Scotland's Gender Pay Gap, 2026 Briefing

Scotland's Gender Pay Gap fell in 2026, but it remains higher than it was in 2023

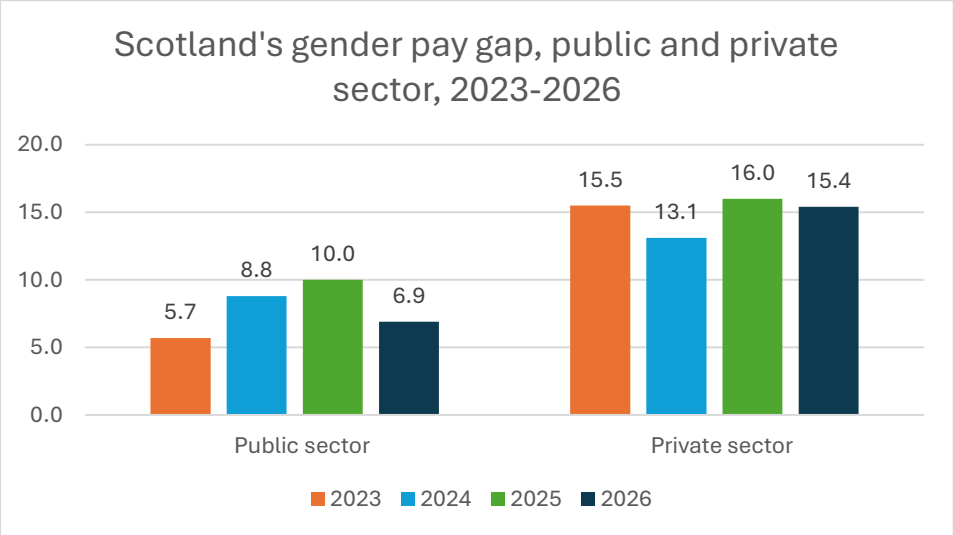
The recently published Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings,[1] shows that Scotland's mean pay gender pay gap for all workers (part-time and full-time) stood at 8.8% in 2026.[2] This represents a fall on 10% in 2025, but an increase from 6.4% in 2023.



STUC analysis based on ASHE data

The gender pay gap is lower in the public sector

The gender pay gap remains smaller in the public sector (6.9%) than the private sector (15.4%). Given most of the public sector is devolved, Scottish Government workforce policies have a central role in addressing the pay gap. It is highly likely, the Scottish Government's proposal to cut up to 20,000 public sector workers as part of its 'public sector reform' agenda will have a negative impact on Scotland's gender pay gap.



STUC analysis based on ASHE data

Scotland's Gender Pay Gap is lower than the rest of the UK

At 8.8%, Scotland's gender pay gap is 5% lower than the rest of the UK's which sits at 13.8%. However, the gap is less than it was in 2023, when it was 6.8% lower than the rest of the UK.

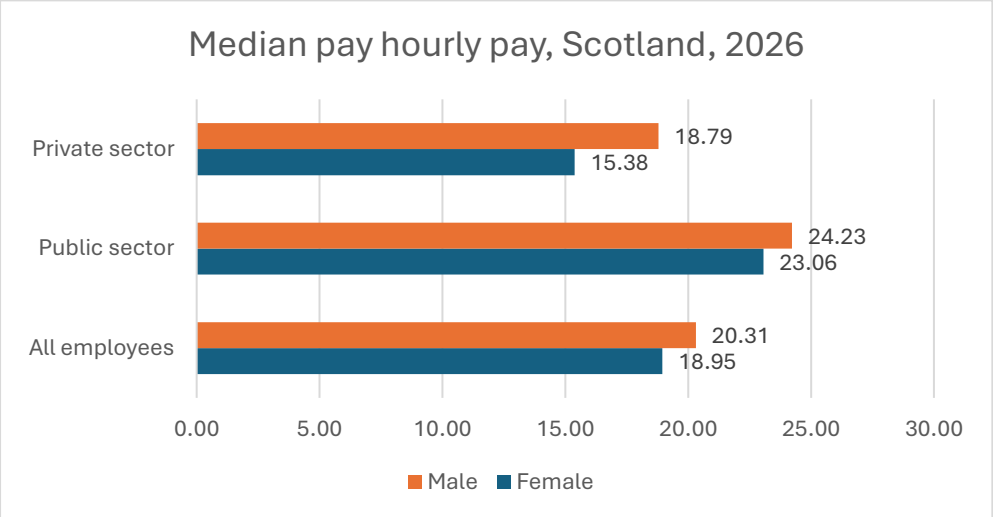


STUC analysis based on ASHE data

There are complex reasons for Scotland's lower gender pay gap, including a higher proportion of the workforce being in the public sector. Again, Scottish Government proposals to cut up to 20,000 public sector workers is likely to have a negative impact on the gender pay gap.

What does Scotland's gender pay gap mean for the average worker? [3]

While the typical man in Scotland earns £20.31 an hour, the typical woman earns £18.95. A full £1.36 an hour less.[4] The picture is even worse in the private sector where the typical woman earns £15.38 – a full £3.41 less than the typical man, who earns £18.79. These differences in hourly pay, for a full-time worker in the private sector, represent more than £6,000 a year.



STUC analysis based on ASHE data

There is a clear need to drive up pay in low-paid, female dominated, private sector industries. Scotland's 200,000-strong social care workforce would be a good place to start. Yet the Scottish Government have failed to progress social care bargaining and pay in social care has fallen relative to average earnings and the minimum wage in recent years.[5] The gender pay gap for social work activities without accommodation (which includes home care workers and nursery/childcare workers, alongside social workers and a range of non-residential job roles) sits at 17.4%.[6]

Policy implications and recommendations

While the latest figures show an improvement to Scotland's gender pay gap, they also highlight major challenges for policy makers.

It has long been understood that action is needed to invest in childcare provision, address occupational segregation, improve flexible working practices, tackle pay discrimination, and confront educational and societal stereotypes.[7] These figures also highlight the need to introduce sectoral bargaining in social care, and reverse plans to cut 20,000 public sector workers.

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[1] ONS (October 2026) *Gender Pay Gap* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/annualsurveyofhoursandearningsashegenderpaygaptables

[2] While the UK and Scottish Government tend to report the median pay gap, the STUC, women's rights organisations and international measures, prefer to report the mean pay gap as it accounts for the earnings of all workers including the highest paid and lowest paid.

[3] While we use mean pay to estimate the pay gap as it incorporates extremes, we use median pay to assess typical pay for the average worker as it excludes extremes.

[4] ONS (October 2026) *Earnings and hours worked, UK region by public and private sector: ASHE Table 25* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/regionbypublicandprivatesectorashetable25

[5] STUC (2025) *STUC report on residential care worker pay* https://www.stuc.org.uk/resources/stuc-report-on-residential-care-workers-pay.pdf

[6] ONS (October 2026) *Gender Pay Gap* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/annualsurveyofhoursandearningsashegenderpaygaptables

[7] Close the Gap (2025) *The pay gap* https://www.closethegap.org.uk/content/gap/