenges and make informed recommendations to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation so we can ensure we are doing all we can to tackle it through prevention and early intervention.

Activity to improve Data on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

A programme of work is underway under the National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group to improve data on CSAE. The Scottish Government's Chief Statistician is chairing a short-life working group looking at this issue specifically. This group brings together experts to consider a range of data sources that can be collated and analysed to build a more comprehensive picture of CSAE in Scotland.

The group will publish an interim report summarising work so far by the end of the year. Data related to perpetrators will be considered as part of this report.

Minutes from meetings of the group are published on the Scottish Government's website.

National Review of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation

Last year, Ministers directed the Care Inspectorate, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and other inspectorates involved in scrutinising health and education services, to lead an Independent National Review of responses to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation in Scotland.

Phase One of the National Review was published on 3 September, providing an assessment of local areas' understanding, response, and improvement in tackling the threats that organised networks represent to the safeguarding of children and young people from child exploitation. The report provides valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities in preventing and responding to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. It highlights areas of progress while identifying issues requiring further consideration as we continue to strengthen Scotland's approach to protecting children and young people.

One of the key findings of the Phase One report was that there was a lack of accurate national data related to group-based harms. The findings and

recommendation on data collection align with activity already underway through the Short-Life Working Group on CSAE Data outlined above.

Police Scotland-led review of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Following instruction by the UK Government, Baroness Casey published an Audit into group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse in England and Wales in June 2025 which set out findings and recommendations on this issue which included a focus on policing.

In response, Police Scotland has taken forward a series of actions to review their operations and response to this specific issue. The Police Scotland review is based on identifying cases of possible interest, followed by an initial review by trained police officers and investigators. The review covers cases since 2013 involving one or more victims aged under 18 and two or more suspects where Police Scotland and the Crown and Procurator Fiscal Service made the decision to take no further action. This work closely aligns with similar activity by English and Welsh forces as part of Operation Beaconport, established by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Crime Agency in response to Baroness Casey's recommendations.

The Scottish Government has provided additional funding to Police Scotland to support a comprehensive review process and allow coordination of activity across Police Scotland to manage both the complexity and sensitivity of these cases. Police Scotland's review of cases is an operational matter, with progress overseen by the Chief Constable. As noted above, the Scottish Police Authority provides independent oversight of Police Scotland and is responsible for the governance, oversight and administration of Police Scotland and holds the Chief Constable to account for policing in Scotland.

Independent Inquiry into Group-Based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

An independent statutory inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation to be chaired by Professor Alexis Jay, who has extensive experience and expertise, was announced earlier this year. Professor Jay is engaging with stakeholders and victims, as part of the preparatory work required to formally establish the inquiry. This includes consideration of the inquiry's terms of reference, structure, and arrangements, ensuring that it is able to operate independently while also proceeding at pace and with sufficient flexibility to investigate all relevant issues.

Child Protection Unit, Directorate for Children and Families

PE2247/B: Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang based abuse

Petitioner written submission, 19 October 2026

On 11 August 2026 I met two representatives of Police Scotland in order to discuss this petition in relation to data collection, and also to discuss my concerns related to grooming gangs in Glasgow.

These are organised trafficking networks, not just dealing in the exploitation of children, but in weapons and drugs trafficking. They are also thought to be involved in organised fraud. In short, they are organised crime groups with the grooming gangs having been profiled as a result of their prolific activities in relation to child grooming and sexual exploitation.

The predominant victim profile of the grooming gangs is white female children, whilst the predominant perpetrator profile is known to be Pakistani origin adult males, with live Asylum cases known to be part of these networks (Casey 2025).

Police Scotland informed me that they had no intention in terms of starting to routinely collect nationality data in relation to these crimes. This is a basic requirement. How can Police Scotland begin to profile these organised crime groups or assess risk if they will not collect basic data? Police Scotland stated that it might take up to three years for them to find enough evidence in their 13 year review in order to mandate basic nationality data collection.

I am concerned that this is a form of negligence, because we can see from repeated prosecutions, and cases which come to light in England and Wales, that activity in relation to these gangs is rife.

Indeed, prior operations carried out by Strathclyde Police prior to 2004 - Operation Gadher and Barber - have identified Asian crime gangs as a pressing and emergent threat. It was reported that one of these operations was closed due to 'political correctness'; as far as I am aware, this is the only such operation to have ever been closed for such reasons in Scottish criminal history.

It is now 2026, and there is no reason to believe that these organised crime gangs have abated in terms of such organised threat.

In relation to flagging gang based (over two perpetrators) markers, Police Scotland have indicated that they intend to take no action regarding this. This is a known deficit in Police Scotland's data collection systems, and this crime profile of gang based abuse is known to be prevalent within the profile identified by Casey of predominantly Pakistani Grooming Gangs. I believe that it is also a crime profile known to be endemic in certain countries, whose men are arriving in large numbers in Scotland.

I therefore believe that not addressing this issue, also constitutes a form of negligence. If you cannot collect the data or flag the crime, how will it ever be able to be quantified, studied, and therefore prevented and criminals targeted?

In relation to asylum seeker status, religion and ethnicity, Police Scotland have indicated no movement on collecting these markers. Why is this? What are the reasons for this? This is basic Police work.

We must know who is committing crimes, and what crimes, so that they can be accurately identified in nature, prevented, and victims protected.

Data is fundamental to basic Police work. It is something in society that every person is used to being asked about and asked to hand over every day of their lives, down to the most intricate and personal questions.

Why, when it comes to child sexual abuse, and organised group based child sexual exploitation and trafficking, do Police Scotland persistently refuse to collect basic and necessary data?

Why also are they setting up a group who are designed to hear victim testimony and experiences, before they have addressed the shortfall in their abilities to identify and target these criminal enterprises?

This is not victim-centred in my mind, and puts victims at risk of trusting institutions who have demonstrated no valid attempt at rectifying what seems to be a willing blindness to crimes against children, because of the background of the majority of the perpetrators.

I urge the Scottish Parliament, and individuals on this committee who care about children who have been and who are being abused, to find the strength within themselves to push forwards on this issue, speak up for victims, and make Police Scotland answerable to the Scottish Parliament in terms of why they refuse to collect data in relation to such heinous crimes.