

As the year closed, all eyes were on Scotland, where the Scottish government pushed through an [unpopular bill](#) granting anyone the right to change their legal sex (which, as confirmed by a recent court judgement, now exists as something separate from “biological” sex).

It feels strange to note any progress elsewhere when this is happening, but we are fighting on several fronts. We know how it feels to win and to lose in court, just as For Women Scotland do. We know there will be setbacks, but that won't deter us. Resisting self-ID in UK law in 2018/19 was a huge battle which women won, but we know this is a long haul. Many of us thought rights for women and girls were settled in law. Now we see how fragile those rights are.

Our focus this year

We've worked intensively with policy-makers in UK government, which has longer term value as well as some rapid results. We've been able to shed more light on the issues, both in private briefings and in the media.

In sport we have certainly seen progress, although there is a long way to go.

Perhaps the most significant change this year has been [the shift in public perception](#). After years of suppressing debate and media coverage, the trans lobby is now losing the war of words. There is more coverage of the issues, more awareness of what the trans umbrella covers nowadays, and what the trans lobby are demanding. That gives us a stronger foundation on which to build. Reinstating fairness and justice for women and girls across all the areas where it's been damaged by trans-centred policies will take time but we are building momentum and most people are on our side.

Inspiring speakers at our FiLiA sport event



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Scotland

Last year we said that working together with Scottish women to oppose self-identification in the Gender Recognition Reform Act would be a big priority for us. We have been working closely with For Women Scotland, Murray Blackburn Mackenzie and with the political campaign groups. We liaise with the other campaign groups in England and Wales too, to support and amplify everyone's work.

We've been working intensively behind the scenes at Westminster. Much of what we do has to be confidential but it's all to do with getting the UK government to engage effectively with the risks of Scotland's self-ID law. The UK government has the power to intervene and we have been working to make sure they know what the problems are with the Scottish bill. It's not just [the impact in England and Wales](#), it's also the impact on reserved matters in Scotland, such as women's rights in the Equality Act. That is where the Scottish government may be overstepping their powers.

If Nicola Sturgeon thought Christmas was going to get in the way of effective resistance, she was wrong. We were working right up to Christmas Eve to make sure the right people were ready. All the months of preparation and hard work culminated in [a statement from the UK Prime Minister](#) the day after the bill was passed. He said the UK government will look at the implications.

There are multiple strands to this, including the approved countries list and the legislative competence of the bill. January will be another month of intensive work on this issue.



Prisons



It's five years since [Dr Williams spoke on UK TV](#) and radio about the plight of women in prison with violent males and sex offenders. There were [some positives from the judicial review](#) brought last year, and there have been some policy changes in England and Wales, though still not enough. Scottish GRR will undo those limited gains. One reason why the UK government must refuse to recognise Scottish GRCs is to [block Scottish men in prison in England and Wales](#) from getting a GRC and demanding access to women's prisons. We have ensured that this is understood as one of the reasons the UK government must use its powers to pause this bill.

Sport

Last year we reported that we had launched a campaign to talk to every national governing body we could, to ensure they properly consider the [new guidance issued by the Sports Councils Equality Group](#). We contacted around seventy national governing bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We've met with doxens in a series of private meetings to ask them how they plan to respond to the new guidance, and to give our input. There's a full report of that campaign [here](#). In short, we are making progress, slowly. We expect to see more new policies next year, but restoring fairness is going to take years.

We hosted a panel on [defending women's sport at FilLiA](#), the feminist conference, with star speakers. We've been invited to speak on this subject in Spain, Portugal and the USA. The fightback is increasingly global. While our focus is on the UK, we liaise with other campaign groups wherever we can. The [International Consortium on Female Sport](#) is launching in January 2023, with Fair Play For Women as a founding member.



Political briefings

We continue to raise awareness of the issues, so that politicians understand that trans issues are not for trans people only but affect women and children too. We have held briefings for parliamentarians at Westminster, in partnership with Labour Women’s Declaration and Conservatives for Women. We’ve done our first briefing at the Welsh Senedd, on sport, [organised by Merched Cymru](#). We went to Edinburgh with Sharron Davies MBE and Mara Yamauchi for a [media conference on sport, organised by For Women Scotland](#), which was very well-attended and widely reported.



Dr Nicola Williams, Stephanie Davies-Arai BEM of Transgender Trend and Karen Varley of Conservatives for Women, at Westminster.

Speaking to law makers

We are always looking for opportunities to focus law-makers and policy-makers on the threats to women’s rights. This year we submitted [evidence to eight public consultations](#) where relevant points could be raised. This includes the appalling Crown Prosecution Service [proposals on changing the legal threshold for prosecuting sex by deception](#). These public consultations are in addition to private correspondence and meetings. They are open to all, and we encourage everyone to respond to them.

Media reporting

After years of [fending off our complaints](#), the main media regulator, IPSO, finally started a review of their transgender reporting guidelines. We had met with the chair and with the head of standards and regulations and [pointed out the failings of the guidance](#). They have promised us draft revised guidance in early 2023 that we will be reviewing and giving feedback on.



The Scottish Census

Last year we won our high court action against the Office for National Statistics and the Cabinet Office, forcing them to remove the dodgy guidance on how to answer the sex question. [An account of that action is here](#). We were not able to persuade the Scottish census authorities – the Scottish government, in effect – to follow suit. Reluctantly, because legal action is always expensive and uncertain, [we took them to court](#) in February 2022, just before the Scottish census was due to start. We lost the case and lost the appeal, [leaving us with the bill](#). This was gutting. It shows just how confused and confusing the legislation in this area is. The recent win by the Scottish government against For Women Scotland is more of the same. In both cases, the judge said sex sometimes means biological sex, but sometimes not. They said it means biological sex when that meaning is obvious – referring to maternity rights, for example – but otherwise means female people plus anyone with a GRC that says they're a woman. In [the ruling on our appeal](#), there was a positive statement that when status or important rights were at stake, [sex had to mean biological sex](#) and could not be self-identified. But of course in practice this line is never held. Service providers are too afraid to oppose demands by trans-identifying people. Now, with the latest ruling against For Women Scotland, and with self-ID passed by the Scottish parliament, even that tenuous right may be lost, as any male can assert a female identity and will be able to obtain it in law.



Dr Williams outside the Scottish high court

A word about money

Winning our case against the ONS cost us around £36,000. We won our costs but this is never 100%, [as explained here](#). Losing in Scotland means we have to pay our costs and those of the Scottish government as well. They have indicated their intention to recover costs from us but haven't sent us the bill. It's uncomfortable, it's painful, but it's not a disaster. Generous supporters large and small have helped us bring those actions and enable us to keep fighting. We value the ongoing support as well as rapid responses to crowdfunders when we have needed to raise money for a specific action. Thank you.

The year ahead

- The conversion therapy bill may be back. Working with other campaign groups, [we pushed it back](#) at the end of last year but it's not gone away.
- Scotland will continue to be a focus. Now the bill has passed it's all about legal challenge - either by supporting the UK government to intervene or considering legal action by ourselves and other women's groups.
- We expect new transgender inclusion policies from a number of large sports in the UK including football, swimming, athletics and cycling.
- The media regulator IPSO is to publish its revised transgender reporting guidelines.
- We expect more political briefings, more media coverage, and we'll be working to make it happen.
- We will be pushing sports bodies to reinstate fairness for women and girls. If they do not, we will consider legal action.

What can you do?

We know it is hard to speak up. At the same time, people regularly contact us asking how they can help. So we put together this page of resources to make it easy to [take action in defence of our rights](#). Please keep speaking up, in person informally as well as by contacting decision-makers and elected representatives. Awareness is growing but a lot of people still don't understand what's going on and why it matters. When they do, they are almost always on the side of protecting privacy, dignity, safety and fairness for women and girls.

We set out at the start of this year to see some real policy change, and we have seen that in sport. We are expecting to see progress in media reporting and in healthcare in the coming months. But even as we make gains in recovering rights that we thought were settled years ago, rights are being lost elsewhere. The devastating decision in Scotland on 22 December 2022 to issue Gender Recognition Certificates on the basis of self-identification shows us how fragile our status as women can be. However, we know that the decision in Scotland is running against the tide of popular opinion, right across the UK. We are seeing, hearing, and feeling more support than ever, from women and men across the country. There are tough battles to be fought, not least in Scotland, but we are sure there will be more progress in 2023. Look out for more policy announcements, as we work to regain our rights.

Please support us at: fairplayforwomen.com/donate/



Dr Nicola Williams