



Like a snowball: the growth and impact of the gender critical movement in the UK

Executive Summary

At a time when human rights protections are being weakened across the board¹, a movement against the rights of women and LGBTI people is growing in the UK. In recent years governments have passed laws that greatly limit the right to protest and introduced draconian immigration and asylum rules. Since 2010, cuts to social security and reduced funding for public services have worsened poverty and made living conditions harder². Amnesty International UK has spoken out against repeated attempts to scrap the Human Rights Act and against calls from some politicians to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.

In July 2025, Amnesty International UK released a study of 65 anti-rights groups in the UK, 32 of which spent £106 million from 2019 to 2023, a rise of more than a third³. The study showed that the biggest spenders are UK branches of US groups, like Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF UK), whose spending grew by 258% between 2019 and 2024⁴. The ADF played a pivotal role in overturning *Roe v Wade* in the US

and keeps challenging the rights of women and LGBTI people worldwide. Investigative reporters have shown how ADF's influence in the UK is growing and its close ties to the Trump administration⁵.

This briefing examines the nature and role of gender critical (GC) actors. Even though their starting point on issues of gender is different from those of actors such as ADF and other ultra conservative Christian groups, their objectives in relation to trans people are remarkably similar.

The growth and influence of the GC movement have been worrying, made normal and supported by the media. Our research shows that the media has produced a disproportionate amount of coverage about trans people from 2020 to 2025, and the words 'gender' and 'critical' have become common in such stories. Most importantly, the voices of trans people have been almost completely absent.

The mapping identified 51 GC actors, most of which are informal. However, two of the most well-known groups, LGB Alliance and Sex Matters, are registered UK charities, while others are registered companies.

Methodology

This briefing consists of two parts. The first part presents the findings of a Corpus Linguistics Analysis into how the British press typically presents issues related to trans people, and whose voices are given prominence. The Corpus Linguistics Analysis considers the reports of four major outlets, the Guardian, the Sun, the Telegraph and the Times & Sunday Times between January 2020 and April 2025. The methodology is explained in full in the technical explainer.

The second part is a mapping of GC actors based on analysis of websites, social media accounts, press mentions and records held by the Charity Commission and Companies House.

The mapping includes an analysis of available financial accounts of GC actors for the financial years 2019 to 2024, focusing on 'spending' as the key metric. For each year, for example, 2023, Amnesty International UK considered the fiscal year that began in 2023, whether it ended in 2023 or not.

Key findings

- Between January 2020 and April 2025, media coverage of issues about trans people has been excessively high compared to the size of the trans population, their role in society, and public interest in these topics.
- Across the four outlets, a total of 17,000 articles were published between January 2020 and April 2025, an average of 264 articles per month, or 9 per day.
- Most media reports about trans people have a negative sentiment, while trans people are hardly seen in stories. When they do appear, it is as criminals or murder victims.
- For each year analysed, the UK Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition, and the Scottish First Minister appear consistently, suggesting that issues of 'sex' and 'gender' have been elevated to top political priorities.
- Since 2017, a diverse and coordinated GC movement has appeared in the UK. Of the 51 organisations Amnesty International UK mapped, only 3 were established before 2017.
- Except for three registered charities, Sex Matters, FiLiA and LGB Alliance, well over half of the groups mapped are informal (32), followed by registered companies (17, one of which is now dissolved).
- Analysis of available accounts for FiLiA, Sex Matters and LGB Alliance for the financial years 2019 to 2024 shows a combined expenditure of £3.6 million.

The origins of the GC movement in the UK

2017-2018: the Gender Recognition Act consultation

Transphobia, like other kinds of prejudice, is a widespread problem in society that existed before the current GC movement. But the origins of the GC movement in the UK can be traced back to 2017-2018, when both the Scottish and Westminster governments held public consultations on amending the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA)⁶.

The GRA is the law that sets out how a trans person can have their ‘acquired gender’ legally recognized by the government⁷. Under the GRA, the first step to get a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is to obtain a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. The GRA was groundbreaking in 2004, but it does not meet current human rights standards. It treats trans identity as a medical problem, which does not match the real experiences of the trans community. In June 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) took the decision to remove gender dysphoria from its list of mental health disorders and classify it as a sexual health issue⁸, recognizing that gender dysphoria is not a mental illness and that calling it one had caused stigma against trans people.

Both the Scottish and English consultations suggested changing the law from a medical process to an administrative one, removing the need for a diagnosis and allowing a trans person to legally change their gender through a statutory declaration.

The two consultations ran in parallel in the span of a year. The Scottish government’s consultation ran from November 2017 to March 2018⁹, and the English one from July to October 2018¹⁰. Over 15,000 people replied to the Scottish consultation and over 100,000 to the English one.

Just before the English consultation closed, a GC group called Fair Play for Women bought a full-page ad in the free newspaper Metro¹¹ to encourage people to oppose the proposed reform and provided a pre-filled form to respond to the consultation. Over 18,000 responses were sent using this form¹².

An analysis of submissions to the Scottish consultation found that women’s groups gave arguments remarkably similar to those of Christian groups, focusing on how the reform would threaten women’s spaces, marriages, families, and the safety of women and children¹³. Women’s groups often worried that a GRA based on an administrative system, so-called ‘self-ID’, would let violent men claim to be women to enter women’s spaces. At this point in time, women’s groups used the terminology of ‘sex-based’ rights in their arguments, rather than ‘gender critical’¹⁴.

As a result of backlash and a change of government, GRA reform was shelved, even though 61% of respondents to the English consultation agreed with the removal of the requirement for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria¹⁵.

Dehumanisation of trans people and fearmongering

Starting with the backlash to GRA reform GC narratives have been presenting trans people, especially trans women, as deceitful and dangerous. According to the GC view, making the GRA an administrative system would have allowed cis¹⁶ men to identify as women to attack cis women in single gender spaces such as toilets.

These claims are deeply at odds with the reality of male violence against women in the UK. In 2024-25, over 80% of perpetrators of sexual violence were someone the victim knew, mostly a partner or ex-partner (43%), followed by family members, friends or dates (38%). Only 15% of women reported being assaulted by a stranger¹⁷. Many trans women are also victims of sexual assault. Although sample sizes are small, in the year ending in 2025 it is estimated that 19% of trans women reported sexual assault or attempted sexual assault¹⁸.

There is no evidence that in countries where legal gender recognition is based on administrative system this has caused an increase in violence against cis women perpetrated by trans people. Equally, there is no evidence that since the GRA became law in 2004 there has been a systematic issue of trans people attacking cis women.

2019 to 2025: from GC as a ‘protected belief’ to the Supreme Court Judgment in For Women Scotland v Scottish Ministers

The term ‘gender-critical’ entered public discourse around 2021, in connection with an employment tribunal case, Forstater v CGD Europe, which ruled that GC beliefs are capable of protection under the Equality Act 2010 (EA). In the Employment Appeal Tribunal, GC belief is described as:

“[...] the belief that biological sex is real, important, immutable and not to be conflated with gender identity. She [the claimant] considers that statements such as “woman means adult human female” or “trans women are male” are statements of neutral fact and are not expressions of antipathy towards trans people or “transphobic”¹⁹.”

This means that a person with GC beliefs considers trans women to be men and trans men to be women, regardless of whether they have a GRC.

The judgment was clear that while the belief is capable of protection, there may be circumstances where it may not be protected:

“This judgment does not mean that those with gender-critical beliefs can ‘misgender’ trans persons with impunity. The Claimant, like everyone else, will continue to be subject to the prohibitions on discrimination and harassment that apply to everyone else²⁰.”

The recognition that GC beliefs can be protected under the EA was a pivotal moment in the growing trajectory of the movement. In fact, while the press initially accurately reported the nuances of the Forstater judgment²¹, over time these nuances have been lost. In our assessment this has contributed to the normalisation of all manifestations of GC belief, including misgendering and talking about trans people with reference to their ‘biological sex’ and trans women as ‘biological males’. However, misgendering could amount to harassment based on ‘gender reassignment’ under the EA, as pointed out by the Forstater judgment itself.

When the GC movement began to mobilise, preventing the reform of the GRA was the main goal²². Once GRA reform was shelved, GC actors started focussing on the use of the term ‘gender’ in policy and lawmaking which, in their view, had created a lack of clarity, putting cis women’s safety at risk and hindering accurate data collection and policymaking²³.

The key demand of GC actors in this respect was to ‘clarify’ the meaning of ‘sex’ in the EA. This eventually resulted, in April 2025, in a Supreme Court judgment on a case started in 2018 by the GC group For Women Scotland to challenge the Scottish government’s interpretation of the EA in relation to achieving gender parity in the composition of the governing boards of public bodies, which included trans women with a GRC.

The UK Supreme Court ruled that a trans woman or a trans man with a GRC is not to be considered as a woman/man for the purposes of sex discrimination under the EA. While the case was only about the EA, it severely reduced the scope of legal gender recognition across the board.

The judgment relied on the existence of the characteristic of ‘gender reassignment’ to protect trans people from discrimination, and that interpreting ‘sex’ as ‘certificated sex’, i.e. based on the marker on a GRC, ‘would cut across the definition of the protected characteristic of sex in an incoherent way’²⁴. The judgment has not changed the law, but its interpretation.

Soon after the judgment, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the body tasked with enforcing the EA, published a non-statutory ‘interim update’ which recommended excluding trans people from single sex spaces and services. The guidance also said that trans people could potentially be excluded from spaces aligned with their sex assigned at birth, too. In the EHRC’s view, a trans man should be excluded from men’s spaces but could also be excluded from women’s spaces, which align with his sex assigned at birth, if his gender presentation²⁵ caused ‘alarm or distress to others’²⁶.

Afterwards, the EHRC opened a public consultation seeking views on its proposals on how services and associations should implement the ruling. The proposals advised that service providers should somehow ascertain a person’s sex assigned at birth, but

that doing so could constitute a violation of the right to privacy²⁷. The confusion resulting from this advice has led to reported increased harassment suffered not only by trans people but by cis people whose gender presentation is non-conforming²⁸. At the time of writing, a final code of practice has not yet been published.

Parallels between GC and ultra conservative Christian actors

The Corpus Linguistics Analysis shows that the press portrays the GC movement mostly in a positive light, as working for the benefit of women and children and against so-called ‘gender ideology’²⁹.

Even though GC actors’ perspective on what they call ‘gender ideology’ is different from that of ultra conservative Christian groups³⁰, in our assessment they share the same goal when it comes to removing legal protections for trans people.

Ultra conservative Christian actors, such as the ADF, seek a society where women and men have different and rigid roles, based on what is ‘natural’ and ‘traditional’. In their view, the concept of ‘gender’, which means that women’s and men’s roles are socially constructed, and therefore can change, is a threat that must be rejected.

GC actors instead consider ‘gender identity’, the intimate sense someone has of their gender, that may be different from their sex assigned at birth, as reinforcing damaging stereotypes. In their view, so-called ‘gender ideology’ pushes gender non-conforming young people, in particular masculine lesbians, to think that they are men and should transition³¹.

While their starting points are different, we consider the demands of GC actors to be the same as those of ultra conservative Christian groups: abolishing legal gender recognition, the exclusion of trans people from spaces aligned with their gender and restricting access to inclusive relationship and sex education. For example, in April 2026 GC organisation Women’s Sports Union joined forces with ADF International threatening to legally challenge trans inclusive sports bodies in England ‘if they fail to protect women’s sport from transgender ideology’³².

Removal of legal gender recognition

Legal gender recognition is a question of self-determination, essential for trans people to be able to fully enjoy the right to privacy, to marry and to family life, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment and to guarantee the best interest of their children. The European Court of Human Rights has recognised the need for legal gender recognition to protect the

rights of trans people in the Goodwin case, from which the GRA derives, as well as other cases³³.

As a result of legal challenges by GC groups, in the UK legal gender recognition has been restricted, if not made redundant.

Attacks on bodily autonomy

Bodily autonomy is the right to exercise control over our sexuality and reproduction and to be able to chart the course of our lives³⁴. This includes the right to access healthcare, including contraception, abortion and, for trans people, gender-affirming healthcare³⁵, without fear of discrimination.

In the UK, compared to the US or some European countries, legal challenges to limit access to abortion have historically been unsuccessful. In our assessment, legal challenges to the ability to consent to gender affirming healthcare, pursued by GC actors, are not only shared by ultra conservative Christian groups but can also work as a proxy to diminish access to healthcare across the board, including abortion and contraception, by undermining ‘Gillick competence’.

‘Gillick competence’, is a legal principle originating from a case dating back to 1984: *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority*. In this case a Catholic mother, Victoria Gillick, challenged her local health authority and the Department for Health and Social Security on issued guidance in relation to how doctors should deal with children under 16 seeking advice on contraception. According to the guidance, whether to prescribe contraception to adolescents was at the doctor’s discretion and it could be prescribed without parental consent. Gillick argued that if doctors followed the guidance they would be acting unlawfully. In the first instance the case was lost but she won at appeal. The case was eventually heard by the House of Lords which supported the first decision.

According to Christian Concern, which has a history of challenging access to abortion as well as gender-affirming care, Gillick competence ‘has a long and unfortunate history as regards undermining parental rights and Christian moral reasoning in medicine’³⁶.

At the time of writing, GC campaigners are challenging the establishment of a medical trial for puberty blockers, supported by Citizen GO, an organisation established in Spain but active globally, whose strapline is ‘Defending life, family, and freedom across the world’³⁷.

The role of the media in the growth of the GC movement

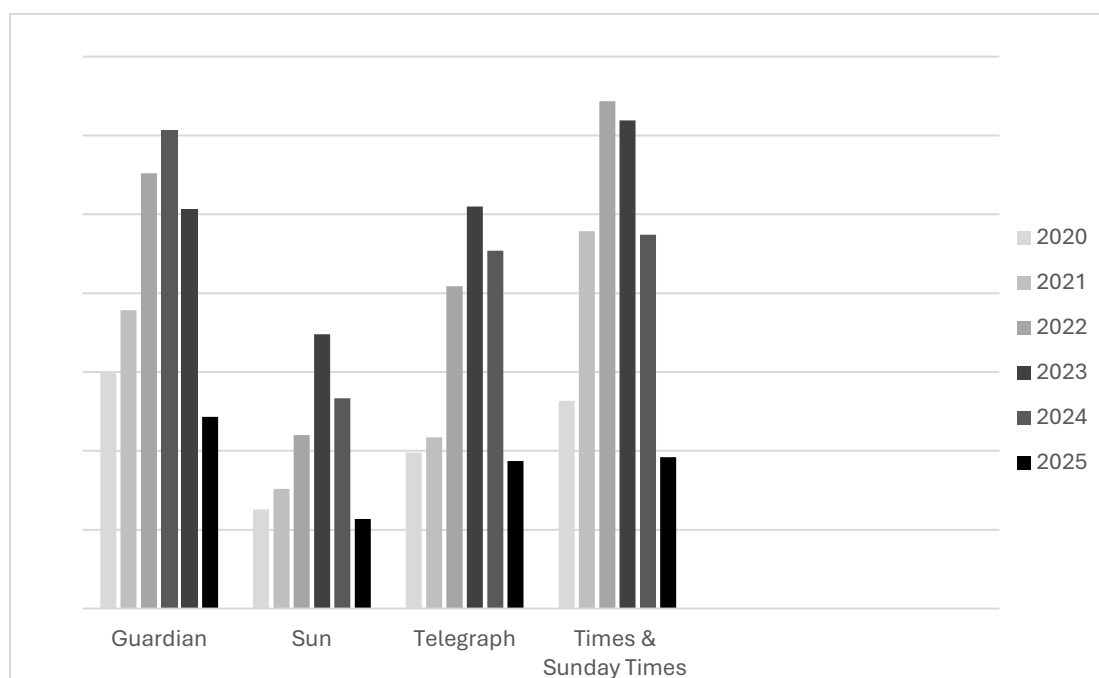
Ongoing disproportionate levels of reporting

Between January 2020 and April 2025, the four outlets combined published 17,000 (16,913) articles, an average of 264 articles per month, or 9 articles per day. The Times & Sunday Times have the most coverage, with an average of 83.5 articles per month; the Sun has the least, with an average of 38 articles per month. Coverage increased particularly in 2022 and 2023.

However, a rapid increase in coverage started before 2020. Previous Corpus Linguistics Analysis has shown a sharp growth in the amount of press coverage related to so-called ‘trans issues’³⁸ with roughly three and a half times as many articles in 2018-19 compared to 2012. In addition to increased volume, the sentiment of the coverage was negative, with trans people increasingly described as involved in controversy, demanding or aggressive and with a propensity to be offended³⁹.

The Corpus Linguistics Analysis Amnesty International UK carried out shows that coverage remains high and entirely disproportionate to the size of the trans population, which, according to the 2021 Census, represents 0.5% of the population (262,000 people)⁴⁰. Coverage is also disproportionate to the public interest and to the degree of influence trans people have in society. For example, ahead of the 2024 General Election, issues related to trans rights or ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ did not figure in the top 16 concerns of voters⁴¹. However, based on a study of press reports ahead of the election, issues of sex, gender and sexuality were by far the most reported amongst ‘culture war’ issues in the four weeks ahead of the election⁴².

Figure. 1 Frequencies of reports January 2020 – April 2025



Compared to the other outlets, coverage in the Guardian was more international in outlook and covered other issues related to trans people, for example, reporting on the condition of trans people in several countries or in specific circumstances, such as immigration detention. On the contrary, the reporting in the Times & Sunday Times, Sun and Telegraph was almost exclusively focused on the UK.

While coverage volumes remained constant, it was also possible to identify spikes in coverage corresponding to specific events, as shown in detail in the technical explainer. The increased volume of reporting typically focuses on relatively negative events for trans people or around reporting on someone with GC views. For example, in April 2022, three notable events took place:

- The government announced it will put forward a ban on conversion practices that excludes trans people⁴³.
- British Cycling banned trans women from competing at the elite level in its events⁴⁴.
- The EHRC published guidance on separate and single sex services⁴⁵.

During this month, across the outlets, reports increased by at least 40% compared to the monthly average for that year. Another notable spike in reports coincided with the publication of the final reports of the Cass review in April 2024. During this month, reports increased by an average of 80% (78%) compared to the monthly average in 2024.

Whose voices are represented?

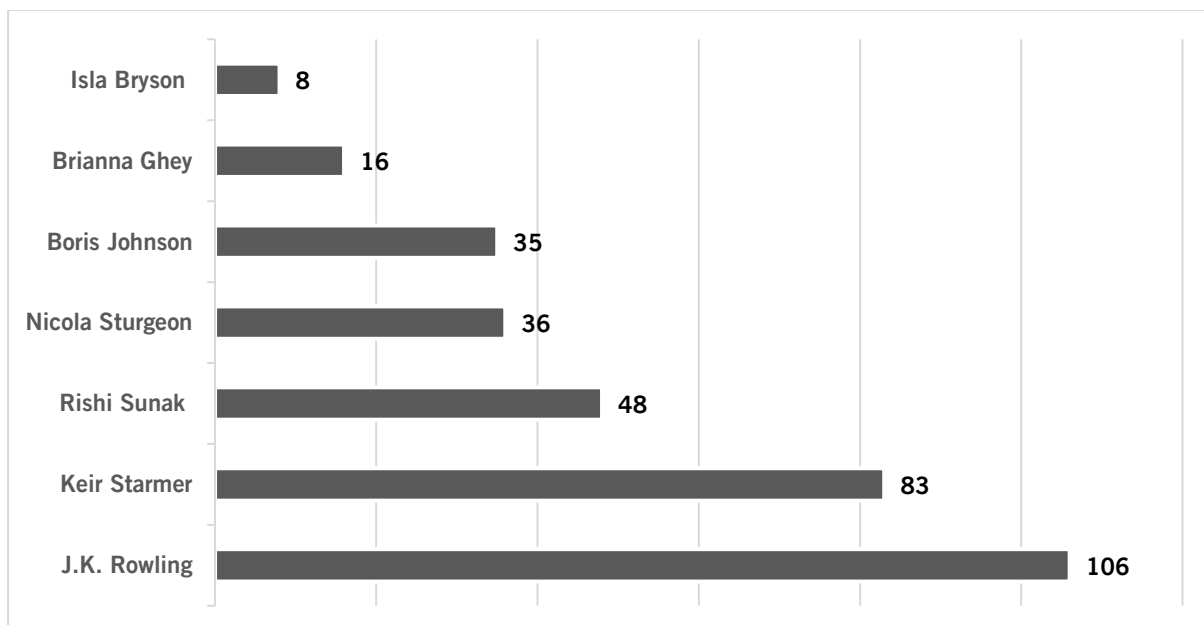
The analysis of bigrams, i.e., two words occurring with each other, in this case proper nouns,⁴⁶ presents two stark findings: trans people barely figure in the coverage, while the most named individuals are high-profile politicians.

Across the entire coverage, only two British trans people appear: Brianna Ghey and Isla Bryson. Brianna Ghey was a 16-year-old trans girl murdered in a public park by two teenagers on 11th February 2023. While her murder was initially reported not to be a hate crime, it later appeared that transphobia was a motivation. Her killers were sentenced to 20 and 22 years respectively, on 2nd February 2024⁴⁷. Across the outlets, Brianna Ghey appears 16 times.

Isla Bryson is a trans woman who, before transitioning, was convicted of sexual violence offences in 2023. Bryson was initially placed in a women's prison, segregated from other inmates. Following a public outcry, Bryson was then transferred to a men's prison⁴⁸. Isla Bryson appears a total of 8 times.

While trans people are virtually invisible from coverage of issues that affect them, successive prime ministers and the longest serving Scottish first minister regularly occur as bigrams, suggesting that 'trans issues' have been elevated to top political concerns for the press. The most recurring name in bigrams by far is J.K. Rowling.

Figure 2. Frequency of top 5 bigrams and bigrams referring to trans people, all outlets combined.



Qualitative analysis of press report on ‘sex’ and ‘gender’

What occurs with ‘gender’ and how has this changed?

This section looks at consistent collocates for the search term ‘gender’, i.e. words which are within the top 10 most statistically likely to occur with ‘gender’ across multiple months. It focuses on three consistent collocates which appear across all four outlets – ‘recognition’, ‘identity’, and ‘critical’.

Gender and identity

In the reporting gender identity is most of the time used to refer to one’s internal sense of self, and only rarely in different ways.

The Guardian

In the Guardian, ‘gender’ and ‘identity’ did not collocate in the reporting in March, July and December 2022. Collocates that appeared within these months focused on the GRA

The Sun

Except for 2023 reporting, the Sun published significantly fewer articles than the other three outlets. In 2020, ‘gender’ and ‘identity’ were only statistically significant collocates in 2 months. This increased to five months in 2021, 8 months in 2022 and 2023. In 2024, the collocation appeared in 5 months and in 3 of the 4 months analysed in 2025, except for February.

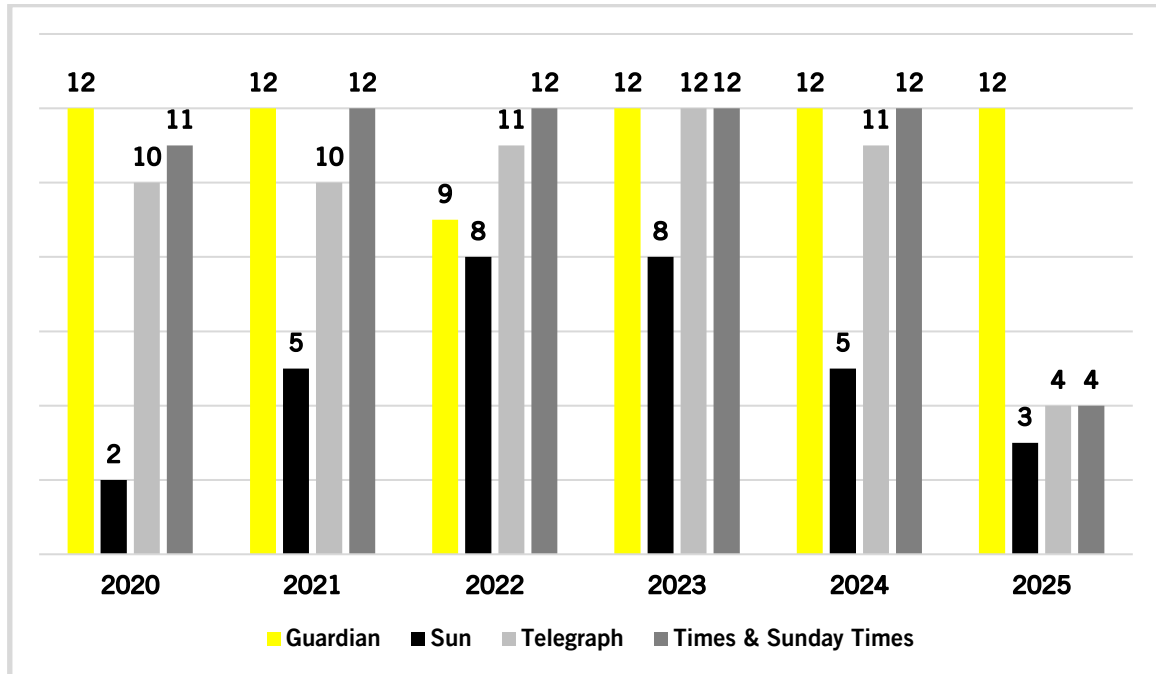
The Telegraph

Like all other outlets, reports of ‘gender’ in the Telegraph regularly collocated with ‘identity’. After 2020, the only times when ‘identity’ was not a statistical collocate of ‘gender’ were in July and September 2021, December 2022, and November 2024. As in previous outlets, when ‘identity’ does not appear with ‘gender’, other collocates typically focus on GRCs.

The Times & Sunday Times

The only month in which ‘gender’ and ‘identity’ did not collocate in the Times was March 2020. During this month, the focus was more on the GRA.

Figure 3. Frequencies of ‘gender’ and ‘identity’ January 2020 – April 2025



Gender and recognition

The findings suggest that all the outlets analysed have had a continual focus on the GRA from January 2020 through to April 2025. Except for the Sun, the outlets have been consistent in often discussing the GRA in reports about trans people.

Typically, when ‘recognition’ collocates with ‘gender’, other collocates, such as ‘certificate’ or ‘act’, also collocate with ‘gender’, suggesting a discussion about the GRA or the Scottish Gender Recognition Reform Bill. Examining a random sample of 100 concordance lines for this collocation, all instances referred to GRCs (54 instances) or the bill itself (46 instances). Of the 54 instances that discussed GRCs, 50 were used in ways that explained them as a technical term (i.e., what gender recognition certificates are). The other 4 instances came from quotes by GC activists expressing negative views about GRCs.

The Guardian

‘Gender’ and ‘recognition’ collocated fewer times than the other outlets. This suggests that there was less focus on the GRA in the Guardian's reports. Indeed, the collocates in months that do not discuss gender recognition also appear to focus on various medical procedures, processes, and medical care. Sometimes collocates about children also appear within these. When examining these in context, they appear to

refer primarily to people seeking gender affirming care, and the views of those who seek to prevent this for children.

The Sun

As previously discussed, in many of the months of reports, ‘gender’ did not have any statistically significant collocates within the Sun. This extends to ‘recognition’, too. What such trends show, therefore, is that while ‘gender’ and ‘recognition’ did frequently collocate, discussion of the GRA, or gender recognition more broadly, was much less prevalent in the Sun's reporting.

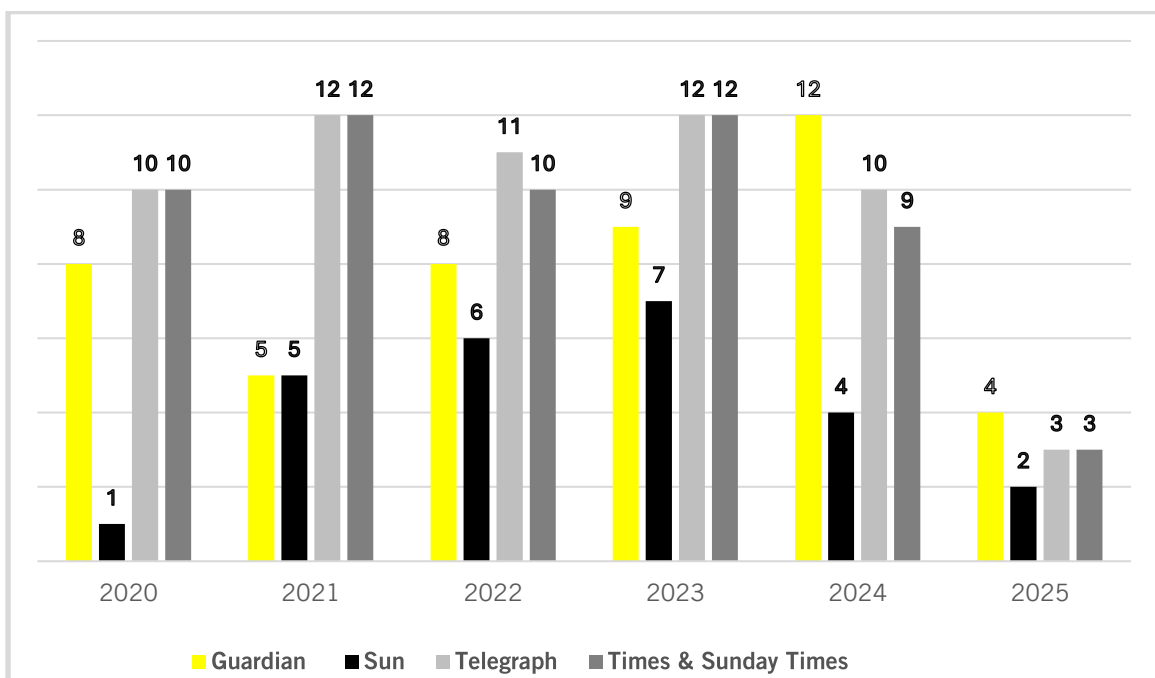
The Telegraph

Like the Times and the Guardian, ‘recognition’ collocated with ‘gender’ in most months of reporting. Like other outlets, most of this discussion focuses on GRCs and the GRA, or the Scottish Gender Recognition Reform Bill. Interestingly, in the months where ‘recognition’ does not occur, except for January 2025, ‘critical’ does co-occur with ‘gender’, possibly suggesting a shift in focus or narrative within the outlet.

The Times & Sunday Times

As with ‘identity’, ‘gender’ and ‘recognition’ collocate across multiple months of reporting in the corpora.

Figure 4. Frequencies of ‘gender’ and ‘recognition’ January 2020 – April 2025



Gender and critical

The findings on the collocation between ‘gender’ and ‘critical’ show a significant and marked increase in reporting on GC views. Across all newspapers, such views were regularly reported neutrally. The number of articles which actively challenged even the use of the term ‘gender critical’ was much rarer compared to authors describing people’s views as GC.

In addition to the outlet-by-outlet analysis below, Amnesty International UK also carried out an analysis of a random sample of 100 concordance lines across outlets between 2021 (when ‘gender critical’ first started appearing) and 2024 to explore whether there were any indicators of articles distancing themselves from the phrase ‘gender critical’, including referring to these views as ‘anti-trans’.

The random sample showed only 21 instances of articles referring to GC views as ‘anti-trans’, while they were qualified with ‘so-called’ 35 times. In 3 out of those 21 instances where ‘anti-trans’ was used instead of ‘gender critical’, it was used to say that calling GC views as anti-trans was wrong or that GC views were ‘allegedly’ anti-trans.

Similarly, in 5 out of 35 instances, ‘so-called’ was used to express that the term TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) was a ‘pejorative description’ (3 times) or an ‘insult’ (1 time) to people with GC views. In the remaining instance, it was used in a paragraph where the article described people with ‘so-called’ GC views as having ‘won’.

- “The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance in north London was criticised for the sign telling staff and students that it had "zero tolerance" of Terf ideology, which it called a specific form of transphobia. The term is used as an insult to people who have so-called gender- critical beliefs that biological gender cannot change.” The Times, 5th November 2022
- “All this takes place in the context of the reality that, for the most part, so-called gender-critical feminists have prevailed. Self-ID is dead, killed in Scotland by the Women Who Wouldn't Wheesht, Nicola Sturgeon and Isla Bryson. The Scottish debacle has persuaded Sir Keir Starmer's government to abandon its promises to legislate on this issue.” The Times, 13th November 2024

The Guardian

Compared to all other outlets analysed, The Guardian has the earliest example of a month of reporting where ‘gender’ and ‘critical’ collocated – January 2020. Of 7 instances of this collocation, 6 are from the same article – “Sacked or silenced: academics say they are blocked from exploring trans issues; Universities are at a loss

how to maintain free speech when both sides claim they feel unsafe”. This article primarily addresses GC ideas in university settings.

This collocation does not appear again until May 2021, then more often between 2023 and 2025. There has thus been an increase in references to GC perspectives, though some examples in the concordance lines for this collocation question the appropriateness of the phrase.

The Sun

‘Critical’ starts collocating in the Sun in August 2021 then in July 2022, and in August 2023. In 2024, ‘critical’ collocates appeared in reports in March, April, May, and September, and then again in April of 2025. Overall, ‘critical’ is much less likely to occur in the Sun compared to the other outlets. This is not to say that such ideas are absent from the Sun; rather, the label ‘gender critical’ is somewhat absent from month-on-month reporting in this outlet.

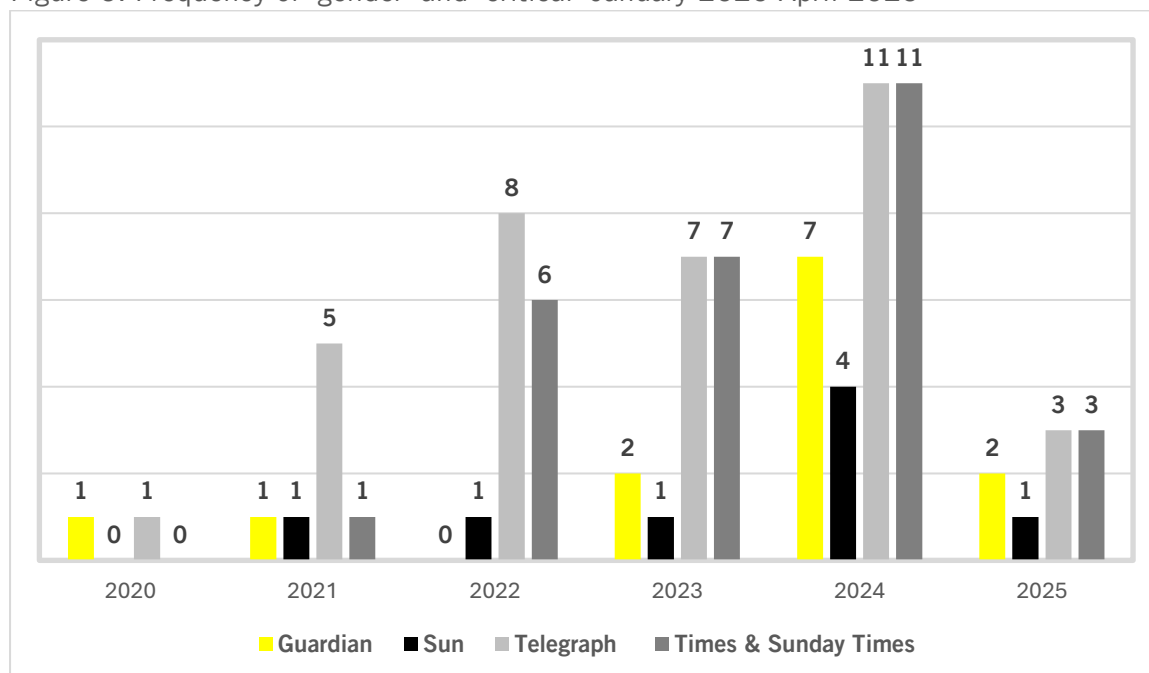
The Telegraph

‘Critical’ began to collocate with ‘gender’ in August 2020 in reports from the Telegraph. Like other outlets, ‘gender’ and ‘critical’ do not collocate again until the following year, but in 2022, 2023, and 2024, they collocate in every single month of reporting, except for April 2024. The collocation also appears in January, March, and April 2025. There is a clear increase in the number of times this collocation is used each month, from infrequent to appearing in almost every month.

The Times & Sunday Times

The collocate ‘critical’ first appeared in the Times & Sunday Times in May 2021. The initial reports that use this collocation typically refer to academics; others discuss GC beliefs in relation to the policies of the LGBTI charity Stonewall. ‘Critical’ then appears as a collocate of ‘gender’ semi-frequently in 2022 and 2023. There is a notable change in 2024: the only month without ‘critical’ as a collocate of ‘gender’ was December. In 2025, only the January data did not show ‘critical’ as a collocate of ‘gender’. This shows an increase in the number of months where ‘gender’ and ‘critical’ collocate, suggesting an increased number of reports featuring ‘gender critical’ as a phrase and, by extension, normalising the use of this phrase. One way that ‘gender critical’ was used, and what it occurred with, was with the term ‘feminists’, as in the trigram ‘gender critical feminist(s)’.

Figure 5. Frequency of 'gender' and 'critical' January 2020 April 2025



What occurs with 'sex' and how has this changed?

Across all four outlets analysed, collocates varied month by month and were used to refer to a range of related topics. One such use was about sexual intercourse – shown through collocates such as 'consent', 'anal', and 'condomless'. Another group of consistent collocates across all outlets referred to issues of relationships and sex education, e.g., 'education', 'relationships', and 'history'. There were multiple collocates that discussed 'sex' in terms of sexual orientation –such as 'same', 'attraction', 'sexuality' and 'gay'. Issues related to trans people in the context of sex education were framed as controversial or negatively, for example:

- “Rishi Sunak ordered a review of sex education in March after there were claims of "age-inappropriate" materials asking children whether they were "planet non-binary", as well as teaching them about breast binders and a "galaxy" of genders.” The Times, 11th November 2023

As with 'gender', the collocates of 'sex' vary from publication to publication, but unlike 'gender', they are more varied, with fewer consistent collocates. This is to be expected given the wider range of contexts in which the word 'sex' is used.

Several collocates that appeared at different points in the reporting across the publications were associated with GC narratives, such as 'single', 'spaces', 'biological', and 'immutable'.

For example:

- “This is highly contested. It's quite something for the leader of a political party to effectively imply one of those uses is morally wrong, especially when the courts have established that a belief in the relevance of biological sex is a protected belief in the Equality Act”. - Sonia Sodha (@soniasodha) September 26, 2021. The Guardian, 21st September 2021
- “Sir Keir Starmer has been accused of peddling a "shameless work of fiction" after the Government claimed it had always supported single-sex spaces for biological women.” The Telegraph, 23rd April 2025

Like other collocates for ‘gender’, many of these views are platformed through assigning such views to others, including nameless people, for example, ‘Starmer has been accused of peddling’ but from an unknown and unnamed person/group.

Mapping the GC movement in the UK

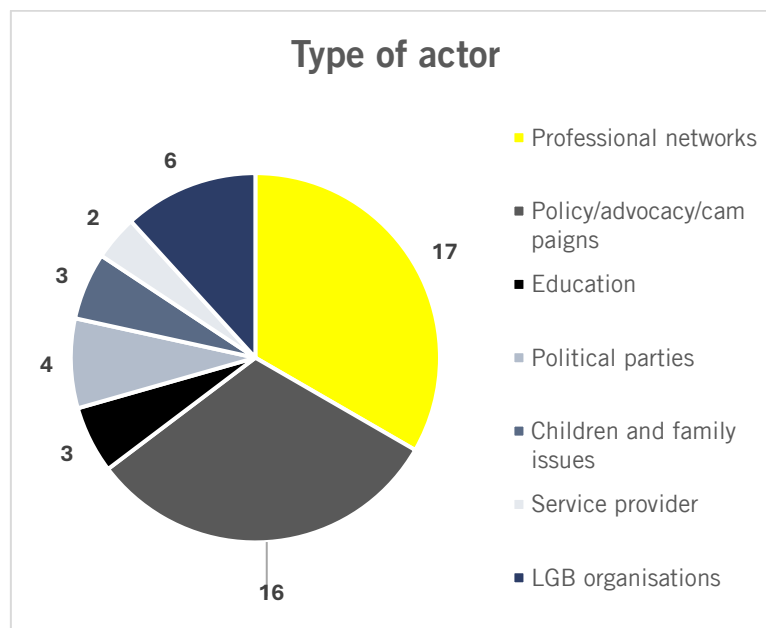
Organised opposition to the rights of trans people emerged at the time of consultation to reform the GRA, in 2017/18. This is reflected in the mapping, with only 3 of 51 organisations existing prior to 2017.

The GC ecosystem is diverse, and while it is possible to identify groups with distinct priorities and tactics, all share broadly the same goals and appear to closely collaborate and endorse one another. Contrary to the groups mapped previously, which were predominantly registered as companies or charities, over half (32) of the 51 actors mapped are informal.

The largest group of organisations (17) are employees' networks in different sectors such as the civil service, education, the health services and retail. Many are branches of SEEN (Sex Equality and Equity Network), which, according to their website, has the aim of supporting staff with GC views and to promote 'sex equality' between women and men in the workplace from the perspective that sex 'must not be conflated with, or replaced by, the concepts of gender or gender identity'⁴⁹.

However, it is challenging to determine how many SEEN branches are active in workplaces, as some exist only as an account on X. The second largest group (16) consists of organisations concentrating on restricting gendered spaces to cis women and excluding trans women through policy, advocacy and campaigning activities. Finally, 6 groups are so-called 'LGB' organisations⁵⁰, 3 groups are active on the front of children and family issues, 3 in education, 4 within political parties (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens), and 2 provide services.

Figure 6. GC actors by type



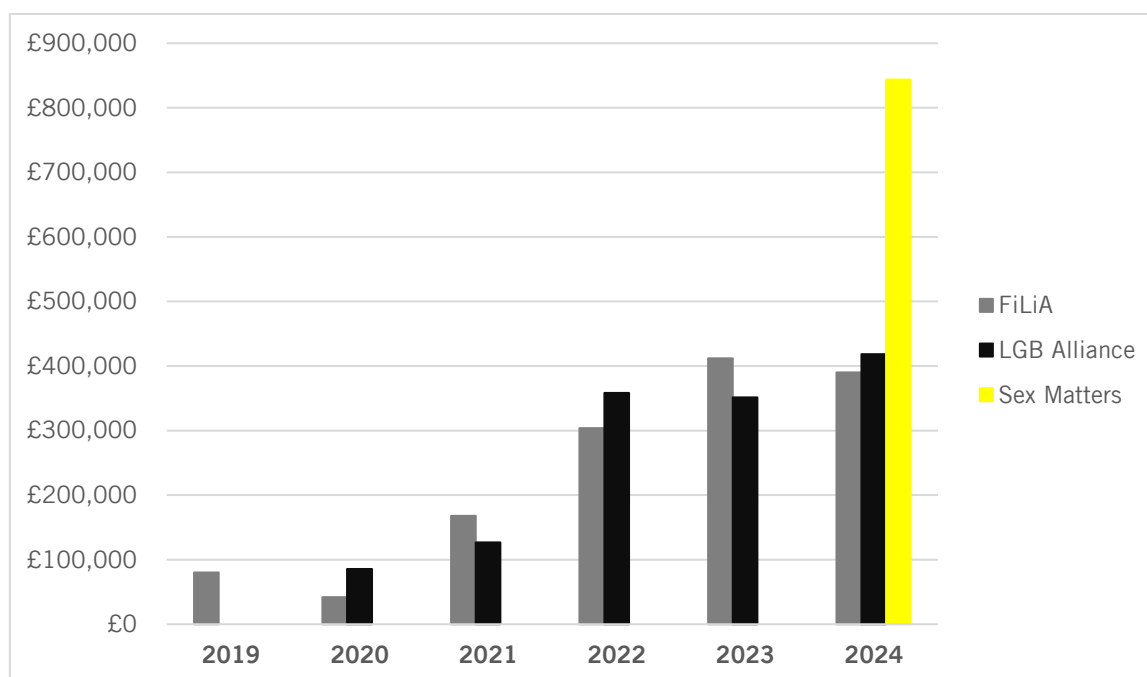
Financial resources of the GC movement

In contrast to the organisations analysed in the first part of this research, all GC groups mapped, except three, are informal or micro-companies, and therefore, it is challenging to understand the financial resources they have available.

Two out of the three charities, FiLiA and LGB Alliance, have available accounts for the financial years 2019 to 2024 and 2020 to 2024, respectively. Sex Matters registered as a charity in April 2024 and produced its first accounts in April 2026. The three charities went from FiLiA spending £80,000 in 2019 to a combined spending of £3.6 million between 2020 and 2024.

Most of the fundraising done by GC groups over the past few years has been for legal challenges. Analysis of ‘case pages’ on the Crowdfunder website, a crowdfunding platform for legal challenges, shows that, as of 4th March 2025, 45 pages raised just over £3.2 million. Six pages raised over £100,000, three pages raised over £200,000 and one page raised over £500,000.

Figure 7. GC charities annual expenditure 2019 – 2024



Changing attitudes towards trans people

As shown in this briefing, the coverage of issues related to trans people continues to be disproportionately high and mostly framed negatively, while the volume and legitimisation of GC positions have grown.

In the same timeframe, reported hate crimes have also increased. Since 2017 hate crimes against people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment have continued to grow and increased by 56% between 2020/21 and 2021/22⁵¹ and again by a further 11% the following year⁵². The number of recorded incidents decreased by 2% between 2022/23 and 2023/24⁵³. However, to put these figures in context, hate crimes are vastly under-reported. In 2017, the government's LGBT Survey found that at least 2 in 5 respondents had experienced verbal harassment or physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey, but more than 9 in 10 of the most serious incidents went unreported, often because respondents thought 'it happens all the time'⁵⁴.

Public attitudes have also worsened. In 2023, the British Social Attitudes Survey found that, over the previous 40 years, public attitudes on a range of issues have become more liberal. For example, the percentage of people who believe that same sex relations amongst adults are 'not wrong at all' grew from 17% in 1983 to 67% in 2023. However, attitudes towards trans people have become more negative. Between 2019 and 2023, there was a 23% decrease in the number of people who thought that a trans person should be allowed to change the sex marker on their birth certificate, from 53% to 30%. General prejudice against trans people has also grown, with the proportion of people who characterise themselves as 'not at all prejudiced' against trans people falling from 82% to 64% since 2019⁵⁵.

A YouGov study reaching back to 2018 confirms this trend, noting growing scepticism on trans rights amongst groups that used to be, on average, more liberal on these issues, such as women and young people. For example, since 2022, the proportion of women supporting legal gender recognition has been 44%, with 32% opposed. The figures are now 37% to 42%⁵⁶. This timeline chimes with the rise of 'gender critical' actors responding to GRA reform.

Conclusion

Since 2017, an organised GC movement has emerged in the UK, firstly to push back against proposals to reform the GRA. Once the GRA reform was archived and GC belief was recognised as capable of protection under the EA, the movement pursued two main objectives.

Firstly, the attempt to remove legal gender recognition, through changes to the EA, and secondly, restricting access to gender affirming healthcare, in particular challenging the capacity of under-16s to consent to medical treatment.

The Corpus Linguistics Analysis shows sustained disproportionate levels of press coverage of 'trans issues' between 2020 and 2025, averaging 264 articles per month across the four outlets considered. The bigrams analysis shows that trans people are virtually invisible in the content that concerns their lives. Top politicians instead recur regularly, which suggests 'trans issues' have been elevated to key political priorities.

The contextual analysis of the word 'gender' shows a marked increase in reporting on GC views. Across all newspapers, such views were regularly reported uncritically. The number of articles which actively challenged even the use of the term 'gender critical' was much rarer compared to authors simply ascribing these terms to people's views.

The impact of the coverage on the lives of trans people is very tangible. Of over 4000 people surveyed by TransActual between 2024 and January 2025⁵⁷, therefore, before the Supreme Court judgment, 99% said that transphobia in the media affected their mental health, and 87% reported having heard transphobic statements from politicians in the 12 months prior to the survey. More than 90% of respondents believed that transphobia in the media had also impacted their treatment by strangers, family members, friends and colleagues in negative ways. Almost 60% of people surveyed said they felt less hopeful about the future since 2023.

The UK government has the obligation to uphold the rights of trans people, including the right to health, privacy and non-discrimination. What this analysis shows is that trans people's wellbeing and public attitudes towards trans people have worsened since 2017, in conjunction with the rise of an organised GC movement.

The press has a critical role to play in shaping public attitudes and holding the government to account for its actions, or lack thereof. To support journalists in their daily work, the following practical recommendations are designed to help incorporate more accurate, fair, and responsible reporting on issues affecting trans people.

Amnesty International UK recommends the following:

- Seek advice from trans-led organisations with communication and media expertise to improve editorial guidelines.

- Reduce coverage to evidence-based reporting of issues that do affect trans people directly, and when doing so, ensure the voices of those affected are front and centre.
- Do not dehumanise trans people, e.g. by asking gotcha questions such as ‘can women have a penis’.
- Cover positive stories about trans people, their lives and contributions to their communities and society.
- Do not frame reporting as a ‘debate’.
- Provide nuance when discussing legal issues. When mentioning that GC belief is protected under the EA, clarify that the expression of such belief is not protected if the manner of expression constitutes harassment or discrimination. For example, misgendering trans people or creating a hostile environment through repeated or offensive conduct can cross the line into unlawful behaviour under the EA.
- Increase the representation of trans people in reporting, both as authors and as respondents.
- Ensure trans people can represent themselves on their own terms and do not ask them to justify their own existence and human rights.
- Qualify GC and explain that it is an ideological stance that seeks to restrict the rights of trans people held by some lobby groups.
- Do not imply that GC views represent women’s views.
- Do not attribute expertise to GC campaigners when they are not qualified to speak on a specific issue, such as gender affirming care.

- ¹ Amnesty International, [Dismantling the Human Rights Framework: Amnesty International Submission to the 41st Session of the UPR Working Group](#), November 2022
- ² UN Human Rights Council, [Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#), 2019
- ³ Amnesty International UK, [The anti-rights movement](#), 2025
- ⁴ See the [financial records](#) of ADF International (UK) on the Charity Commission website.
- ⁵ NY Times, [They Helped Topple Roe v. Wade. Now Their Sights Are Set on Britain](#), 23rd October 2025
- ⁶ There were two consultations because the GRA is a devolved matter, meaning that the Scottish government can make their own decisions in this area of law, though this power is not absolute.
- ⁷ The law was enacted in response to a European Court of Human Rights judgment in a case brought by a trans woman, Christine Goodwin, against the UK. The Court found that not having any way to have her gender legally recognised by the state was a violation of her right to respect for private and family life and the right to marry and to found a family (Articles 8 and 12 of the ECHR).
- ⁸ WHO, [Gender incongruence and transgender health in the ICD](#)
- ⁹ Scottish Government, [Review of the Gender Recognition Act 2004: factsheet](#)
- ¹⁰ House of Commons Library, [Gender Recognition Act reform: consultation and outcome](#), 2022
- ¹¹ <https://x.com/AskNic/status/1049927605938475009>
- ¹² Government Equalities Office, [Gender Recognition Act: analysis of consultation results](#), 2020
- ¹³ Open Democracy, [Christian Right and some UK feminists 'unlikely allies' against trans rights](#), 18th October 2018
- ¹⁴ See a sample of responses by [Lesbian Strength](#), [Object](#), [Yes Matters](#), [Midlothian Women's Spaces](#), [Fair Play for Women](#) and [A Woman's Place](#).
- ¹⁵ See note 12
- ¹⁶ A cis person, short for 'cisgender', is a person whose sex assigned at birth corresponds to their gender identity. It derives from Latin, meaning 'on the same side', while trans means 'on the opposite side'.
- ¹⁷ ONS, [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)
- ¹⁸ ONS, [Data set Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales](#), Table 4a
- ¹⁹ [Forstater v CGD Europe & Ors \(RELIGION OR BELIEF DISCRIMINATION\) \[2021\] UKEAT 0105 20 1006 \(10 June 2021\)](#)
- ²⁰ *Ibidem*
- ²¹ BBC, [Maya Forstater: Woman wins tribunal appeal over transgender tweets](#), 10th June 2021
- ²² For example, A Woman's Place UK ceased activities in 2024 as it considered having achieved its goals, see [A Woman's Place UK: the right side of history](#), 28th November 2024
- ²³ Sex Matters, [Campaign – Sex in the equality Act](#)
- ²⁴ [For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers \[2025\] UKSC 16 \(16 April 2025\)](#), paragraph 172
- ²⁵ Gender presentation or expression refers to how individuals express their gender identity. This may or may not include dress, hairstyle, make-up, speech, mannerisms and surgical or hormonal treatment
- ²⁶ EHRC, [Code of practice consultation 2025: changes to chapter 13](#), 20th May 2025
- ²⁷ EHRC, [Code of practice consultation 2025: change to chapter 2](#), 20th May 2025
- ²⁸ TransActual, [Trans segregation in practice](#), 2025
- ²⁹ The concept of 'gender ideology' is used by actors that oppose rights related to bodily autonomy, gender and sexuality, defend patriarchal gender norms as natural and positions the patriarchal family as the norm, and all other forms of family life as 'ideology'. This concept is used by secular proponents as well as religious actors, and by some groups that identify as leftist or feminist. Anti-rights actors construct 'gender ideology' as an attack on the nation and traditions, as well as an attack on the family, marriage, and religious freedom.
- ³⁰ For further analysis see Lamble, Sarah. 2024. ["Confronting Complex Alliances: Situating Britain's Gender Critical Politics within the Wider Transnational Anti-Gender Movement." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 28 \(3\): 504–17.](#)
- ³¹ LGB Alliance, [Time to stop "transing the gay away"](#), 27th February 2024
- ³² ADF International, [Sports bodies threatened with legal action if they continue to allow men to compete in women's sport](#), 23rd April 2026
- ³³ For example, *A.P., Garçon, and Nicot v. France* (2017), *Y.T. v. Bulgaria* (2020) and *Ghviniasvili and Others v. Georgia* (2023)
- ³⁴ Sexual and reproductive health depends on and affects our access to the full range of interrelated human rights, including bodily autonomy and the right to life, the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the right to equality and non-discrimination. Bodily autonomy means being able to make decisions about how to express our sexuality, including our sexual orientation

and gender identity, as well as about our bodies, our personal relationships, the form and shape of one's family and the destination of one's life path, among other things.

³⁵ According to the WHO, gender affirming care can include 'any single or combination of a number of social, psychological, behavioural or medical (including hormonal treatment or surgery) interventions designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity'.

³⁶ Christian Concern, [NHS Trust sued over children 'consenting' to puberty blockers](#), 10 January 2020

³⁷ [CitizenGO](#)

³⁸ The media uses this shorthand to refer to policies that impact the lives of trans people, such as health care and legal gender recognition, as well as to trans people themselves. The equation of trans people with an abstract 'issue' is a powerful mechanism to promote prejudice while obscuring it as a rational argument in a 'debate'.

³⁹ Mermaids, [Mermaids' research into newspaper coverage on trans issues](#), 18th November 2019

⁴⁰ Office for National Statistics, [First census estimates on gender identity and sexual orientation](#), 6th January 2023

⁴¹ YouGov, [General election 2024: what are the most important issues for voters?](#), 1st June 2024

⁴² Loughborough University, [General Election 2024: Report 4: 30 May – 26 June 2024](#)

⁴³ BBC News, [Conversion therapy: Ban to go ahead but not cover trans people](#), 1st April 2022

⁴⁴ BBC Sport, [Transgender women no longer able to compete at elite female events run by British Cycling](#), 8th April 2022

⁴⁵ EHRC, [Guidance published for providers of single-sex services](#), 4th April 2022

⁴⁶ The identified bigrams are proper nouns, i.e., names of individuals. The analysis counted bigrams that appeared at least 8 times per month; this means that other names do appear but fewer than 8 times.

⁴⁷ BBC News, [Brianna Ghey's murderers jailed for 22 and 20 years for 'sadistic' killing](#), 2nd February 2024

⁴⁸ The Guardian, [Trans prisoners in Scotland to be first sent to jails matching their birth gender](#), 9th February 2023

⁴⁹ [About SEEN](#)

⁵⁰ These are organisations such as LGB Alliance, which define themselves as advocating for the right of lesbian, gay and bisexual people that they consider to be threatened by the recognition of the rights of trans people.

⁵¹ Home Office, [Hate crime, England and Wales, 2021 to 2022](#), 6th October 2022

⁵² Home Office, [Hate crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023 second edition](#), 2nd November 2023

⁵³ Home Office, [Hate crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2024](#), 10th October 2024

⁵⁴ Government Equalities Office, [National LGBT Survey: Summary report](#), 7th February 2019

⁵⁵ National Centre for Social Research, [Britain's attitudes towards moral issues have become much more liberal](#), 21st September 2023

⁵⁶ YouGov, [Where does the British public stand on transgender rights in 2024/25?](#), 11th February 2025

⁵⁷ TransActual, [TRANS LIVES 2025 Continuing to endure the UK's hostile environment](#), 2026