



Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Government debate Equally Safe at Work

1. About Close the Gap

Close the Gap is Scotland's expert policy and advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and employees to influence and enable action to address the causes of women's inequality at work.

2. About Equally Safe at Work

Equally Safe at Work is a world-leading employer accreditation programme being piloted in seven councils throughout 2019. The participating councils are **Aberdeen City Council, Highland Council, Midlothian Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Perth and Kinross Council, Shetland Council and South Lanarkshire Council**. It is being developed by Close the Gap and supports the implementation of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. The Equally Safe strategy recognises that violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

A review of international practice by Close the Gap found that there are no existing employer accreditation programmes that focus on violence against women, gender inequality and the workplace. *Equally Safe at Work* is therefore pioneering in making this link, and in focusing on the employer role in preventing violence against women. The pilot is overseen by an expert advisory group, and key stakeholders were engaged in the development of the programme including local government employers, violence against women experts, and trade unions.

3. What will it do?

Addressing gender inequality in the workplace is a fundamental step in preventing and eradicating violence against women, both in the workplace and in society. *Equally Safe at Work* will support councils to develop an increased capacity for addressing the inequalities experienced by women in the workplace and better support female employees who have experienced gender-based violence.

The programme will support employers to take steps to address the causes of their gender pay gap, and support employees who have experienced sexual harassment, domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking, so-called 'honour-based violence' and other forms of violence against women both in and outside of the workplace. *Equally Safe at Work* will enable councils to create a zero-tolerance culture towards violence

against women through improved employment practice, policy development, training and capacity building, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the reporting process.

4. What is involved?

Equally Safe at Work provides employers with a framework to guide their work and a detailed handbook that provides evidence-based advice and guidance, and best practice. Councils must demonstrate that they are meeting the criteria under each of the six key themes to receive accreditation. These themes are:

1. Leadership
2. Data
3. Flexible working
4. Occupational segregation
5. Workplace culture
6. Violence against women

The programme is structured by bronze, silver and gold tiers which enables councils to progress from building a foundation for change to embedding a strong culture of gender equality within the organisation. In the pilot, we anticipate that councils will be working towards the bronze tier.

5. Violence against women and the labour market

Violence against women is perpetrated at epidemic levels. **Three million women each year in the UK experience violence against women¹**, with many more women living with past experiences of abuse. It is a violation of a women's human rights and an enduring social problem. It affects all aspects of women's lives and the workplace is no exception. It is critical that employers understand the impact of gender-based violence on women, so that they are better able to support women to stay in work, and to access the support services they may need.

The **economic cost of violence against women in the UK is estimated to be £40 billion²**. This includes the cost to public services and the lost economic output of affected women. **Domestic abuse is estimated to cost the UK £16 billion, which includes an estimated £1.9 billion lost due to decreased productivity, administrative difficulties from unplanned time off, lost wages and sick pay³**. It

¹ End Violence Against Women & Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) *Maps of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain*.

² Jarvinen, J. Kail, A. & Miller, I. (2008) *Hard Knock Life: Violence against women- a guide for donors and funders*. London: New Philanthropy Capital.

³ Walby, S. (2009) *The Cost of Domestic Violence: Update 2009*.

therefore makes good business sense for employers to support employees who have experienced gender-based violence and to take steps to address gender inequality at work and prevent violence against women.

One in five women in Scotland experience domestic abuse in their lifetime⁴, and three quarters of women are targeted at work.⁵ Perpetrators of domestic abuse and stalking often use workplace resources such as phones and email to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners, acquaintances or a stranger. Perpetrator tactics such as sabotage, stalking and harassment at work affect women's productivity, absenteeism and job retention.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace is now a high-profile issue and there is increasing pressure for employers to take action. **In the UK, more than half (52%) of women have experienced sexual harassment⁶, with this figure rising to two thirds of women aged 18-24.** Experiences range from unwelcome sexual comments to serious sexual assaults. **Research found that 70% of women in Scotland had witnessed or experienced sexual harassment.⁷** Research on experiences of sexual harassment⁸ at work is likely to be affected by under-reporting because **most women will never report it because of a fear of being blamed and a lack of confidence in the complaints procedure.**

Women report sexual harassment as having a negative impact on their mental health, making them less confident at work, and inducing them to avoid certain work situations in order to avoid the perpetrator. All of these effects and responses are likely to diminish their performance at work, and their propensity to apply for and be appointed to promoted posts. Sexual harassment therefore contributes to the glass ceiling, to women's subordinate role in the workplace, and to the gender pay gap⁹.

6. Next steps

Equally Safe at Work will be piloted throughout 2019, and during this time councils will be supported by Close the Gap to take steps to enhance their employment practice. At the end of the one-year pilot period, to gain accreditation, councils will need to demonstrate that have met the criteria set out in the framework, and provide evidence of the changes they have made in the workplace.

⁴ Engender (2017) *Gender Matter Roadmap: Towards women's equality in Scotland*.

⁵ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2013) *Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse*.

⁶ TUC (2016) *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016*

⁷ Zero Tolerance (2017) *Sexism is a waste: The need to tackle violence and misogyny in Scotland's workplaces*

⁸ TUC (2016) *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016*

⁹ Engender (2017) Engender Submission to the Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation in Scotland.

The evaluation of *Equally Safe at Work* will measure if councils have an improved understanding of gender inequality and violence against women; improved understanding of their role in preventing violence against women and advancing gender equality; improved employment policies and practice that are gender- and violence against women-sensitive; and that tolerance of violence against women in the workplace has reduced. Following a successful evaluation, Close the Gap will explore a larger roll out of the programme.