

Protected Characteristics Profile: Sex

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

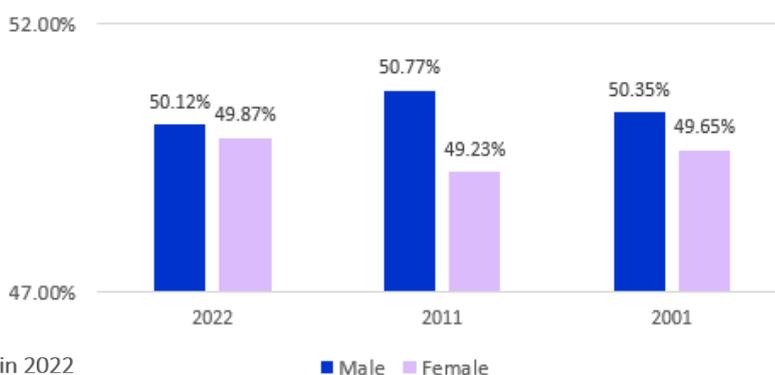
The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Sex discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their sex, in one of the situations that are covered by the Equality Act.¹

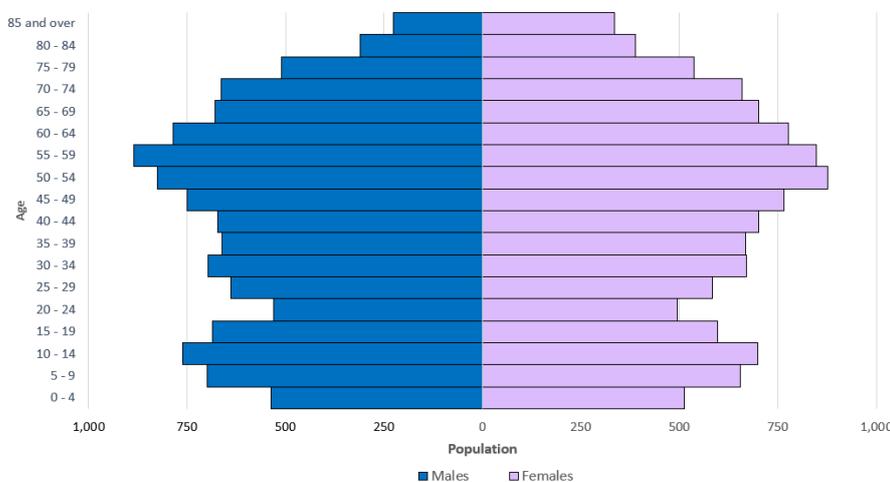
Key Points

1 The population in Shetland, by sex, has remained stable over time, with a slight male majority across all Census years. In contrast, Scotland has consistently had more females than males every Census year.

Percentage of Population in Shetland, by Sex, in 2022, 2011 & 2001



Shetland Population by Age and Sex in 2022



2 In 2022 there were more males in age groups 0-34 & 55-64 than females, whilst there are more females than males in age groups 35-54 & 65-85 and over. This pattern is similar in Orkney, the Western Isles and Scotland, although the Highlands, as a whole, has more females across most age groups.

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals due to their sex highlights several key findings:

Employment

Research from the Older People and Employment Scotland 2017 report, reveals that there is evidence to suggest that ageist and sexist attitudes among employers can interact, particularly disadvantaging older women. As a result, these women often end up in roles for which they are overqualified and underpaid, exacerbating gender inequality in later-life employment opportunities.

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/sex-discrimination>
Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022); National Records Scotland (2022).

Workplace Discrimination

Research from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research found that women aged over 50, in Scotland, face significant barriers such as ageism, gender discrimination, and limited access to career advancement opportunities. Women in this demographic often face lower wages, reduced job security, and are under-represented in leadership roles.

Education

In the UK, there is a higher percentage of men than women who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This has been the case since 2001.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

This summary presents key themes identified from an online survey carried out by Shetland Women's Aid, which received 58 responses. However, this analysis focuses specifically on the responses to seven questions posed by Shetland Islands Council (SIC), rather than the full survey. These questions focused on the following:

1. Challenges: What are the biggest challenges you face as a woman in Shetland?
2. Benefits: What are the greatest benefits of being a woman in Shetland?
3. Awareness: How would you describe the local community's understanding of your needs as a woman?
4. Discrimination: Have you experienced discrimination in Shetland due to being a woman? If comfortable, please share your experience(s).
5. Action: What actions would help reduce or eliminate discrimination against women in Shetland?
6. Services: Are there service areas (e.g. housing, transport, healthcare, learning, employment) that need improvement to better support women?
7. Community & Equality: What changes could improve women's experiences in the community and promote equality and inclusion?

Please note that this summary reflects only the responses to the SIC's portion of the survey. For a comprehensive overview, please refer to the full Shetland Women's Aid publication: [WOMEN IN SHETLAND SHARED THEIR VIEWS - Shetland Women's Aid](#)

The following section outlines the key themes that emerged from the responses to the seven SIC posed questions, highlighting the lived experiences, concerns, and suggestions shared by women in Shetland.

Living with Fear and Insecurity: a recurring theme was the fear of violence and harassment women in Shetland experience, with several women recounting personal experiences ranging from inappropriate comments and groping to violent assaults and rape. This fear is amplified by the understanding that perpetrators are rarely held accountable. This lack of accountability can leave women feeling vulnerable and unprotected.

Navigating a Culture of Silence: the Shetland community can be a double-edged sword for women experiencing abuse. The fear of social repercussions, judgment, or retaliation from the abuser or their network of family and friends is described by some respondents as a significant deterrent to reporting abuse or seeking help. Some described the pressure to conform to traditional norms and maintain a facade of harmony, even at the expense of personal safety and well-being.

Confronting Endemic Sexism and Misogyny: some respondents describe a culture of sexism and misogyny that permeates everyday life. For example, the prevalence of sexist and misogynistic language, particularly in social settings like pubs, where women are expected to endure "sexual jokes and harassment". This normalisation of disrespect contributes to a hostile environment where women feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

Struggling with Limited Support and Resources: the geographic location of Shetland can present a barrier to women seeking help and support. Respondents describe long waiting lists for counselling and limited access to specialised services, such as trauma therapy. The high cost of living and travelling south further restricts options for those seeking to escape abusive situations or access resources available on the mainland. This lack of accessible and affordable support can leave women feeling trapped and isolated, exacerbating their sense of vulnerability and hopelessness.

Suggestions for Improvement include:

- Challenging Cultural Norms: support to create a shift in attitudes and beliefs through open dialogue, education, and a willingness to confront harmful behaviours and attitudes;
- Strengthening Support Systems: improving access to support services for women experiencing abuse or other challenges, including ensuring that specialised services, such as trauma therapy, are readily available;
- Holding Perpetrators Accountable: a zero-tolerance approach to violence and harassment against women, that believes and supports victims, holds perpetrators accountable for their actions, and sends a clear message that such behaviour will not be tolerated; and
- Using the responses to this survey to have more conversations with women and services about activities which can enable women to feel safer.

Work will continue, to hear from men and women about issues they face, living and working in Shetland.

