Scotland's Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-2025

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Ministerial Foreword

As a strong advocate of the use of data to improve the quality and inclusivity of Scotland's services, strengthening the equality evidence base to ensure that services deliver for everyone is vital. The Scottish Government has a longstanding commitment to inclusive, evidence-based policy.

Scotland's Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-2025 builds on our ambitious and wide-ranging Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP), which began in April 2021. Through the EDIP, we worked closely with partner organisations to undertake a range of actions to share good practice and make improvements to priority datasets.

This new strategy aims to deliver better equality evidence that will, in turn, enable policymakers to develop sound and inclusive policies to improve service delivery and improve outcomes across Scotland. Good quality equality evidence is essential to informing our understanding of what is happening in the lives of all of Scotland's people and in implementing effective solutions to tackle structural inequality, helping the people who need it most.

The Scottish Government and our partners already publish a wide range of robust equality evidence, and this new Equality Evidence Strategy adds to that. It aims to improve and expand data already collected, explore new and innovative ways of improving Scotland's evidence base, and importantly has the primary aim of improving the lives of everyone in Scotland.

Christina McKelvie

Minister for Equalities and Older People

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1. Purpose

Robust and comprehensive equality evidence is vital for the design and delivery of inclusive policies and services. The people of Scotland have experienced unprecedented challenges since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. The pandemic exposed deep-rooted structural inequality in our society and exacerbated the disproportionate impact on individuals and groups who already experience disadvantage. Going forward, there is a clear collective need and a desire for better equality evidence.

This document presents Scotland's new Equality Evidence Strategy, covering the period March 2023 to December 2025. It sets out a range of actions to strengthen Scotland's equality evidence base that will be carried out by the end of 2025, along with a refreshed vision and direction that have been developed based on stakeholder views and feedback.

The strategy aims to enable policymakers to develop sound and inclusive evidence-based policies to improve service delivery and outcomes for Scotland's people. The publication of this strategy marks the completion of the first phase of the Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP), which laid the groundwork in strengthening Scotland's equality evidence base following the continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The launch of this strategy marks the commencement of the second phase of the EDIP, which will be focused on implementing the actions set out in this strategy, alongside continued efforts to build capacity and share good practice.

Responsibility for successfully implementing the strategy has to be shared across a range of organisations and interests, and across all Scottish Government ministerial portfolios. The Scottish Government will support the collection and use of information by the public sector, academic institutions, the third sector and from within communities themselves. Certain listed authorities have responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and it is incumbent on all organisations to consider their role in funding, designing or undertaking data collection, research and analysis to fill equality evidence gaps. The Scottish Government will continue to learn from and work collaboratively with our partners to improve the equality evidence base for Scotland.

2. Vision

Below is our vision for equality evidence improvement for the lifespan of this strategy, from 2023 to the end of 2025. The vision was developed based on the range of stakeholder views and feedback gathered through our consultation and events.

> To tackle structural and intersectional inequality of outcomes, Scotland's equality evidence base will become more accessible, wide-ranging and robust. A stronger evidence base will enable the development and delivery of sound, inclusive policies and services and enable the measurement of improvements in the lives of all of Scotland's people.

Vision principles

Our vision is made up of three core principles, which describe how the Scottish Government and its partners will achieve this vision together. Within the Scottish Government, these principles will be realised through the implementation of a range of improvement actions (see Actions to Improve the Equality Evidence Base) and the success of delivering on the vision will be assessed against these principles.

> Principle 1: More robust and comprehensive data and evidence will be gathered on the intersecting[1] characteristics of people in Scotland across a range of outcomes.

The Scottish Government and its partners already publish a range of equality evidence, but significant gaps remain. Throughout the period of this strategy, organisations will be supported to gather and publish new robust intersectional equality evidence in accordance with best practice. Actions will also be undertaken to strengthen the equality evidence base through the publication of more robust and comprehensive equality data from existing datasets. Additional research and data gathering will be carried out where evidence broken down by equality variables cannot be produced from existing datasets. The evidence collected will be proportional and fit for purpose, with priorities guided by user need.

> Principle 2: Equality evidence will be made more easily accessible so users will be able to access what they need, when they need it.

There already exists a wide range of robust equality evidence. It is important to make best use of existing equality evidence in order to ensure that the needs and lived experiences of groups are taken into account in a fast-paced, resource constrained landscape. This ensures that efforts are not duplicated and groups are not overburdened.

Furthermore, there are a range of 'users' of equality evidence with differing needs, and purposes of accessing evidence and, as such, differing preferences in how evidence should be made available. This includes (but is not limited to): analysts; policymakers; project managers; academics and data experts; those involved in

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[1] The definition of intersectionality is discussed in the glossary of key terms used in this strategy.

service design and delivery; campaigners; and those with lived experience of inequality.

Over the course of this strategy, a range of activities will be undertaken to improve access to equality evidence in a range of formats to meet known user needs. Improvement will be informed by known barriers to equality evidence access, including those communicated to the Scottish Government through recent consultation and engagement events. Throughout the lifespan of this strategy, work will be undertaken to further consult with users as improvements are implemented to monitor impacts on equality evidence access. The Equality Evidence Finder platform will be developed and further promoted to ensure that users, and potential users, have awareness of the site as a first port of call for identifying available equality evidence in Scotland.

> **Principle 3: Good practice will be shared and promoted to support increased confidence and competence in the production and use of robust equality evidence.**

A key aim of the first phase of the EDIP was to share learning and good practice in the collection, analysis and presentation of equality evidence. The delivery of workshops and seminars and the sharing of good practice examples will continue through the lifespan of this strategy to build confidence and competence among data analysts and users. Recently updated guidance on equality data question wording and response options will be promoted to ensure it is used consistently by collectors of equality evidence.

Ensuring that equality evidence is used to inform the design and delivery of policies and services at the point of critical decision making is key to developing effective solutions to tackle structural inequality. Work will be undertaken to improve the understanding of the role of evidence on the nine protected characteristics in fulfilling organisations' obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (see the Legal obligations section of this strategy for details), alongside the sharing of examples of how equality evidence has been used effectively to improve service outcomes.

3. Background

What is equality evidence?

Where 'equality evidence' is used in this strategy, it refers to statistics and research across a range of characteristics, including "intersections" between characteristics (such as younger women; minority ethnic disabled people; older trans people etc.).

The equality evidence covered by this strategy goes beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 to cover identity characteristics more generally.[2]

The Scottish Government and its partners already collect and publish a range of quantitative and qualitative equality evidence. This includes evidence from the Census, population surveys, administrative datasets and social research. The Scottish Government also regularly identifies and uses equality evidence produced externally by the wider public sector, academic institutions and the third sector to ensure the latest evidence is used to inform our work.

Given that the purpose of equality evidence is often to identify differences among and between relatively small groups of the population, some datasets have more practical utility than others. The most comprehensive source of equality statistics at national and local levels can be obtained from Scotland's Census as everyone in the population is required to submit a return, thus enabling the collection of a range of equality data from the vast majority of the population (although responding to some of the equality questions is voluntary). There are also strong subject-specific administrative data sources, such as data gathered through the delivery of education, health, transport and justice services. In most cases these data sources can be analysed at more localised geographic areas, as well as being available for whole Scotland statistics.

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[2] The characteristics covered in this strategy are: sex, gender, age, disability, race (including ethnicity), gender reassignment (including trans status), sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership.

It is important to note that not all datasets are owned and managed by the Scottish Government. Some key datasets used by the Scottish Government are, for example, owned by departments of the UK Government, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs).

At a national level, the Scottish population surveys (Health; Household; Crime and Justice) all have a common core that allows their samples to be combined for a limited number of questions – this includes the equality questions. In addition, the Annual Population Survey (APS) provides equality breakdowns of key labour market statistics. Equality-focused sample boosts could help population surveys to provide more robust data for smaller sub-groups in the population, although this practice has to be weighed against the robustness of a purely random sample and the significant cost implications of a boost. The Scottish Government already contributes to sample boosts of some surveys led by the UK Government and the ONS to ensure that there is sufficient data collected in Scotland to allow for the robust disaggregation of the Scottish sample by person and/or household characteristics.

Alongside statistical data, qualitative evidence forms a critical part of the equality evidence base. The Scottish Government and its partners regularly commission and support research to fill identified quantitative and qualitative evidence gaps across a range of domains, including undertaking recurring research to examine changes over time. Qualitative research allows for the collection of rich and detailed evidence into the lived experiences of groups with shared and intersecting characteristics. Alongside providing valuable insights to complement available statistics, qualitative evidence may be particularly useful in informing understanding of the experiences of smaller groups of people for whom robust statistics cannot be produced from population-level datasets.

The Scottish Government is increasingly using participatory methods to actively involve people with lived experience (see Participation and engagement for details). Public involvement can be a strong way to ensure that marginalised communities, such as those with intersecting characteristics, are actively engaged in the whole research process from conceptualisation through to implementation and dissemination. Involving people with lived experience could take multiple forms, including co-production, panels, appointment of public advisors and user-led research. It is important to note, however, that when public involvement is attempted without equity between researcher and those with lived experience there is a risk that it could be seen as tokenistic and could perpetuate any pre-existing power imbalances.

The intersectional approach

Strengthening the equality evidence base is not just about filling data gaps via statistical collections, but also about understanding how an individual's experience of structural inequality arises across different contexts and designing research in ways that take into account inequality in power and privilege.

The term 'intersectionality' has its roots in Black feminist activism, and was originally coined by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw used the term intersectionality to refer to the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women, critiquing the "single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law, feminist theory and anti-racist politics" for its focus on the experiences of the most privileged members of subordinate groups.[3] Specifically, Crenshaw highlighted legal cases wherein women were required to choose between bringing a claim of racism or sexism and could not say that they had been discriminated against due to the combined effects of race and sex. Since its original usage, the term 'intersectionality' has been increasingly used in reference to combinations between a range of characteristics, in addition to race and sex, such as disability, sexual orientation, occupation and socio-economic disadvantage, and wider life experiences.

If applied correctly, the 'intersectional approach' has the potential to advance efforts to identify, understand and tackle structural inequality in a given context in a way that focuses on the lived experience of people most affected. For example, intersectionality helps us to understand how people experience services, such as education and healthcare, differently as a result of their identity and unequal power dynamics. Understanding these differences helps us to develop more effective and inclusive policies and services.

An evidence synthesis undertaken by the Scottish Government proposed the following as the foundational elements of intersectionality (represented visually in Figure 1 below):

- a recognition that people are shaped by their simultaneous membership of multiple interconnected social categories (including the characteristics covered by this strategy)

- the interaction between multiple social categories occurs within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g. laws, policies, governments). A recognition of inequality of power is key to intersectionality

- structural inequalities, reflected as relative disadvantage and privilege, are the outcomes of the interaction between social categories, power relations and contexts. As a result, an individual's experiences of inequality can be chronic or transitory, creating unique lived experiences

It should be noted that it is the interaction or "intersection" of two or more characteristics with power dynamics within a given context that gives rise to inequality, not just the presence of intersecting characteristics on their own.

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[3] Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams (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 1989:139–67, p. 149

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the foundational elements of intersectionality.
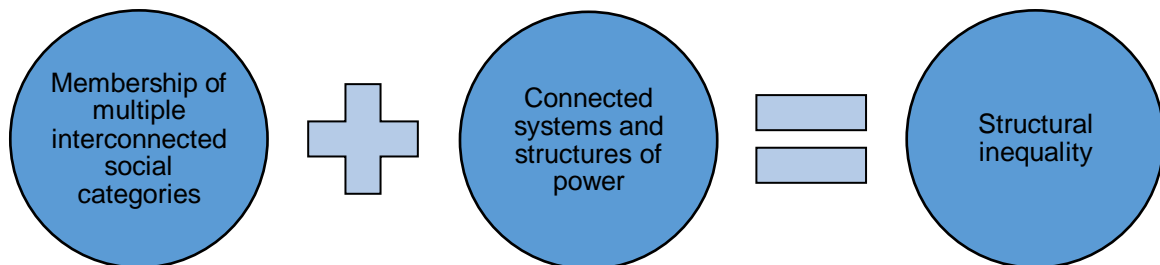
The Scottish Government proposed five key considerations that policymakers and analysts should take into account when taking an intersectional approach:
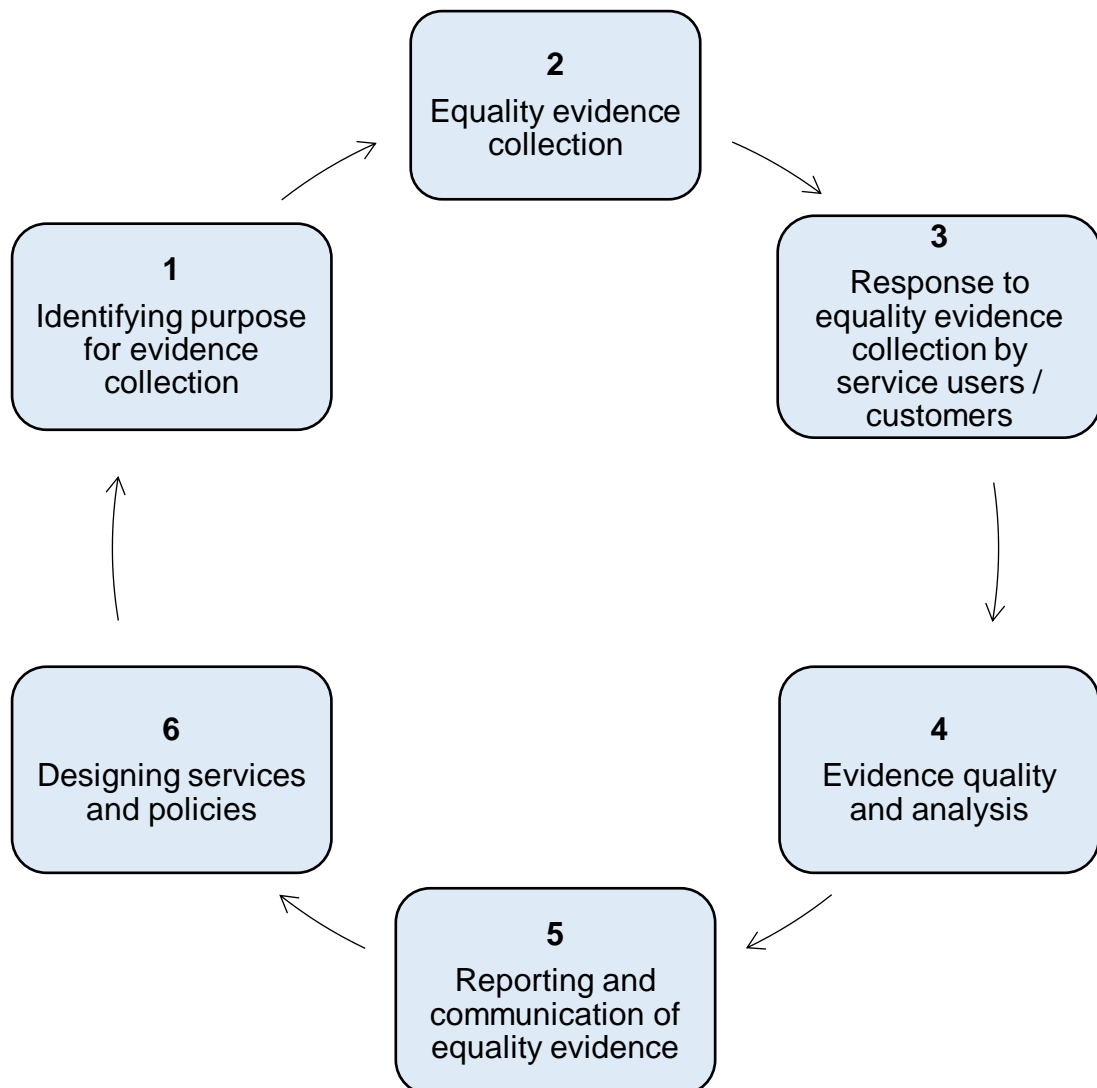
1. contextualisation: structural inequality should be understood within existing systems and structures of power
2. reflexivity: policymakers and analysts should consider how their own power and lived experiences impacts on their ability to make decisions
3. public involvement: participatory approaches ensure that those with lived experience have a central voice in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies
4. reaching marginalised groups: reducing barriers to participation is a critical consideration in the design and delivery of effective research
5. innovative statistical approaches: analysts should consider the full range of options for carrying out robust intersectional data analysis to make the best use of existing datasets

The role of equality evidence in the policy process

Equality evidence is critical to improving understanding of if and how services and outcomes differ. As shown in Figure 2, below, it is a cyclical process with several stages:

1. identifying the purpose or need for evidence collection
2. designing an approach to collect that evidence
3. removing barriers to encourage a good response
4. ensuring the evidence is high quality and utilised as fully as possible
5. reporting according to useful categories that consider intersectionality and are relevant to services and outcomes
6. identifying the impact on outcomes and services

Figure 2: The cyclical process of using equality evidence in policy design and delivery.

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│ evidence         │        │ collection by    │
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There is always a need to be clear on what evidence is required – and why – to ensure that the right evidence is collected, using the most appropriate methods, to meet the specified purpose, and to balance costs and benefits.

It is important to ensure that existing evidence is used before deciding to collect new evidence. There already exists a range of equality evidence collected and published for a number of groups and outcomes in Scotland. The existing evidence base must be thoroughly reviewed to identify whether existing evidence can be adapted or utilised to help understand the policy or service. Making best use of available evidence means that groups are not overburdened or asked to answer the same questions multiple times, and that available resources are maximised. When considering the purpose of equality evidence collection, it is key to consider the likely limitations of making decisions based on the available evidence base.

There will be instances where the existing equality evidence base is insufficient to inform decision making. Where new evidence is required, it is usually much easier and cheaper to collect equality data if it is built into data collection systems from the start. As a new service is developed, the related IT system should be established to collect relevant equality evidence and, as services are redesigned to respond to equality data reporting, the data collection itself should be reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Opportunities to involve and collaborate with groups most affected, particularly those with lived experience, must be sought throughout this process.

When reporting and communicating equality evidence, it is important to do so ethically in ways that ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants, that build trust and do not stigmatise groups for any inequality of outcomes identified (see Reporting and communication of equality evidence). There should always be clear communication with the groups affected to set out the findings and how the evidence has been used to inform policy design (see Trust).

How does the Scottish Government use equality evidence?

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that equality, human rights and children's rights are embedded into everything we do. In so doing, the Scottish Government uses equality evidence for a wide variety of purposes. This includes producing official or national statistics, updating National Performance Framework (NPF) indicators and commissioning social research to inform ministerial decision making around policy directions and budget allocations. Some of these purposes are detailed further below. The availability of robust equality evidence supports the Scottish Government in its ambition to develop and deliver inclusive, evidence-based policies and services.

Legal obligations

In order to meet the legal duties set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and the Scottish Specific Duties (SSDs) and to deliver good, fair outcomes, policymakers and practitioners need robust evidence on the nine protected characteristics (see Box 1). This data enables them to understand whether their services, policies and strategies are having differential impacts in terms of access, satisfaction and outcomes. This is as true for a locally delivered policy, strategy or service as it is for indicators in the NPF.

Box 1: The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The PSED was introduced by the Equality Act 2010 and came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Act applies in Scotland, England and Wales and covers age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership[4] and sexual orientation. The PSED applies to specified public bodies and other bodies when carrying out public functions, who must have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

In 2012, Scottish Ministers made regulations that placed specific duties on Scottish public bodies to help them meet the requirements of the PSED, known as the Scottish Specific Duties (SSDs). The SSDs are intended to provide a supporting framework to enable certain public authorities to better perform their PSED, through enhanced data collection and evaluation, and greater transparency and accountability. In this way, the specific duties help authorities to better perform their duty to have 'due regard' to all 3 needs of the PSED, and to mainstream equality in their everyday work.

Data protection law does not prevent specified public bodies and other bodies from processing personal data for the purposes of the general or specific duties, and should not be considered a barrier to equality evidence collection.[5] However, it is important that any processing of personal data is in compliance with data protection legislation.

The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the PSED in Scotland, and recently ran a consultation on proposals. The results of the consultation are available in an analysis report. Through the engagement carried out to date, substantial feedback has been received on the current implementation of the PSED, including that impact assessments are often carried out too late in the policy development process. Evidence should be used to inform a course of action, rather than just used to assess potential impacts once a policy direction has already been decided on. Furthermore, impact assessments can sometimes use little evidence or involve limited engagement with people with lived experience. The Scottish Government will seek to address the issues identified in our engagement to-date in the next stages of the review.

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[4] Marriage and civil partnership are not a relevant protected characteristic for the purposes of limbs 2 and 3 of the PSED.
[5] EHRC guidance on the public sector equality duty and data protection

The SSDs requires listed authorities, including the Scottish Government, to assess and review the equality impact of their policies and practices. In making the assessment, listed authorities must consider relevant evidence relating to persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and take account of the results when developing the policy. In practice, this requirement has given rise to the carrying out and publication of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) that help to identify and guard against potential risks of discrimination and human rights breaches.

EQIAs are of critical importance in tackling inequality and developing better policy and, in order to carry one out, a policymaker should gather evidence to consider the needs of different groups or individuals in advance of determining a proposed approach and, once a course of action is decided on, the potential impacts it will have across the nine protected characteristics defined under the Equality Act 2010. Impact assessments should gather and use evidence to address all three needs of the PSED (see Box 1). The evidence could take the form of existing evidence, for example official or national statistics, or a policymaker may gather new evidence on the likely impact of a proposed policy on people with protected characteristics. In practice, most EQIAs usually summarise the information available to a policymaker when an action is proposed but will not usually create new evidence. Thus, ensuring that robust and comprehensive evidence on the nine protected characteristics is readily available to meet current and anticipated user needs is essential to the production of effective EQIAs.

Equality budgeting
The Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement (EFSBS) is a key document published alongside the main Scottish Budget every year. The EFSBS assesses how budget decisions impact people with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, supporting the Scottish Government to meet its legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010, the PSED and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The EFSBS includes a detailed analysis of the impact of each ministerial portfolio's spend against each protected characteristic and socio-economic disadvantage. The EFSBS relies on the availability of robust up-to-date evidence to identify what is known about existing inequality of outcomes and what contribution the portfolio's budget makes to addressing these issues.
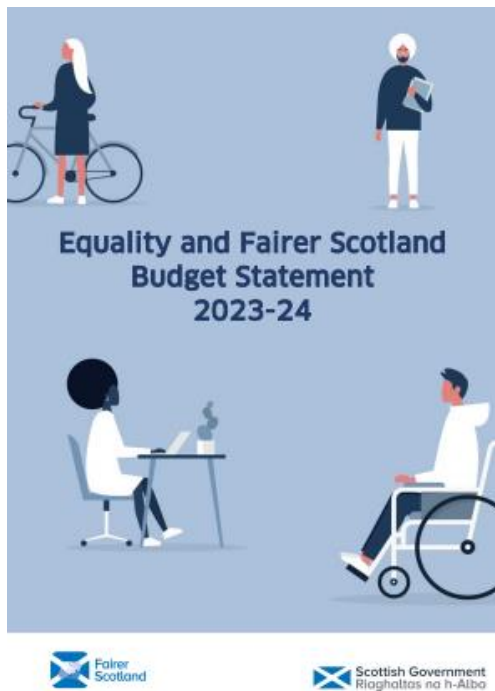
National Performance Framework (NPF)

Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF) is Scotland's wellbeing framework, setting out a vision for national wellbeing in Scotland. In order to achieve this purpose, it sets out 'National Outcomes' which describe the kind of Scotland we are working towards.

These National Outcomes are that we:

- grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential
- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- are creative and their vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment
- have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone
- are healthy and active
- respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

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Progress against these outcomes is measured using 'National Indicators'. Each of the 11 National Outcomes have a set of indicators that underpin them and can be used to help understand if progress is being made. There are 81 indicators in total.

Robust equality data allows us to analyse the indicators by protected characteristics, which helps us to understand if different groups of people in Scotland – such as women, disabled people, older people – are achieving the National Outcomes or not. Available equality breakdowns for the NPF indicators are presented on the Scottish Government's Equality Evidence Finder. In addition, the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Economy Toolkit, designed to help local and regional decision makers solve problems in ways that support their area's transition to a wellbeing economy, was published in November 2022. The toolkit included useful sources of data and evidence that could help policymakers further explore evidence of place-based wellbeing outcomes, drivers, and the indicators in the local-level Wellbeing Economy Monitor.

4. Context

[Scotland's previous Equality Evidence Strategy](#) was launched in 2017 and important improvements were made to Scotland's equality evidence base throughout its life span (2017-2021). In late 2019, an interim [progress report](#) was published that detailed key improvements to the evidence base over the strategy's first two years.

The past few years, particularly during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, have seen extensive activity focused on the equality evidence base. This includes the convening of working groups to steer and inform the work of the Scottish Government and the undertaking of a range of projects to fill priority gaps and identify and promote good practice. This section summarises key developments undertaken and ongoing activity to set the scene in which this strategy has been developed. Annex A provides a more detailed overview of recent progress and the current equality evidence base.

Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP)

Since the launch of Scotland's previous Equality Evidence Strategy in 2017, progress has been made by the Scottish Government to strengthen the equality evidence base. This complements improvement work undertaken across the wider public sector.

Following the conclusion of the [Equality Evidence Strategy 2017-2021](#), the EDIP was launched in April 2021 to lay the groundwork for the development of an ambitious cross-professional data improvement plan for the future. The EDIP built on the work being taken forward by individual analytical areas to produce evidence, guidance, best practice and enhanced networks to improve equality data in the short term. The first phase of the EDIP was governed by a [project board](#), co-chaired by Scotland's Chief Social Researcher and Chief Statistician, which included representatives from a range of external public sector bodies with a key interest in mainstreaming equalities.

Throughout the first phase of the EDIP, progress was made to strengthen Scotland's equality evidence base over a number of projects (see Annex A). Several EDIP projects that were taken forward by the Scottish Government sit within the [Inclusive Data Taskforce Implementation Plan](#), which sets out how data inclusivity will be improved across the UK statistical system.

Many areas of the public sector, including different parts of the Scottish Government, are already progressing work to improve their equality evidence. It is worth reinforcing that often the most effective equality data improvement work will be achieved where policymakers, analysts and stakeholders focus on specific subject domains and characteristics (including the protected characteristics specified in the Equality Act 2010). This work allows active prioritisation of the key service outcome issues that can, in turn, help drive and prioritise the data to be collected.

It is important that the EDIP and this strategy be seen as part of a broader programme of mainstreaming equality and human rights activity within the public sector in Scotland. There needs to be good communication between data producers, policymakers and practitioners to ensure that improved data leads to improved

outcomes. Service improvement can occur by motivated, trained and knowledgeable staff intervening and seeking best practice at any of the different points in the policy development process.

Equality mainstreaming

The Scottish Government seeks to promote and advance equality in all that it does, building on policies and legislation already in place.

The Scottish Government is currently developing an equality and human rights mainstreaming strategy. After engagement with both internal and external stakeholders during 2022, a draft framework has been prepared with four main sections: Strengthening Leadership and Accountability; Improving Policy Coherence; Building and Using Evidence and Experience; Capability, Capacity and Culture.
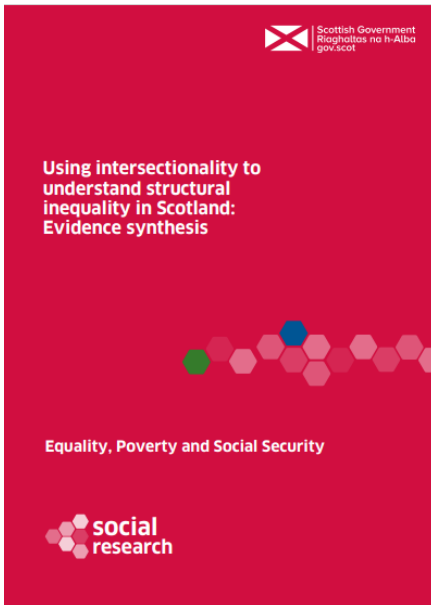
Further engagement with stakeholders will be carried out in 2023 to further develop the mainstreaming strategy. As we finalise this strategy, we are currently working on tools and protocols to support other organisations and the Scottish Government, to further strengthen mainstreaming activity including links to guidance, proformas and best practice examples. These are designed to deliver the aims and objectives of the mainstreaming strategy, and will be shared as part of the engagement with stakeholders which we are aiming to commence in spring 2023.

In addition to equality mainstreaming activity, there are also a number of advisory groups, frameworks and strategies that work with or within the Scottish Government with a focus on strengthening the equality evidence base. Details of these can be found in Annex B.

Intersectionality

Embedding an intersectional approach into policymaking in the Scottish Government is a wider ambition that will require whole system change. Key to achieving this ambition is ensuring alignment between different areas of improvement and recommendations, for example between data and the operation of the PSED in Scotland.

During 2022, the Scottish Government published an evidence synthesis of literature on the concept of intersectionality to improve confidence and competence among analysts and policymakers. This report examined what the concept means, and how it can be applied to policymaking and analysis, as well as providing spotlight examples. In addition to this, the Scottish Government ran a seminar in July 2022 on applying the concept of intersectionality to analysis. This seminar was very well attended and received positive feedback.

Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland: Evidence synthesis

Equality, Poverty and Social Security

Many of the national and official statistical datasets managed by the Scottish Government's Analytical Services Divisions (ASDs) and the National Records of Scotland (NRS) collect and publish equality data. As part of the EDIP, the Scottish Government carried out an Equality Data Audit in autumn 2021. Analysts were asked to assess all datasets used by their ASD to produce official or national statistics, update NPF indicators or inform significant ministerial decision making, and report on which equality variables were collected and published from each. The audit found that almost a third of datasets (29%) were being used to produce intersectional data breakdowns. The most common of these was age by sex, followed by race by sex, and disability by sex.

Where there is more than one characteristic collected from individuals in datasets held by the Scottish Government, intersectional breakdowns may be possible (though in practice often subject to limitations around small sample sizes and data disclosure). Although the analysis produced from these datasets is ultimately the decision of the ASDs who manage them, the Scottish Government Equality Analysis team will continue to promote good practice and co-ordinate robust intersectional analysis to build a strong evidence base.

Examples of intersectional analysis taking place within the Scottish Government includes:

- Scottish Surveys Core Questions (SSCQ)[6] is an annual official statistics publication which publishes intersectional equality data by several characteristics in its reporting
- Social Security analysts publish supplementary tables that provide intersectional analysis of the data presented in Social Security Scotland client diversity and equalities official statistics

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[6] SSCQ is a result of a harmonised design across the three major Scottish Government household surveys: The Scottish Household Survey; The Scottish Health Survey and The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

- intersectional analysis is undertaken as part of the Tackling Child Poverty annual progress updates, with analysis including focus reports on priority family groups (Mothers aged 25 or under; households with babies under one; families with a disabled adult or child)

In some instances, statistical data collections may not be the best source of intersectional evidence, particularly where the subgroup sample size is relatively small. It is important to consider whether other sources of evidence would better inform understanding of the experiences of groups with intersecting characteristics, including through more focused qualitative research, and using methods that present opportunities for co-production of research with individuals and groups with lived experience of structural inequality.

Participation and engagement
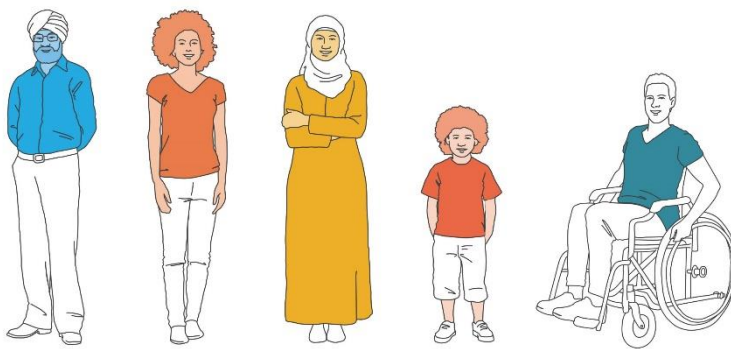
While nearly all research involves participants and their participation of some sort, participatory research is distinct. It typically uses methods that offer people with lived experience greater decision making power and influence, for example taking a collaborative approach to developing a solution to an issue. This recognises that people have valuable expertise through lived experience, which is important to fully identify the causes of and solutions to an issue. Significant programmes of work across the Scottish Government have taken approaches that use participatory methods or draw on lived experience in research and policy development. In autumn 2022, a survey of Participation and Engagement work taking place across Scottish Government was undertaken. The survey provides an initial overview of the extent and nature of Scottish Government's Participation and Engagement work. The survey included questions on the characteristics of participants and stakeholders involved in Scottish Government's Participation and Engagement work. Its findings note the large number of participatory engagements taking place across Scottish Government, and identify options for a co-ordinated approach to support the delivery of this work.

Examples of participation and engagement work which has taken place across the Scottish Government include the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) 'Experts by Experience Panel'; the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland and Scotland's Climate

[Assembly](#); the [Social Renewal Advisory Board](#) and The 'People's Panel on Wellbeing 2022 and beyond'.

Participative methods have been used by the Scottish Government to develop the social security system in Scotland through [Social Security Scotland's Experience Panels](#). These panels are made up of people who have experience of one or more of the relevant benefits (i.e. benefits due for devolution following the Scotland Act 2016), and more than 2,400 people registered as panel members when launched in 2017. An example of participative work carried out with the Experience Panels is presented in Box 2.

Box 2: Social Security Scotland – Co-designing the Social Security Charter and Measurement Framework

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 makes provision for the production of a Charter and Measurement Framework, to be made in consultation with people with lived experience of the social security system.[7] A group of diverse people with a range of conditions and experiences (the Core Group) – made up mostly of Experience Panel members – have taken part in workshops with Scottish Government analysts to create the charter, based on the principles in The Act.

The co-design of the Charter Measurement Framework was undertaken between March and August 2019. Scottish Government officials held:

- seven full-day workshops with Core Group 2, including an advice and discussion session between the group and the Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)

- two meetings with representatives from stakeholder groups

- two meetings with SCoSS

Crucial elements of the co-design process included:

- enabling participation: breaking down barriers to participation through, for example, use of sign language interpreters and audio describers where necessary. All written materials used by the group were made available in accessible formats, for example, large print or different colour contrast, where needed

- power: group decision making and ownership about the process of producing the Charter Measurement Framework and the processes' outputs

- knowledge: capacity building with participants; guests, including policy colleagues and ministers, to inform group of latest developments/answer questions

- knowledge exchange: recognising lived experience as expertise

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[7] [Social Security Charter measurement framework: co-design process - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](#)

5. Engagement with stakeholders in developing this strategy

Between July and October 2022 the Scottish Government carried out a public consultation on Citizen Space on a draft plan to improve and strengthen Scotland's equality evidence base. The consultation received 116 responses from a range of equality advocacy organisations, public sector bodies and individuals. An analysis of the consultation was carried out by an independent research consultancy, Why Research. The full report can be found in Annex C.

The consultation asked 32 questions (including 6 questions in the Respondent Information Form), broken down as follows: 15 closed questions (e.g. inviting yes/no/don't know responses; with multiple choice options) and 17 open questions (inviting a free text response option: e.g. explain your answer, any other comments). The consultation had four sections:

- section 1: asked for views on the vision for equality data improvement over the period 2023-2025
- section 2: asked for views on the proposed improvement actions
- section 3: asked when and how equality evidence is used and any barriers faced
- section 4: asked who is producing equality evidence and any barriers faced

To promote and supplement the consultation the Scottish Government Equality Analysis team also ran a series of stakeholder engagement events in August and September 2022. There were around 200 attendees across the events from a number of public sector and equality advocacy organisations.
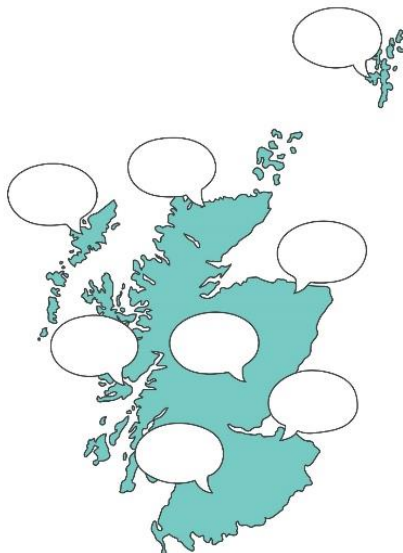
 Alongside feedback on each action in the draft plan, key cross-cutting findings from the consultation and events included:

- there was general agreement on the need for a strong evidence base upon which services can be designed and decisions and policy can be made

- respondents welcomed opportunities to improve the equality evidence base and acknowledged the need for more data on specific groups. The need for intersectionality along with a capacity to disaggregate data were key for many respondents

- qualitative data was seen as providing valuable information in its own right, as well as helping to enhance understanding of quantitative data

- there were calls for help and guidance for data users to maximise their understanding of how to understand and analyse data, as well as how to use this effectively in decision-making

- there were some comments on the terminology used and the conflation of different terms

- the Equality Evidence Finder was seen to be a useful tool, although there were some comments on a need to improve its utility, for example, by improving upon its accessibility, and by ensuring that all data are up-to-date

6. Challenges

There are several challenges involved in improving Scotland's equality evidence base, including those raised by stakeholders in the EDIP consultation and stakeholder engagement events. We also share a number of challenges which are similarly experienced by the Welsh Government and the ONS in filling equality evidence gaps. These challenges provide important context against which improvement activity has been developed and will be implemented throughout the lifespan of this strategy.

Cost and feasibility challenges

The Equality Analysis team within the Scottish Government has a prominent role to play in promoting and coordinating robust analysis to build a strong evidence base. The team also plays a leading role in enabling others to lead effectively and develop good practice. However, most of the analysis has to be carried out within relevant policy areas across the Scottish Government, in line with our mainstreamed approach. As such, these policy areas determine priorities for equality evidence in their own area. In general, analysts work to support policy officials to ensure policies are developed in an inclusive way. Thus, priorities for filling equality evidence gaps will depend to some extent on policy priorities within each area. However, not every item of data that policymakers would like to know can be collected, often because of technical, ethical or cost barriers. There is always a need be clear on what data are required and why to ensure that the right data are collected to meet the specified purpose, and to balance costs and benefits.

Trust

Trust is often a barrier to participation in research, especially among the most marginalised groups. Research by the Inclusive Data Taskforce, which was established in October 2020 by the UK Statistics Authority to improve the UK's inclusive data holdings, found that there was a general sense of distrust in government and in government statistics among participants, particularly among under-represented groups (in the Inclusive Data Taskforce research these groups included those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, other minority ethnic groups and documented and undocumented migrants).

Equality questions can involve people divulging sensitive personal information so understandably some people are reluctant to provide answers. For example, people may be reluctant or feel particularly sensitive about sharing information about gender reassignment, sexual orientation, or religion or belief due to fears of discrimination or harassment or feelings that the information is irrelevant to the service. Many people will have a distrust of public bodies' ability to store their data securely. While there may be public distrust of large data linkage systems, the lack of join-up nationally and locally between data sources and collections means that the same questions need to be asked and answered again and again, increasing respondent burden further.

It may be that if public bodies are sensitive to these concerns, seek to link collections safely and manage the response issues in a safe and supportive way, that sample

sizes will increase along with the quality and validity of the data. Seeing data collections leading to specific improvement (i.e. policies) is also likely to increase response.

Over the term of this strategy, work will be undertaken with under-represented groups and relevant stakeholder organisations to increase trust in and understanding of government research and statistics. Collaboration with the ONS will be sought on relevant projects in this space.

Under-representation of certain groups

The previously discussed issues around trust suggest that certain groups are more likely to be under-represented in government statistics and research. This means that policy decisions may not adequately reflect their interests and experiences. Furthermore, where underrepresented groups do take part in research, they may make up a proportionately small percentage of the sample, limiting options for disaggregated data.

If sample sizes are small, alternative sources of data will be sought, where possible, utilising methods such as data pooling or through qualitative approaches.

Accessibility and usability of data collection tools

Data collectors should design appropriate methodologies and instruments for data collection, including question wording and setting (face-to-face, digital, self-completed or staff-completed). Respondents should be able to recognise themselves and their circumstances within categorisations. The Scottish Government has produced guidance on how to collect equality data. The recommended questions aim to be simple to understand and should be used consistently across data collection tools.

Data quality and analysis

While administrative data sources with a good response rate may be able to provide service-level information disaggregated by a variety of equality variables and, in some instances, intersections between characteristics, it will always be more difficult with population surveys which by nature have smaller samples sizes. There are, however, various analytical statistical techniques (for example combining years, imputing data, data linkage) that might allow data to be mined better than it is at present. It is also important to quality assure data and data should be checked for consistency and to ensure that individual cases are not disclosive.

Reporting and communication of equality evidence

Once data are clean, quality assured, analysed and ready for reporting, there can still be some issues to overcome. Included in this would be the categories that can or should be reported; the labelling used; acceptable confidence intervals, disclosure issues and presentation in a range of easy-to-understand accessible formats. The reporting and communication of equality evidence should always be done in ways that do not further stigmatise or blame individuals or groups.

The [Equality Evidence Finder](#) provides a central repository for equality data, but it is important to consider a range of accessible formats and presenting data and charts in a variety of formats.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Population surveys are important sources of equality evidence and, as such, it is important to note when thinking about change over time. In March 2020, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, fieldwork for the Scottish Government's core surveys - the Scottish Household Survey (SHS), the Scottish Health Survey (SHeS), and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) - was suspended. A revised approach, which involved no interviewer travel and surveys conducted remotely by telephone or by video, was piloted and adopted for the remainder of the 2020 sample. This change in method has the potential to change the accuracy of estimates and introduce discontinuity into data series'. As such, it has been recommended that when using core survey data 2020 data should not be compared with data that came before it.

Stakeholder differences

Different stakeholders have varying, and sometimes conflicting, views on which equality evidence gaps should be prioritised and how data should be gathered. This came through clearly in our consultation. Where time and resources are limited and it is not possible to meet all demands and views, there will need to be prioritisation of data development work and decisions made that do not meet all stakeholder and user needs. However, a range of stakeholder views will often be sought in order to guide our decision making.

7. Actions to improve the equality evidence base

The Scottish Government know that there are gaps in the equality evidence base. Recognising this, and in order to respond to user needs, an Equality Data Audit was undertaken within the Scottish Government. The purpose of this audit was to identify where evidence gaps existed across analytical areas (e.g. health, justice) and across a characteristics.

In October 2021 Equality Data Audit returns were received from across the 10 analytical areas of the Scottish Government and National Records of Scotland (NRS). Analysts were required to provide RAG (red, amber, green) ratings[8], for each dataset in their area, on the collection and publication of data on nine characteristics[9].

Additional information was also requested about each dataset on any barriers to equality data improvement, pressures for improvement, and any current work underway or plans to make equality data improvements.

Analysts were asked to include in their return all datasets used by their analytical area to:

- produce official or national statistics

- inform National Performance Framework (NPF) indicator progress

- produce statistics that have informed Scottish ministers' decision-making

A total of 199 datasets were included in returns across the 10 analytical areas, of these:

- age and sex (or gender) were collected in over 6 in 10 datasets, and breakdowns by these characteristics published from around 5 in 10 datasets

- race (or ethnicity) and disability were collected in just under 3 in 10 datasets, and breakdowns by these characteristics published from around 2 in 10 datasets

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[8] For each dataset, analysts selected from a dropdown list to indicate whether data on each protected characteristic are (a) collected and (b) published. Definitions of each RAG rating are as follows:
- red - collected: no data collected on this protected characteristic; published: no published breakdowns for this protected characteristic
- amber - collected: data collected but not robust enough to produce reliable statistics for this protected characteristic (e.g. due to small sample size); published: breakdowns for this protected characteristic are not proactively published but are available on request
- green- collected: data collected that are robust enough to produce reliable statistics for this protected characteristic; published: breakdowns for this protected characteristic are proactively published (e.g. when new data become available or according to a publication schedule)

[9] Sex or gender; age; race or ethnicity; disability; sexual orientation; gender reassignment or trans status; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; religion or belief.

- marriage and civil partnership and religion or belief were collected in just over 1 in 10 datasets, and breakdowns by these characteristics published from less than 1 in 10 datasets

- sexual orientation was collected in 1 in 10 datasets, and breakdowns by this characteristic published from less than 1 in 10 datasets

- pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment were collected and breakdowns by these characteristics published from less 1 in 10 datasets

More detailed information on the findings of the Equality Data Audit by analytical area and RAG rating is available this summary paper.

Improvement criteria

The actions outlined in the table below show a range of different types of planned analytical activity aimed at improving Scotland's equality evidence base. These datasets and improvement activities were chosen by analysts following the internal equality data audit and were based on the following set of criteria. The Scottish Government and NRS sought to identify equality data improvement actions that are challenging but achievable (particularly taking into account available resources) and where there were:

- already known pressures to improve equality data within the portfolio area
- known evidence gaps, including those highlighted by external stakeholders or policymakers
- relevance and a clear user need for the data, i.e. consideration of which equality variables would be relevant to implementation or evaluation of policies or measuring service delivery
- likely to be the resources required to make improvements

Summary of improvement actions

Annex D sets out, in tabular form, the actions identified by the Scottish Government and NRS across a number of key themes. These actions cover improvements to the data on a range of equality variables, including all nine of the protected characteristics, and improvements are within a timeframe until the end of 2025.

Many of the actions focus on improvements to routinely-used datasets and statistical outputs to ensure investment in evidence sources known already to inform significant decision making. However, there are also likely to be numerous social research questions that will arise over the course of the strategy which will be considered and prioritised locally based on policy needs, stakeholder input and available resources.

The list of actions that follow demonstrate the ambition of the Scottish Government and NRS to improve the equality evidence base across a range of themes.

These improvement actions are wide-ranging and cover all parts of the data cycle, from engaging with users about their needs around data collection right through to strengthening analysis and reporting. Some common themes have emerged from the actions, which are summarised below.

Implementation of the improvement actions will deliver on our vision. Across the actions, we are committing to:

- working with data providers to improve the completeness of the equality data they have access to for analysis. We have recognised the benefit of working with data suppliers to improve the breadth, quality, granularity and intersectionality of data held on systems. There is also commitment to improve consistency of the variables collected and bring them in line with the Census 2022. Some areas are planning on carry out scoping exercises to assess the quality of the equality data collected by data suppliers and determine gaps
- improving data utility. Several methods were put forward that were designed to improve the quality of the data and increase sample sizes for better analysis. These included data pooling, i.e. combining multiple years' worth of data to gain a larger number of records so that analysis can be carried out and broken down by smaller equality groups. Data utility can also be improved by data linkage and some analytical areas intend to combine their own data with the population census
- producing more detailed analysis of data already collected. For example, expanding the range of characteristics in publications and including additional tables showing breakdowns by equality variables not previously collected
- carrying out new analysis of substantial data sources, such as the Census, where new data is expected to come on stream. Where the dataset has larger sample sizes, there is also scope for new intersectional equality analysis and some analytical areas intend to carry this out
- sharing good practice to increase the confidence and competence in the collection, analysis and use of equality evidence

9. Governance and Collaborations

Governance

Within the Scottish Government, responsibility for taking forward activity to tackle inequality sits with the Minister for Equalities and Older People. However, in order to achieve the collective ambitions set out in this strategy, action is needed across all Scottish Government ministerial portfolios and beyond. Analysts across Scottish Government who report to Scotland's Chief Social Researcher and Chief Statistician will be responsible for achieving actions set out in Annex D.

The first phase of the EDIP, which ran from April 2021 to March 2023, was governed by a project board, co-chaired by Scotland's Chief Social Researcher and Chief Statistician. The board included representatives from a range of public sector bodies with a key interest in mainstreaming equalities, including Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the Improvement Service (IS), and Public Health Scotland (PHS). The project board supported the design and delivery of projects during the first phase of the programme and provided strategic input into the development of this strategy.

Moving forward, the project board will continue to provide oversight and governance of the improvement work during the three year lifetime of the strategy. It will continue to meet quarterly and an update on progress on the improvement actions will be a standing agenda item on project board meetings.

An interim report, detailing progress towards the completion of the improvement actions, will be produced by the Scottish Government Equality Analysis team and published half way through the lifetime of the strategy – this interim report will be informed by analysts taking forward the improvement actions set out in the strategy. There will also be a progress report at the end of the strategy's lifespan and completion of the improvement actions will be key to the success of the programme.

Collaborations

The Scottish Government will work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to improve the equality evidence base for Scotland. Throughout the period of the strategy, the Scottish Government will proactively seek the input of a number of groups including:

People with lived experience

The input of people with lived experience of intersecting characteristics and experiences structural inequality will be sought on a project-specific basis to ensure their experiences are used to inform and shape our work, and to ensure the same groups and individuals are not overburdened.

Equality advocacy organisations and networks

Equality advocacy organisations and networks may wish to express their views and ensure these are taken into account with respect to the characteristic they represent, and we welcome their involvement. Input from stakeholder organisations will be sought on a project-specific basis.

Public sector bodies

As collectors and users of equality data, collaboration with these bodies is vital to achieving the vision set out in this strategy. The Scottish Government often relies on data collected by local authorities and other public sector bodies to inform policy design and delivery, including a number of routinely used subject-specific administrative datasets.

To facilitate the sharing of data, the platform [ProcXed](#) is already used by local authorities, public bodies, health boards, alongside private companies and third sector groups. The purpose of ProcXed is to ensure data transferred from data providers to the Scottish Government is done so securely, and also provides quality assurance feedback on the data.

A number of actions to improve the equality evidence set out in Annex D rely on collaboration between the Scottish Government and other public sector bodies. As set out above, representatives of these group will be invited to join the Project Board for the strategy to ensure they have opportunities to input into the improvement actions being taken forward by the Scottish Government and share learning and good practice.

The general public

We recognise that the general public may want to express their views and ensure that these are taken into account in terms of the progress being made by the Scottish Government in improving the equality evidence base and the approaches taken to gathering new evidence. Groups most impacted by equality evidence collection will be engaged with, including those reluctant to provide data, to ensure their voices are heard. Regular posts on the [Scottish Government Statistics blog](#) will be published to update members of the public on this ongoing work.

Scottish Government analysts

A network of lead analysts from each analytical area was established during the first phase of the EDIP to support communications and engagement across the Scottish Government and ensure progress is made across the Scottish Government in delivering on this strategy. This network will continue throughout the lifespan of this strategy. The network includes a representative from each analytical area of the Scottish Government, and membership will be continually reviewed to ensure progress is made. The network will be required to provide updates on progress every six months. However, we will seek to ensure the process of providing progress is streamlined to ensure this does not detract from delivery.

Scottish Government policy professionals

Scottish Government policy professionals use equality data to inform policy and delivery. Officials will undertake engagement with and provide resources for policy professionals through events and materials produced as part of the Mainstreaming Strategy.

UK Government, ONS, and devolved administrations

Collaboration with the UK Government, ONS and other devolved administrations will be sought where possible and helpful. For example, we are aware that the [Welsh](#)

[Government have launched their Equality Evidence Strategy](#) last year. We are keen to learn from the approaches taken to tackle shared challenges involved in improving the equality evidence base by the UK Government, ONS and devolved administrations. Likewise, the UK Government and ONS are the owners of a number of datasets used by the Scottish Government so their input will be sought on a project-specific basis as actions are implemented.

Academics and data experts

Academics and data experts hold valuable expertise on data collection, analysis and presentation. We are keen to learn from and showcase this good practice across the public sector. Additionally, input from academics and data experts be sought on a project-specific basis, including through the commissioning of research.

Regulatory and scrutiny bodies

Regulatory and scrutiny bodies will be contacted, where a need for input would be helpful. We will learn from and take on board their input to shape our approaches and actions throughout the lifespan of this strategy.

Local and national politicians

As users of equality evidence local and national politicians, we recognise that politicians may wish to provide their views on equality data gaps. We will take on board these views, consider actions to address these and provide updates on our progress.

9. Glossary

Equality evidence – see the What is equality evidence? section of the strategy

Protected characteristic – as set out in the Equality Act 2010 it is illegal to discriminate against someone based on these characteristics. They are: age, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, religion of belief, marriage and civil partnership, disability and pregnancy and maternity.

Intersectionality – is shaped by 3 key tenets: (1) people are shaped by their simultaneous membership of multiple interconnected social categories; (2) the interaction between multiple social categories occurs within a context of connected systems and structures of power; (3) structural inequalities are the outcomes of the interaction between social categories, power relations and contexts.[10]

Intersectional data – data that takes into account two or more combinations of individual, social/cultural and environmental characteristics and, where the dataset allows, the context in which these combinations of characteristics give rise to relative advantage and disadvantage.

Structural inequality – inequality that is embedded in social structures, based on institutionalised conceptions of differences based on, for example, sex, race, sexual orientation or disability.

Lived experience – knowledge and expertise gained through direct involvement, such as experience of inequality or discrimination, or through group membership.

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[10] Report on using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

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