Young Women’s Access to Culture in Scotland

# Background

The Young Women’s Movement is Scotland’s national organisation for young women’s leadership and rights. Our vision is a fairer Scotland where young women and girls are meaningfully heard, valued and supported to lead collective action and enact transformational change throughout society, systems and structures. Our work is imagined and led by young women, for young women.

# Cultural engagement in Scotland 2023: Scottish Household Survey findings

At The Young Women’s Movement, we welcome the recent Scottish Government report Cultural engagement in Scotland: insights from people's experiences, which, by drawing on data from the Scottish Household Survey, provides evidence on cultural engagement in Scotland in 2023. At The Young Women’s Movement, we support young women and girls across Scotland to lead change on issues that matter to them – including their cultural rights. We believe it is for young women to determine the changes they want and need in their lives, and we make sure their voices, opinions and insights are heard and understood by decision-makers.

We strongly believe that young women in Scotland should have the right to access, contribute to and participate in cultural life and the conduct of cultural practices, and the right to access and enjoy heritage in its tangible, intangible, natural and mixed manifestations.

This includes the right to:

* Expression and creation;
* Information and communication;
* Language;
* Identity and belonging to multiple, diverse and changing; communities of shared cultural values;
* Development of specific world visions and the pursuit of specific ways of life; and
* Education and training.

# Accessing culture

This Scottish Government report explores cultural engagement, attendance and participation at a national level in Scotland alongside additional detail across various protected and socioeconomic characteristics. While we are reassured that the report clearly acknowledges and outlines the barriers to cultural participation, the latest data (2023) illustrates that young women have strikingly low provision to participate in culture in Scotland on a national level.

Despite the report highlighting that cultural engagement in Scotland is high, with the data showing that just under nine in ten (88%) adults were culturally engaged (a figure which has maintained since 2022), the data also suggests that young women and girls face significant barriers to participation in culture in Scotland.

While more women (79%) than men (68%) reported having participated in a cultural activity in the last 12 months, when the data is disaggregated by age, we see that young people’s participation in cultural activities in Scotland is the lowest; only 68% of those who are 16-24 years old and 71% of those 25-34 years old participated in cultural activities, which is low in comparison to those 45-59 years old (75%), 60-74 years old (77%) and over 75 years old (75%). This gap in rates of participation for young people in comparison to other subgroups highlights systemic barriers that impact young women’s rights to participate in culture and heritage in Scotland.

# Intersectional Gender Analysis

At The Young Women’s Movement, we take an intersectional feminist approach to social change, campaigning and movement building, and research. To truly understand the complexities of young women’s roles, it’s vital to take an intersectional approach in our analysis. Intersectionality is a concept, coined by scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, that examines how various social categorisations, such as gender, age, race, class, ability, and ethnicity interact to shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion. While gender analysis highlights disparities between men and women’s experiences, intersectionality acknowledges that no one’s identity exists in isolation. So, when we take an intersectional approach, we don’t take gender as a singular experience, but one that exists within a wider framework of identities that change our experiences of power. Taking an intersectional approach in our work helps us to:

* avoid making over-generalisations of gendered experiences;
* identify hidden inequalities and reveal layers of power, inclusion and exclusion;
* enhance targeted programmes, campaigns and research;
* promote broader goals of equity and build connections within wider movements of social justice.

As Scotland’s national organisation that works at the intersection of gender and age, intersectionality is central to our work. That is why we see it fit to not only highlight that this Scottish Government report show lows levels of cultural participation in young women, but that the report also shows that participation was higher among adults with a degree or professional qualification; highest among adults with higher annual household incomes; lower for adults with a disability; and that participation steadily decreased as deprivation, measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2020), increased. We believe that all young women should have the right to participate in culture, regardless of income, qualifications, disability, or where they live in Scotland.

Crucially, the data made available by this Scottish Government report is disaggregated by some key variables, such as gender and age, which we welcome, as it reveals nuanced patterns and disparities; however, this data is not available for other key variables such as ethnicity, race, and nationality, which limits our understanding of many young women’s experiences of participating in culture. Another key limitation to the data produced and shared in this report is that the data is not disaggregated in an intersectional way in that we can only analyse data for each key variable in isolation to each other; for example, we only have data for gender and for age in isolation of each other, so we cannot truly know what the data shows for women at a certain age bracket. This means that, because we only have data for young people and data for women, rather than data for young women, we have to make certain assumptions in our analysis and conclusions around young women’s participation in culture in Scotland.

Concerningly, the data reveals even less for young women who have other intersecting marginalised identities, such as for young disabled women or young women from lower income households. Crucially, we have no data at all for young women of colour, young women of other oppressed ethnicities, and young women who are living in Scotland with varying migration statuses. This bars us from adequately examining structural barriers and how power operates at different levels when young women try to participate in culture in Scotland.

# Cost-of-Living Crisis

At The Young Women’s Movement, we know from our own research, which does centre an intersectional approach, that the cost-of-living crisis continues to deepen for young women and girls across Scotland, and this will be a barrier to young women exercising their cultural rights. According to this report, in 2023, the most frequently cited factors limiting or preventing people from attending cultural events and places was a ‘lack of time’ (12%) followed by ‘cost of tickets’ (12%); and ‘cost of tickets’ has been maintained as a barrier since 2022.

At The Young Women’s Movement, we know that the cost-of-living crisis will be a significant financial barrier and time constraint for young women trying to participate in culture in Scotland. In 2023, The Young Women’s Movement and Scottish Women’s Budget Group co-launched our report, ‘I am just keeping my head above water’: Young women’s experiences of the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland. The report highlights how young women are struggling – financially, emotionally, and physically – during the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland. Some young women told us that they are struggling to afford socialising with their friends, including going to the cinema or attending a concert, which is leading to a deep sense of social isolation and even loneliness, particularly for those living in rural and island communities.

“...compared to the Central Belt, there are fewer social groups (i.e., craft groups, choirs) and the ones that do exist seem to be populated by older women. I love older women, but it would be nice to meet some people my own age.” - Young Women Lead Highlands participant

“I spend a lot of my free time at home, because it costs too much to go out to do nice things.” - ‘I’m just keeping my head above water’ research survey respondent

# Young Women Remember

The Young Women’s Movement works closely with young women and girls in Scotland to co-design and co-produce arts, culture and heritage programmes and research to empower young women and girls to lead in these areas and advocate for their cultural rights. Young Women Remember, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, is our current heritage research project, led and co-designed by 14 young women, which seeks to uncover the real stories of our movement from its inception as YWCA Scotland over 100 years ago in 1924. The project began in April 2024, and since then we have made significant progress in discovering fascinating information about our history and the women who have contributed to building and sustaining our movement over the past century. By the end of the project, we will have curated written testimonies and images from our archives and newly filmed oral histories into a ‘living’ digital archive that will continue to grow with young women’s stories in the future.

According to the Scottish Government report, the majority of respondents (86%) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘tended to agree’ that it is “important to them that Scotland’s heritage is well looked after”. Women have historically been underrepresented and marginalised in the narratives of history and heritage in Scotland, and if we don’t intervene early with projects such as Young Women Remember, there is risk that these stories could be lost. By uncovering these stories, we will showcase personal examples of how collective action can make a positive difference in the world, inspiring the next generation of young women to learn from the past and have the confidence to address contemporary issues together in their own innovative ways.

“I often have trouble being arty and creative in front of others but tried my best this weekend (and really enjoyed it!) it was great getting to share my true thoughts, ideas, passions and traits with others.” - Young Women Remember Steering Group Member

In the Scottish Government report, almost half of respondents (47%) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘tended to agree’ with the statement “culture and the arts make a positive difference to my life”, and over half of adults (51%) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘tended to agree’ with the statement “culture and the arts make a positive difference to my local community”. We know this is particularly true for young women, who, without cultural co-production projects such as Young Women Remember, face significant barriers to participating in culture in Scotland, especially cultural projects that centre the history of women and girls’ contributions to Scottish history, heritage and culture.

At The Young Women’s Movement, we ask the Scottish Government to:

1. Produce and publicly share data about national cultural participation that is disaggregated by all key variables, particularly around race and ethnicity, and in a manner where it can be analysed with an intersectional approach, so that we can truly and adequately understand the structural barriers of those most marginalised in Scottish society.
2. Consider young women’s unique accessibility needs and take appropriate actions to mitigate their exclusion from cultural participation on a national scale. Young women’s ability to participate in culture should not depend on what qualifications they have, what their income is, where they live, or whether they are disabled or not.
3. Meaningfully consult with young women when developing national cultural strategies, rather than making decisions for and about them. Young women have unique cultural wants and needs, and more accessible mechanisms should be in place for young women to voice their cultural wants and needs in decision-making spaces.
4. Invest in a national cultural infrastructure in which cultural and historical resources can not only maintain activity but provide free and low-cost cultural activity to young women, develop and expand to meaningfully co-produce activity with young women; and refurbish spaces so that they are more accessible to young women.
5. Collaborate with young women artists and creatives to ensure that strategies designed to support, develop and promote young women’s creative careers meet their wants and needs and are in-line with international standards for fair working conditions.

# For further information

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