# Claire Inglis case sparks urgent calls to reform Scotland’s bail laws on domestic violence



The tragic case of Claire Inglis, whose life was brutally cut short by her ex-partner Christopher McGowan, has sparked urgent discussions about the adequacy of Scotland’s bail system, particularly in relation to domestic violence. Claire’s parents have voiced their deep concerns over recent legislative changes that they argue further endanger victims like their daughter.

McGowan, who had a criminal history containing 39 previous convictions—including prior incidents of domestic violence—was released on bail to Claire's home in Stirling. Despite a history of escalating violence, including an attack on an ex-partner, he was allowed to live in proximity to Claire and her young son. It was in this setting that he committed the horrendous act, battering and ultimately murdering Claire in November 2021. The judicial system’s failure to adequately assess the risks posed by McGowan raises profound questions about how effectively it protects vulnerable women.

The recent amendments to the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act, which came into force in May, have alarmed advocates and victims’ families alike. Previously, there was a presumption against granting bail to anyone accused of violent or sexual offences if they had a similar past conviction. The new regulations, however, remove this safeguard unless the court can justify refusal. This shift has been described as a cost-cutting measure intended to relieve prison overcrowding, a change Claire's parents, Ian and Fiona Inglis, rightly argue places lives at risk.

Fiona expressed her frustration, stating, “These shocking reforms do not protect victims. Instead, they put women’s lives at risk.” She highlighted her belief that the new developments are a regression in the fight to safeguard vulnerable individuals from potential abusers. “If he hadn’t been allowed to go to Claire’s home, she would still be alive today," she added, emphasising the belief that preventative measures must be fiercely upheld rather than weakened.

The criticism of the new bail rules echoes broader discontent within Scottish society, particularly from opposition politicians and victims' advocacy groups. Kate Wallace, chief executive of Victim Support Scotland, outlined fundamental flaws in the legislation, asserting that it fails to adequately safeguard those affected by domestic violence. She pointed out that measures should ideally ensure that bail is not granted to offenders returning to environments where they pose a threat.

Scottish Tory leader Russell Findlay echoed these sentiments, labelling the Scottish National Party's (SNP) approach as disingenuous. He referred to the party's assurances of considering victims’ safety while simultaneously undermining the justice system’s protocols as a troubling contradiction. His concerns, as articulated, are substantiated by unsettling statistics, with bail-related offences rising by 11% in the last reported year, illustrating the pervasive issue of offenders breaching bail conditions.

The judge presiding over McGowan's trial described his actions as “beyond sadistic.” In light of this horrific case, there remains a pressing need to evaluate and reform the bail system to better serve and protect victims. The Crown Office has expressed intentions to consider a fatal accident inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Claire's death, underscoring the need for accountability and systemic change.

Scottish First Minister John Swinney, in response to critics of the new regulations, has suggested that enhanced social work assessments will mitigate risks. However, Fiona’s sentiment that progress remains stagnant resurfaced when she remarked, “We are living in 2025 and we are no further forward in protecting victims of domestic abuse than we were generations ago.” This chilling assertion calls into question the effectiveness of current reforms and whether they can be relied upon to prevent tragedies like Claire's in the future.

As the debate continues, the Inglis family's plea for more robust protections for domestic abuse victims resonates loudly, urging a reevaluation of legislative priorities that could very well dictate the safety of countless individuals.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/25/man-jailed-in-scotland-for-beyond-sadistic-of-girlfriend), [[4]](https://edinburghdaily.uk/tragic-murder-of-young-scottish-mother-by-ex-partner-on-bail-a-devastating-case-of-domestic-violence)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/25/man-jailed-in-scotland-for-beyond-sadistic-of-girlfriend), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/christopher-mcgowan-murder-claire-inglis-b2435640.html), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-67127371)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[4]](https://edinburghdaily.uk/tragic-murder-of-young-scottish-mother-by-ex-partner-on-bail-a-devastating-case-of-domestic-violence), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/28/offender-40-convictions-murder-girlfriend-released-stirling/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/christopher-mcgowan-murder-claire-inglis-b2435640.html), [[4]](https://edinburghdaily.uk/tragic-murder-of-young-scottish-mother-by-ex-partner-on-bail-a-devastating-case-of-domestic-violence)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-67127371), [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/crime/beyond-sadistic-killer-jailed-for-murder-of-new-girlfriend-4385085)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/christopher-mcgowan-murder-claire-inglis-b2435640.html), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-67127371)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/25/man-jailed-in-scotland-for-beyond-sadistic-of-girlfriend), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/28/offender-40-convictions-murder-girlfriend-released-stirling/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/parents-murder-victim-claire-inglis-35282739> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/25/man-jailed-in-scotland-for-beyond-sadistic-of-girlfriend> - Christopher McGowan, 28, was sentenced to a minimum of 23 years for the 'beyond sadistic' murder of his girlfriend, Claire Inglis, 28, in Stirling, Scotland. McGowan had 40 previous convictions and was on bail when he killed Inglis in November 2021. The judge described the crime as 'beyond sadistic' and noted McGowan showed no remorse during the trial. The case has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the bail system in protecting victims of domestic violence.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/christopher-mcgowan-murder-claire-inglis-b2435640.html> - Christopher McGowan, 28, was sentenced to a minimum of 23 years for the murder of his girlfriend, Claire Inglis, 28, in Stirling, Scotland. McGowan had 39 previous convictions and was on bail when he killed Inglis in November 2021. The judge described the crime as 'beyond sadistic' and noted McGowan showed no remorse during the trial. The case has sparked calls for reform of the bail system to better protect victims of domestic violence.
4. <https://edinburghdaily.uk/tragic-murder-of-young-scottish-mother-by-ex-partner-on-bail-a-devastating-case-of-domestic-violence> - Claire Inglis, 28, was murdered by her ex-partner, Christopher McGowan, 28, in Stirling, Scotland, in November 2021. McGowan had 39 previous convictions, including aggravated domestic assault against an ex-partner, and was on bail when he killed Inglis. The case has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the bail system in protecting victims of domestic violence. The Crown Office is considering a probe into the circumstances surrounding Claire’s death.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/28/offender-40-convictions-murder-girlfriend-released-stirling/> - Christopher McGowan, 28, was convicted of murdering his girlfriend, Claire Inglis, 28, in Stirling, Scotland. McGowan had 40 previous convictions and was on bail when he killed Inglis in November 2021. The judge described the crime as a 'crime of staggering cruelty and depravity' and noted McGowan showed no remorse during the trial. The case has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the bail system in protecting victims of domestic violence.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-67127371> - Christopher McGowan, 28, was sentenced to a minimum of 23 years for the murder of his girlfriend, Claire Inglis, 28, in Stirling, Scotland. McGowan had 39 previous convictions and was on bail when he killed Inglis in November 2021. The judge described the crime as 'beyond sadistic' and noted McGowan showed no remorse during the trial. The case has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the bail system in protecting victims of domestic violence.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/crime/beyond-sadistic-killer-jailed-for-murder-of-new-girlfriend-4385085> - Christopher McGowan, 28, was sentenced to a minimum of 23 years for the murder of his girlfriend, Claire Inglis, 28, in Stirling, Scotland. McGowan had 40 previous convictions and was on bail when he killed Inglis in November 2021. The judge described the crime as 'beyond sadistic' and noted McGowan showed no remorse during the trial. The case has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the bail system in protecting victims of domestic violence.