

Gender Equality Strategy

Executive Summary

Advisory Panel

Abstract

Executive Summary of Research Thematic Areas, Key Findings and Recommendations

Ann Marie Gray
Louise Coyle
Rachel Powell
Siobhán Harding

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1. Overview

1.1 Context

The evidence set out in this report shows how gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. Tackling these inequalities requires actions across and at every level of government. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the twenty years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement's commitment to the 'full and equal participation of women in public life', statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted by rigid gender norms.

The persistence of gender inequalities also has to be placed in the context of a lack of progress with regard to a number of substantive areas of Social Policy¹. This has permeated every aspect of life but has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable in society. This is illustrated by the continuing, and in some cases growing, stark differences for women and men in health outcomes between the least and most deprived areas and by inequalities in educational outcomes. Despite a long standing commitment, the publication and resourcing of a comprehensive Childcare Strategy is still awaited.

It is therefore all the more important that this strategy for gender equality is being developed alongside other social inclusion strategies to address inequalities relating to disability, LGBTIQI+ and poverty. There are common areas of concern and interest between the strategies and we have drawn attention to some of these throughout the report. It is hoped that the work of the co-design groups will include the identification of common actions and principles across these strategies which are interlinked. It is also critically important that existing strategies – The Active Ageing strategy (2016-2022); The Race Equality Strategy (2015-2025); the NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme (2019-2024) and the new Childcare Strategy - and the action plans associated with these develop a gender focus. These strategies cannot operate in isolation and linkages need to be taken account of in the development, implementation and monitoring of policy.

While responsibility for some of the issues raised in this report rests with the Westminster Parliament, the majority fall within the devolved powers of the NI assembly. It is the responsibility of NI's MPs and the NI executive to lobby Westminster to implement the necessary legislative amendments. It is the responsibility of the NI Executive and Assembly to progress on the remainder.

There is overwhelming international evidence that political commitment to gender equality is central to the success of any policy approaches and strategies. The current Draft Programme for Government does not reference gender equality and the general outcome with regard to equality is insufficient. The new, and subsequent Programmes for Government should contain a specific commitment to gender equality and to the successful implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy.

1.2 The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other International Obligations

In developing a gender equality strategy consideration must be given to the key conventions, laws and regulations that should be utilised. The UK has signed up to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Of these, Goal 5 focuses specifically on gender equality: "To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. As can be seen throughout the report, other United Nations conventions including The UN Declaration on Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are also relevant to gender inequality, including with regard to intersectionality – see Chapter 2.

It is also vital that the equality rights accorded women under EU treaties and legislation can be maintained post leaving the European Union. There must be a clear commitment from the NI government to maintain these rights.

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most important human rights treaty for women and it is important that a gender equality strategy takes account of the binding obligation on governments which ratify the Convention. The overall aim of the CEDAW Convention (the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women) can be subdivided into three broad objectives: to ensure full equality of women before the law and protection against discrimination in the public as well as the private sphere; to improve the de facto position of women; and to address prevailing gender relations and the persistence of gender-based stereotypes. Importantly, the Convention affirms the concept of substantive equality between women and men and requires state parties to take all appropriate measures to achieve this. The monitoring of governments periodically by the CEDAW Committee on their progress to achieving gender equality is an important indicator of achievement.

Women's organisations in NI (particularly through the work of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform NIWEP) have an impressive track record of engagement with CEDAW. It is important that this work is resourced – indeed the CEDAW Convention places an obligation on state parties to ensure participation by civil society organisations.

The importance of the CEDAW Convention has been evidenced in the way that it has been used effectively by civil society organisations in NI to achieve critical change in the area of reproductive rights.

1.3 The Limitations of a Gender-Neutral Approach

A gender-neutral approach defaults to treating men and women the same, which does not result in equality of outcome for women and men. This approach is often described as “gender-blind” - an inability to perceive that there are different gender roles, needs, responsibilities of men, women, boys and girls, and as a result fail to realize that policies, programmes and projects can have different impacts on men, women, boys and girls.²

While the development of the 2006-2016 Gender Equality Strategy was welcome, the outcomes and impact were limited. A review of the strategy in 2013³ identified a range of problems with the implementation and monitoring of the strategy, including that the actions linked to it were insufficiently focused and targeted, that actions were not time bound and there was no formalised monitoring framework. It is also the case that the development of separate action plans for women and men encouraged a gender neutral approach. The issue of gender neutrality has been identified in this report as a significant barrier to women's equality. The CEDAW Committee has cautioned on the dangers of gender neutrality in policy making and resource allocation. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, Vice President of CEDAW in discussing the new challenges to gender equality from the CEDAW perspective, identified gender neutrality as a key concern. She spoke of the challenge posed by gender equality from the Left (gender being mainstreamed away) and from the Right (censoring gender in the ‘war on gender’)⁴. This is not the first time that the Committee has expressed concern that gender-neutral legislation, policies and programmes lead to the inadequate protection of women against direct and indirect discrimination and hinder the achievement of substantive equality between women and men.⁵

² http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd15/lc/gender_terms.pdf

³ Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (2013) Review of the Gender Equality Strategy - https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/gender-equality-strategy-2006-2016-review.pdf

⁴ Halperin-Kaddari, R (2018) New Challenges to Gender Equality from the CEDAW Perspective https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/lcpd/ICPD-25/Presentations/Session-3/1_-_3rd-thematic-session-presentation-Ruth-Halperin-Kaddari-CEDAW.pdf

1.4 Mainstreaming

Rees⁶ described mainstreaming as: “the systematic integration of equality into all systems and structures, all policies, processes and procedures, and into an organisation’s culture”. Governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland have developed mainstreaming strategies which include multiple equity grounds. Northern Ireland’s model for its mainstreaming strategy comes via Statutory Duty Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, and covers not just gender but simultaneously age, race, disability, religion, political opinion, marital status, dependant status, and sexual orientation. This broader use of mainstreaming is generically described as “equality mainstreaming.”⁷ There is considerable debate about the impact of this equality mainstreaming for women and the experience of NI does provide us with some cause for concern. Misinterpretation of the statutory duty has too often resulted in a view that equality can be achieved by treating men and women the same or by inadequate/inappropriate use of the equality impact assessment mechanism to identify inequalities.

Political will, resources received and enforcement have been established as some of the most influential factors in a mainstreaming strategy’s success⁸. Without these key elements, strategies fail to have any significant impact. In NI the implementation of mainstreaming has been approached with varying degrees of enthusiasm and rigour. While Section 75 aimed to change the practices of government and public authorities, so that equality of opportunity was central to the process of policy formation in NI, neither the budget, nor the investment strategy for NI have been subject to equality impact assessment. In fact, it has been common to screen out policy or use high level impact assessments (EQIA), with little evidence that significant budget decisions have been made or adjusted as a result of identified gender impacts (Rouse, 2016). Recent evidence also points to the problematic implementation of Section 75 in terms of equality considerations. In October 2020, the Equality Commission for NI, in an investigation under paragraph 11 of schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, found the NI Department for Finance and Personnel had breached their own equality scheme in respect of the EQIA process in formulation of the NI Budget for 2019/2020. In particular, the Commission highlighted the Department’s failure to consult on spending proposals. Addressing these problems is an important basis for effective gender equality policies.

1.5 Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises that individuals can experience discrimination on the basis of multiple and intersecting identities. Disadvantage and discrimination based on gender is inextricably linked to other identities, factors and experiences such as age, race, disability, sexual identity and poverty. Utilising the concept of intersectionality provides the opportunity to recognise, and address through policy, multiple, intersecting disadvantages⁹. The importance of intersectionality is addressed in a number of international treaties and conventions. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) have both addressed intersectional discrimination. The ICESCR has noted that the cumulative disadvantage accrued by individuals or groups of individuals who face discrimination on more than one of the prohibited grounds means that they experience a unique and specific impact which needs addressing.

The CEDAW Committee has pursued an intersectional approach in its General Recommendations (GR) and Concluding Observations¹⁰. For example, GR 35 explicitly recognises that gender based violence may affect some women to different degrees or in different ways. GR 36 has a section on disadvantaged groups of girls and women, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers, women with disabilities and LGBTI+ women (paras 40-46). An intersectional approach to disaster reduction can be seen in GR37 which notes that situations of crisis exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and compound intersecting forms of discrimination.

The Committee recommends that State parties take all appropriate measures to ensure the right of all categories of disadvantaged and marginalised groups to education by eliminating stereotyping and discrimination and by removing barriers to access. THE CEDAW committee makes frequent reference to intersectionality in its Concluding Observations. In its most recent set of Concluding Observations on the UK (2019)¹¹ it expresses concern about the limitations of equality legislation to effectively protect women from discrimination, including intersecting forms of discrimination. It also asks for action to be taken with regard to the lack of systematic data, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, disability and age, in particular with regard to intersecting forms of discrimination. This, it noted, impedes analysis of areas where women lack substantive equality with men and impacts on policy making and analysis of the impact of any measures taken.

1.6 Gender Budgeting

The importance of resource allocation to the success of gender mainstreaming has focused attention on gender budgeting. Gender budgeting seeks to redistribute resources in a way that redresses imbalances in women and men's use of, access to and benefit from public services and finances¹². Gender budgeting practice is now evident in the public policy of many countries. Research by Ulster University¹³ shows that The International Monetary Fund has identified that more than 40 countries have some form of gender budgeting, mostly at a national level. Additional evidence of its adoption is presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹⁴ who report that almost half of their members had planned to, or were actively considering, the introduction of gender budgeting tools. The most commonly used tools for gender budgeting among (OECD) members were the ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessment of policies.

The Ulster University research also explains how gender budgeting policies are being pursued in Britain and in the Republic of Ireland.

1.6.1 Gender Budgeting: Republic of Ireland and Great Britain

The Republic of Ireland expressed its commitment to gender equal budgeting in its Programme for a Partnership Government (2016). This commits to the development of the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. It specially commits to building capacity within government for gender budgeting in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments. This commitment toward developing the capacity and competence for gender budgeting is reiterated in the National Strategy for Women and Girls, which set the goal to undertake measures to build capacity within the civil and public service with regard to gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting¹⁵.

In Scotland, studies of the budget process and equalities analysis in draft budgets resulted in the introduction in 2009 of the Equality Budget Statement (EBS) alongside the draft budget. The first of its kind in the UK, the EBS represents a tangible integration of equality analysis in the budget. An additional development relates to the Joint Scottish Government and Scottish Parliamentary Budget Process Review Group (2017) which made a series of recommendations to strengthen equality analysis in the budget formation process.

In Wales the rapid review of gender equality found a significant disconnect between existing policy and budgetary processes¹⁶. As part of the review, Ministers have tasked the Wales Centre for Public Policy to provide independent evidence and expertise to inform the gender equality review, including an examination of tackling inequality through gender budgeting¹⁷.

1.6.2 Gender Budgeting: Northern Ireland

The Ulster University research shows that in the absence of adopting tools and processes for gender budgeting, NI significantly lags behind the other devolved administrations, the Republic of Ireland and other OECD countries. In other UK devolved administrations, Ireland and internationally, gender budgeting has made a substantive contribution to addressing gender inequalities, the elimination of unequal outcomes and to increasing women's participation in civic and political life.

Analysis of key policy documents, including the draft Programme for Government, together with interview data obtained for Phase 1 of the Ulster University Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) funded research project, substantiate the critique that gender equality has not been a policy priority in NI. The research finds evidence of a default to gender neutrality in policy formation and resource allocation in NI. Further evidence of this was found by Rouse (2020)¹⁸ who reports a strong correlation between NI civil servants' understanding of impartiality, as outlined in the NI Civil Service Code of Ethics, and a gender-neutral approach to policy development. Diane Elson, an internationally renowned expert on gender budgeting, challenges the view that the budget is a neutral exercise and points to a body of considerable evidence which shows that ostensibly neutral policy decisions have had gendered consequences. Underlining this is the explicit recognition that in the context of extant inequalities, no state action can be considered to be gender neutral as all state action - from laws and policies to budgets can either facilitate or hinder progress in gender equality.

The findings from Phase 1 of the Ulster University JRCT project, in assessing the potential for gender budgeting in NI, points to the existence of Section 75 as policy infrastructure which could enable gender budgeting in NI but implicated issues of competence and capacity within the civil and public service as a significant inhibitor of Section 75 processes to deliver gender equal policy and resource allocation in Northern Ireland.

The Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland should contain a specific recommendation in respect of developing requisite competence and capacity within the civil and public service in respect of gender analysis within existing Section 75 processes which would facilitate gender budgeting.

1.7 Data

The lack of robust, disaggregated data is a major challenge. Throughout this report we refer to these data gaps. International evidence shows that countries that have more gender equality produce regular, accessible data which allows them to evidence and map inequalities. There is a near absence of data for many of the Section 75 protected groups. This is an issue of critical concern and one which requires urgent action.

We recommend that an expert group should be established to conduct a rapid review into data on inequalities. This group should determine the steps to be taken to improve the availability of disaggregated data.

1.8 Resourcing of the Women's Sector to support participation in decision making and co-design

The women's sector has suffered from the lack of core and sustained financial support and the drastic cuts imposed on the sector since 2015 has had a hugely negative impact. A reliance on short-term funding leads to insecurity and loss of valuable experience from the sector. The contribution made by the sector both to policy development and to the provision of essential frontline services is immense – the work of the sector in terms of its response to the COVID 19 pandemic is just one illustration of this. This needs to be recognised by government. The women's sector plays a critical role in policy development and policy and legislative scrutiny and government departments benefit from the expertise and the structures for participation which organisations have.

'New Decade, New Approach' included a commitment to put civic engagement and public consultation at the heart of policy-making but this needs to be done in a way which is meaningful. The Women's Resource and Development Agency report 'Women At The Heart of Public Consultation'¹⁹ shows that how the public are invited to get involved in shaping public policy is critical. It provides practical recommendations for effectively engaging with women. Co design is increasingly being utilised by Executive departments when new initiatives are being scoped and developed. While this is a laudable approach, the evidence shows that unless there is a genuine and high level of participation, including from the most marginalised, this will only entrench existing power imbalances and encourage cynicism.

The duty on public bodies in NI to consult is positive and women's sector organisations make a substantive contribution by way of consultation responses. However, to do so, often within very tight time constraints imposed by Departments, places considerable pressure on them. Genuine co-design requires sufficient time to talk to people properly, issue consultations that are online only and provide support to help people understand what they mean.

¹⁹ Women At The Heart of Public Consultation 2018
https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WRDA_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf

Government should commit to support organisations to contribute to policy – locally, within the UK and internationally, as required by CEDAW. Participation in the policy process should be supported by the adoption of a meaningful approach to co-design, including realistic time periods for consulting and the resourcing of organisations.

Government should also provide longer-term funding for grassroots women’s organisations to enable them to continue and develop the vital work they do in addressing women’s poverty and inequality, often filling the gaps left by the withdrawal or lack of provision of statutory services.

There has been an impact on the provision of specialised services resulting from the procurement process, one example has been the end of the contract for Women’s AID to provide the domestic abuse 24 hour helpline service. Procurement processes for specialised services should take account of historic knowledge, established relationships and expertise.

1.8.1 Duration of the Gender Equality Strategy, Implementation and Monitoring

We recommend that the duration of the strategy is five years. There should be no gap between the end of this gender equality strategy and the subsequent strategy. While the lead Department for the strategy is the Department for Communities, responsibilities for implementation and resourcing are cross departmental.

There should be an annual review of progress with a substantive external evaluation at the mid-way point. In order to facilitate scrutiny progress on the development of the strategy needs to be transparent. It is recommended that the Gender Equality Strategy and the Indicators are placed on the Department for Communities website. Progress on each indicator should be monitored using a ‘scorecard’.

The resourcing of the Gender Equality Strategy should reflect the breadth of the themes and the work required to address the substantive inequalities. The adoption of gender-based budgeting will help ensure that all resource allocation is gender proofed.

1.8.2 Drawing lessons from Elsewhere

In developing an implementation plan for the Gender Equality Strategy it will be useful to look at models of good practice. References to Iceland and to Wales below are just examples of where there has been significant identifiable progress.

Iceland has headed the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap index for more than a decade and its approach is being explored by a number of European countries. A key factor in the success seen in Iceland is an acknowledgement that gender equality cannot come from the bottom up and the need for strong legislative measures. An example is the measures implemented to address the gender pay gap which placed strong mandatory obligations on employers. These had the outcome of not just reducing the pay gap but also the composition of the workforce.

In Iceland there has also been a recognition that legislation, properly implemented, can impact attitudes and behaviour (in Northern Ireland we do not have robust data on attitudes and this is a significant gap in charting attitudinal change).

A visible political commitment to gender equality is a requirement. Combatting deeply entrenched social, economic and cultural inequalities requires long term sustained commitment. The commitment made by the Welsh Government in 2018 to gender equality emphasises the equal sharing of power, resources and influence. The willingness of the government to advance proposals for gender budgeting is an indication of the seriousness of that commitment.

There are a number of overarching principles upon which we feel an effective gender equality strategy rests:

- A high level political commitment in the Programme for Government to equality of outcome for all women, men and non-binary people;
- A commitment to practically advance equality through putting a gender perspective at the heart of decision making and budgetary allocation;
- The adoption of an intersectional approach to policy making and to diversity of participation and representation;
- A commitment to openness, transparency and accountability including with regard to evidence informed policy making and to the collection, collation and publication of data; and
- A commitment to enhance the capacity of the NI government with regard to gender equality. This should include a review of training opportunities for NI government officials with regard to understanding and implementing mainstreaming measures, equality impact assessments and conducting consultations.

In completing this report we maintained a strong focus on evidence in terms of identifying and explaining gender inequalities and in terms of recommendations. In this chapter and in subsequent chapters we include a list of summary recommendations. These are not exhaustive but are issues which we see as pivotal to driving change - the radical change needed.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 critically examines equality and human rights legislation and frameworks and the protection offered by these. It also examines the 'new' threats to gender equality from the COVID 19 pandemic and exiting the European Union.
 - Chapter 3 focuses on employment, pay and work life balance. It assesses the limited improvement over the past 25 years and looks closely at the actions required to achieve equality in these areas.
 - Chapter 4 examines poverty and economic justice and shows the harm caused to individuals, families and communities. It highlights the particular vulnerability of some groups of women to poverty and shows how gender norms perpetuate this. There is analysis of the actions required to effectively address poverty and which includes upholding the dignity of the individual.
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- Chapter 5 looks at the paid and unpaid care work predominantly delivered by women. It shows how this work has been chronically undervalued and which suffers from sustained under-investment. It sets out a number of recommendations to address the inequalities experienced by these carers and which would benefit care users.
- Chapter 6 examines gender inequalities with regard to health. It shows how the health system reflects and reinforces gender inequalities and how an important aspect of this is the intersectionality between gender and income, race, age and sexual identity.
- Chapter 7 focuses on representation, participation in public life and peacebuilding and community cohesion. It shows how, despite the commitments made in the Belfast/GFA, women have not been afforded the opportunity to participate equally in politics and public life. Addressing these entrenched inequalities requires the introduction of ‘special measures’.
- Chapter 8 addresses gender based violence and misogyny and demonstrates how gender neutral decision making approaches have prevented progress in addressing these issues. It concludes that major legislative reforms are needed.
- Chapter 9 focuses on education, training and changing culture. Eradicating inequalities in these areas is at the core of achieving gender equality and addressing disadvantage and poverty but there is much to be done. Gender stereotyping is pervasive in education and training policies and structures.
- Chapter 10 looks at the potential for action on the environment and climate change to impact on gender equality. It highlights the need to acknowledge existing gender inequalities and to value care work to ensure that everyone can benefit equally from the opportunities provided by green economies.
- Chapter 11 sets out the conclusion.

1.8.3 Key Priority Recommendations to be considered:

1.8.3.1 Equality and Human Rights Legislation Frameworks:

- Avoid gender neutrality through applying a gender lens to all policy, legislative and budgetary decision-making so as to truly understand different gender roles, needs and responsibilities and realise the different impacts on different genders;
- Provide a greater focus on the importance of training on anti-discrimination law, Section 75 and positive action measures to ensure maximum knowledge and awareness of the law and good practice among policy makers, employers and service providers;
- Implement all CEDAW recommendations with regard to policy within the competence of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly; and
- Greater representation of women’s voices in the Brexit debate at local, national and EU levels so they can influence decision-making that is likely to significantly impact on their lives.

1.8.3.2 Employment, Pay and Work-Life Balance:

- Given the breadth of issues relating to women’s employment, a separate Women’s Employment Strategy would be useful to comprehensively outline and address the nuanced systematic barriers that women face in work and broader society in Northern Ireland. Targets from this strategy should be incorporated into the Programme for Government;

- Urgently require gender disaggregated data for furlough, redundancy and within all forms of welfare payments to accurately measure the gendered impact of COVID-19;
- Urgently develop a Childcare Strategy and implement a government-funded, universal, free childcare provision; and
- Statutory regulations need to be urgently implemented to tackle the gender pay gap. Given the fact that 99.9% of businesses in Northern Ireland are small-medium sized businesses, monitoring and mandatory reporting must be a requirement for all businesses with 10-20+ employees. Regulations must be robust and include meaningful sanctions for employers who do not report, and for those who fail to take action to address their Gender Pay Gap. In addition, the regulations should stipulate that employers must also share data on their gender pay gaps, explanations and actions to address these with trade unions in a timely manner.

1.8.3.4 Poverty and Economic Justice:

- While continuing to lobby for an end to the Bedroom Tax, Benefit Cap, Two-Child Limit and the Universal Credit 5-week wait there is an urgent need to extend and strengthen the mitigations package for Northern Ireland to address these issues;
- Make the £20 uplift to Universal Credit introduced to help with the Covid19 pandemic permanent and extend it to legacy benefits;
- Consider a further £20 per week increase to the child element of Universal Credit to specifically support families with children;
- Increase the funding available to the Universal Credit Contingency Fund, use it to make automatic payments to new claimants impacted by the 5-week wait and make it easier to apply to the Fund; and
- Increase the funding available for the Discretionary Support Scheme, widen the eligibility criteria, make more payments as grants rather than loans and make it easier to apply.

1.8.3.5 Adult Social Care

- Take urgent action to increase the salaries of paid care workers. This should be linked to the professionalisation of training (within the development of a training and qualifications framework, including Higher Level Apprenticeship) for adult social care workers with opportunity for workplace progression and secure contracts for all care workers. These actions are critical to avoid a worsening of the crisis in adult social care provision and to building a sustainable care system. As such they will benefit the quality of care provided to users and the economy;
 - Policies and strategies with regard to support to unpaid carers should be updated (including a new Strategy for Carers) and properly resourced;
 - A review of carers' assessments should be conducted to establish; a) reasons for the relative low level of assessment b) the reasons why a significant number of assessment offers are declined; c) the reasons for the variation across HSC Trusts; and
 - Increase the value of Carer's Allowance at least in line with developments in Scotland.
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1.8.3.6 Health:

- Implement the findings of the 2013 RQIA review of specialist sexual health services in NI. In the context of the development of abortion provision, set up an integrated sexual and reproductive health service;
- In line with the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, provide women with access to high quality abortion and post-abortion care;
- Address the data gaps outlined in chapter 6, including the collection and publication of data on health outcomes across the Section 75 groups, taking into account intersectionality; and
- Take urgent action to address persistent, and in cases worsening, inequalities in women's health in line with recommendations on addressing gender poverty set out in this report and in the report of the Anti-poverty Strategy Expert Group.

1.8.3.7 Representation, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Community Cohesion:

- Ensure women's groups as well as marginalised communities that have been specifically impacted by the pandemic (i.e. trans communities, racialised groups, disabled people) are adequately represented in all departmental COVID-19 recovery efforts;
- Recognise that women need to be included in all discussions including those related to finance and economy;
- Support for public bodies to put in place time-bound, measurable plans for increasing the participation of women, particularly women from disadvantaged, under represented and rural communities;
- Consistent, mandatory support for childcare/caring, travel and other costs associated with participation in local decision-making structures, public bodies and political life;
- Urgent rebalancing of resourcing for rural women to address historic imbalance;
- Resourced adult Community Education which addresses systemic barriers for women
- Government Departments and statutory agencies consulting apply the learning from 'Women At The Heart of Public Consultation' guidelines;
- Ensure that women are adequately represented on co-design groups and include community level representation, taking the lead from established community organisations and working with them to establish co-design procedures that work for the specific communities being engaged with; and
- Analysis of all public appointments should be required by whoever oversees the appointments process, not just by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. This should include seeking feedback from applicants'.

1.8.3.8 Gender Based Violence, Misogyny and Justice:

- Despite the introduction of new legislation relating to domestic abuse, several gaps remain in the protections afforded to victims in Northern Ireland compared to other regions. Victims in Northern Ireland should have equal protections and their geographical location should not impact their recourse to justice. Additional legislation must be urgently implemented to address the gaps in protections for victims;

- Urgently develop a specific strategy to address all forms of violence against women and girls;
- Fully implement all recommendations from the Gillen Review and Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review;
- Adequate resourcing needs to accompany all new legislation relating to all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual abuse and hate crime; and
- To address objective need, robust recording of Section 75 Characteristics of all victims is needed and sufficient funding for specialist support providers is essential.

1.8.3.9 Education, Training and Changing Culture:

- Bullying strategy; including staff training, to take account of the specific experiences of Trans, LGB and SEN students;
- Urgently address digital poverty and the impact of educational needs of families across all of Northern Ireland; including access to free internet and technology;
- Recognition that the addressing poverty is most likely to make the most significant impact on attainment outcomes for all;
- Gender stereotyping recognised and an education strategy implemented from Early Years;
- Resourcing to address the disproportionate cuts to the women's sector community adult education; and
- Establish an expert panel to direct future RSE such as that established in Wales.

1.8.3.10 Environment and Climate Change:

- Conduct a skills-needs analysis to establish the skills required by men and women to equally participate and benefit from opportunities created in the green economy. The information should be used to create targeted green skills development and training initiatives for both men and women;
- Put in place accountability procedures to ensure all relevant stakeholders are held accountable for operating in a gender-responsive manner to achieve gender equality outcomes in the green economy. This can be done through gender responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that measures to advance gender equality in the green economy are having the desired impact;
- Broaden definitions of 'green jobs' beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high recompense sector;
- Recognise the dual-benefit of job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are mostly done by women;
- Ensure the equal participation of rural women and girls in policy making processes on disaster mitigation and climate change; and
- Ensure rural women are a target group in the development and delivery of a new Rural Development Programme for NI.

2. Equality and Human Rights Legislation Frameworks

Summary

Equality and Human Rights legislation and the agreements, strategies and international obligations which are based on these rights embody the key values in society of fairness, dignity, equality and respect. They provide important protections for citizens especially for those who are more likely to face inequalities and give the opportunity to challenge and highlight poor and unequal treatment.

The impact of a decade of welfare reform and austerity changes, the predicted worsening of existing inequalities as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and the likely adverse impacts of Brexit, particularly in Northern Ireland, gives rise for concern about the erosion of equality and human rights for both men and women. Women's voices have been largely absent from Brexit negotiations and from recovery planning as a result of the pandemic. This will only serve to ensure that women, their rights, needs and aspirations are not effectively represented in future policies and decision-making and will have undoubted negative impacts for gender equality into the future.

Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realising gender equality. This approach involves the integration of a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and budgeting with a view to promoting equality between women and men and combating discrimination. It is a critical step in building a more equal society and a way to prevent the creation and reinforcement of inequalities which can have negative impacts for everyone in society.

The Section 75 duties use a mainstreaming approach however evidence suggests that it has not reduced gendered inequality and has been largely ineffective in producing any real improvements in this area. A gender-neutral approach to policy and decision making has been the standard across Government and this has not served women well as it fails to take account of the different experiences of men and women as a result of existing gender inequalities. A failure to account for these gender dynamics means that the design of policies and budgets may aggravate existing gender inequality and may not benefit women and men equally. There is a need for greater training and enforcement of the Section 75 procedures to ensure that inequalities are effectively reduced.

Many of the existing threats to equality and human rights could be avoided if a Bill of Rights was in place for Northern Ireland. This would bring together and safeguard all the existing human rights, incorporate international standards as well as allowing for the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. The argument for a Bill of Rights has become increasingly essential and a framework which provides rights and guarantees within a culture of respect for human rights will provide protection for all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

2.1 Recommendations:

- Strengthen the protection against sex discrimination and harassment in Northern Ireland at the very least to match existing rights which apply in GB but ideally to bring it into line with CEDAW international obligations and best practice elsewhere;
- Ensure effective application of the Section 75 equality duty so that gender equality impact assessments are systematically undertaken;
- Greater focus on the importance of training on anti-discrimination law, Section 75 and positive action measures to ensure maximum knowledge and awareness of the law and good practice among policy makers, employers and service providers;
- Consider other methods of equality impact assessment like those used in Wales or Canada;
- Apply a gender lens to all policy, legislative and budgetary decision-making so as to truly understand different gender roles, needs and responsibilities and realise the different impacts on different genders;
- Implement the CEDAW recommendations with regard to policy within the competence of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly;
- Greater representation of women's voices in the Brexit debate at local, national and EU levels so they can influence decision-making that is likely to significantly impact on their lives;
- There must be no regression in the protection of human rights particularly women's rights as a result of Brexit;
- Post-Brexit Northern Ireland should continue to learn from EU policy development and innovation so as to replicate what is advantageous to Northern Ireland;
- Any loss of funding from the EU should not lead to gaps in services provided to women and girls, men and boys as well as gender minorities;
- A consultation on the Shared Prosperity Fund should take place without delay. Spending from the Fund should be devolved with the aim of reducing inequalities in social and economic wellbeing;
- Implement a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland;
- Work to ensure a future Rural Development Policy that supports vibrant, gender equal, rural communities and that the Programme for Government, proposed budgets and policies across all Government departments take account of rural needs;
- Redress the historic underinvestment in rural women by ensuring that rural women have dedicated rural development resourcing which takes into account gender differentials;
- Ensure that rural women are engaged in future rural development policy planning and development;

- Establish a Citizens Assembly to consider gender equality issues and how these might be meaningfully improved in Northern Ireland;
- The NI Executive should lobby Westminster to incorporate all the provisions of CEDAW into domestic law;
- The NI Executive should lobby Westminster to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and CEDAW Recommendation No. 30 to ensure women's effective participation and leadership in conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes in Northern Ireland; and
- The NI Executive should lobby Westminster to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

3. Employment, Pay and Work-Life Balance

Summary:

To measure gender inequality in Northern Ireland and create a strategy to address this, analysing women's employment, pay and work-life balance provides an excellent example of how prevalent the issue is. In creating a strategy that aims to achieve gender equality in Northern Ireland, a wide range of action is needed to tackle the gendered issues that drastically impact women's employment and ability to access high quality work in the labour market. Barriers to employment, gender stereotypes, unaffordable childcare, the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities, deeply segregated labour markets, sex discrimination, the denial of gender pay gaps and low pay all uphold gender inequality in Northern Ireland and must be addressed urgently.

The trends in women's employment show only minor improvements in the past 25 years, and highlight the need for broad, inter-departmental action from the NI Executive alongside the introduction of legislation to address issues beyond the public sector. Women's employment rates are comparatively low, and the number of women who are unable to enter the paid labour market is dangerously high, largely due to family and home commitments. This is the least common reason for men, which shows the nuanced and gendered nature of women's engagement with the labour market. For women that are participating in the paid labour market, the picture is still bleak in relation to gender equality.

Key indicators of how prevalent gender inequality is, beyond low levels of women's employment and high levels of "economic inactivity" due to family and home commitments, include the vast over-representation of women in part-time, low-paid and insecure work alongside the vast under-representation of women who are self-employed or in senior positions. In addition to this, the detrimental impact of having children on women's pay, work patterns and ability to stay in the labour market alongside the lack of a government funded childcare provision have led to huge employment barriers for women that have persisted for decades. Deeply gender segregated labour markets and many of the aforementioned factors have led to a gender pay gap for women in Northern Ireland that is often dismissed by officials and departments. In addition, the lack of effective gender disaggregated data on areas such as the government furlough scheme, redundancies and the claimant count in Northern Ireland make it extremely difficult to fully assess and address objective need. Across all indicators on employment, women have less access to equal economic opportunities.

Based on the evidence and indicators in relation to women's employment, a number of actions to address these issues become evident. This could include, but is not limited to, creating a comprehensive women's employment strategy; recognising care work as a part of essential economic infrastructure and providing structural investment; introducing a universal, free childcare provision; providing a legislative basis for better workplace policies on issues such as maternity discrimination, parental leave and sex discrimination; making a requirement for recording gender disaggregated data to accurately assess the impact of economic crises on women and introducing mandatory gender pay gap reporting and monitoring that recognises that 99.9% of all businesses in Northern Ireland are small-medium sized. To assess the impact of mechanisms introduced to address gender inequality in employment, robust monitoring mechanisms need to be introduced to ensure compliance and accountability.

3.1. Recommendations:

Women's Employment:

- Women's low employment rates compared to men, particularly in full-time employment, need to be addressed urgently. The impact of having dependent children on women's ability to access employment, particularly full-time employment, needs to be addressed through measures such as targeted recruitment and an adequate childcare provision;
- The low levels of self-employed women need to be targeted – particularly as self-employment with appropriate levels of support can be a more suitable option for rural women. Assessments of funding allocated to self-employed women, support available for women entrepreneurs, increasing levels of women apprentices, addressing and resourcing infrastructure issues and the chronic underfunding of rural women etc. are all areas worth exploring;
- The levels of women in full-time employment cannot be used as the sole indicator of measuring gender equality in employment and it should be addressed alongside various other targets including addressing insecure, temporary, low-paid work; tackling levels of working poverty; encouraging men into flexible and part-time work; creating meaningful policy change to support the redistribution of caring responsibilities and upholding work-life balance; and
- Given the breadth of issues relating to women's employment, a separate Women's Employment Strategy would be useful to comprehensively outline and address the nuanced systematic barriers that women face in work and broader society in Northern Ireland.

Women's Unemployment, "Economic Inactivity" and the "Motherhood Gap"

- Rising unemployment and underemployment rates in Northern Ireland need to be addressed urgently; particularly as this is likely to have worsened significantly due to COVID-19;
- The term "economically inactive" needs to be challenged in its dismissal of the high volume of women who are involuntarily unemployed due to family and home commitments, alongside other minorities that are considered inactive due to systemic barriers and discrimination;
- The contributions of those not formally employed due to family and home commitments needs to be assessed and recognised in terms of the economic value of this unpaid labour.

- High levels of women considered “economically inactive” compared to men, due to unequal distribution of care and family and home commitments, needs to be treated as a priority. Particularly in assessing how patriarchal gender stereotypes lead to a much higher proportion of women undertaking this work; and
- Becoming a mother carries a huge penalty in terms of employment rates, types of employment and working patterns of mothers, particularly mothers of young children. Discrimination against women with children, and the barriers to returning to employment, should be addressed immediately through robust monitoring of workplace discrimination and pay and the creation of an adequate childcare provision. This could also be overseen through a Women’s Employment Strategy.

Furlough Scheme and Redundancy:

- Gender disaggregated data is urgently needed in measuring numbers of women furloughed, women made redundant and women included the claimant count in order to accurately assess how economic conditions are impacting women in Northern Ireland. Without this gender disaggregated data, it is difficult to address the disproportionate impact of economic shocks on women’s employment;
- Requirements for reporting the numbers of women furloughed and made redundant should be introduced for all businesses, particularly those with less than 20 employees, in light of the current economic crisis. Northern Ireland has a high number of small to medium sized businesses and current requirements under employment legislation and the lack of government recording of gender in claimant counts leaves significant gaps in accurately reporting the levels of women impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Due to the lack of gender disaggregated data, and data on the impact on smaller businesses, the full extent of the economic consequences of the furlough scheme and increased redundancies are missing. The impact of those in low-paid employment surviving on 80% of their wages, delays in financial support for those who are self-employed, those in businesses forced to shut down, and those requiring significant financial support (such as childminders and the broader childcare sector), needs to be analysed and addressed; and
- An analysis of the impact of subsequent lockdowns needs to be assessed, as many employers could not access financial support and many staff were no longer on the UK Government’s Furlough Job Retention Scheme after this initially ended in October. Significant economic planning is needed as businesses and employees were unable to avail of the financial support that was needed.

Gender Segregated Labour Markets:

- The detrimental impact gender segregated labour markets has in stifling meaningful, sustainable economic growth and achieving gender equality needs to be urgently addressed. Recommendations from the Women and Work Commission 2006 should be implemented;

- The additional detrimental impact gender segregation has on worsening the impacts of economic shocks on women also needs to be considered an urgent priority for the NI Executive. Gender segregation in low-paid, precarious and undervalued sectors such as care needs to be addressed to avoid economic shocks further exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and disproportionately impacting women;
- A range of approaches to tackling gender segregated labour markets need to be adopted, implemented and monitored. This should include effective monitoring of sectors with vast gender segregation; increasing investment in undervalued sectors such as care; improving the working conditions in precarious sectors; tackling gender stereotypes that embed segregation; removing barriers to sectors including inflexible working, a lack of childcare and monitoring differences in pay, promotional opportunities and development of staff;
- In work to address gender stereotypes, it is important that the experiences of trans people and gender minorities are included, particularly in addressing barriers to accessing employment in certain sectors due to a lack of cultural competency and gender stereotyping. Any work to tackle gender stereotyping, through training for example, should also take the diverse experiences of gender minorities into account; and
- Long-term strategies are needed to address occupational, vertical and differences in work patterns. This should include tackling pervasive gender stereotypes, poor working conditions, equal allocation of apprenticeship funding for skills development of women, encouraging trade union membership and collective bargaining, monitoring and addressing gender pay gaps, encouraging development of family-friendly workplace policies, creating quotas for women in leadership positions and more.

Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Paternity and Pregnancy Discrimination:

- Issues with sex discrimination, pregnancy and maternity discrimination and workplace sexual harassment all need to be urgently addressed in Northern Ireland. The prevalence of all issues, and the failures of legislation to adequately need to be further understood within Northern Ireland;
- Discrepancies in how SMP and SMA are treated in terms of being earned, or unearned income, need to be addressed, particularly in relation to how these impact Universal Credit and perpetuate women's poverty;
- Maternity and parental leave entitlements in the UK and Ireland are significantly lower than in other EU countries and should be increased. This is expanded on in section 3.6.2.
- The prevalence of workplace sexual harassment, low levels of reporting and consequences for perpetrators needs to be addressed; and
- Models of good practice elsewhere, alongside recommendations for workplace policies to protect against these issues should be considered. This could be implemented and overseen through a Women's Employment Strategy.

Flexi Working and Family Leave Frameworks:

- Increased financial and social support for carers is needed urgently in Northern Ireland, particularly given the increased pressures due to COVID-19 and the unequal distribution of care between men and women increasing levels of gender inequality;
- In line with commitments made in New Decade, New Approach, a Childcare Strategy Timeline and Childcare Provision should be released by the Education Minister as a matter of priority. Rapidly increasing costs of childcare, the lack of a government funded provision, and limited availability for rural families, families with disabled children and ethnic minority families' needs to be addressed urgently;
- Any childcare provision introduced in Northern Ireland must also address issues with low pay and gender segregation in the childcare sector and be accompanied with cultural competency training to support the accessibility of childcare for rural, ethnic minority, LGBTQI+ families and for disabled children. Further, it is imperative that our childcare settings are equipped to educate, improve social cohesion and tackle the root causes of discrimination against marginalised groups;
- All forms of care should be seen as a part of the essential economic infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Underinvestment and the undervaluing of all forms of care work, both paid and unpaid, has created large barriers to women's economic opportunities and the dismissal of the economic value of unpaid domestic work;
- Northern Ireland compares badly to other regions in relation to paid family leave and the provisions for maternity and paternity leave are inadequate and should be increased;
- Ensure that all LGBTQIA people are considered when improving access to maternity/paternity leave, and that there are no additional barriers for LGBTQIA parents attempting to access leave. There needs to be adequate protections in relation to maternity and paternity leave for those adopting, and for trans men and non-binary people requiring leave after giving birth. Specific guidance for employers should be given on supporting trans parents in accessing maternity and paternity leave;
- Shared parental leave in the current form is not effective and should be considered a policy failure in need of reform. Parental leave should be available as a day one right and should be remunerated to at least SMP levels. This should be a period of reserved paid leave for fathers and second parents as a more effective way of enabling and encouraging uptake in men taking leave to care for children. Without policy reform, shared parental leave does little to address the unequal distribution of care;
- Governments should introduce a legislative basis to require employers to publish flexible working options in all job advertisements. Reforms to eligibility to flexible working should be implemented to make it an option to all workers, regardless of employment contract, and available from the beginning the role. Employers who cannot accommodate any form of flexibility should be required to transparently set out exceptional circumstances to justify this; and
- Increased measures to allow for flexi work should be introduced beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and workers should be provided with the right to disconnect when doing remote work, particularly as pressures have increased for workers during the pandemic and job

insecurity increases. Measures to improve accessibility to flexi work must also account for unattended consequences of women facing additional pressures of combining work and caring responsibilities as seen through the pandemic through additional measures to encourage and enable men's uptake in flexible working.

Promoting Workplace Equality:

- Employment rights are devolved and there needs to be the full realisation of commitments outlined in New Decade, New Approach in relation to workers' rights and this needs to be done with a gendered focus;
- Employers should be fully supporting in efforts to promote workplace equality through clear workplace guidelines, enforcement and legislative backing;
- Workplace equality guidelines and legislation should be introduced in relation to a range of issues such as menopause, breastfeeding, tackling workplace sexual harassment and supporting victims of domestic abuse in the workplace;
- There should be the full introduction of statutory paid leave for victims of domestic abuse of at least 10 days across all sectors in Northern Ireland;
- There needs to be broader support and promotion of collective bargaining in Northern Ireland to ensure an autonomous voice for all workers, particularly in areas of low pay, low union representation and high occupational gender segregation; and
- There should be a Women's Employment Strategy implemented to support the Gender Equality Strategy and the implementation of the above measures to promote workplace equality. This should also be used to address the broad pay differences between male-dominated and female-dominated occupational sectors.

Gender Pay Gap:

- Claims that Northern Ireland does not have a gender pay gap are false, as this is often claimed based on a comparison that only represents a small number of women employees and based on one of many types of statistical measurements that can be applied;
- When all employees are considered excluding overtime, rather than just full-time employees, men earn £1.01 more per hour than women;
- Internationally, different measurements are used as Eurostat tends to use the mean, OECD used the median and the International Labour Organisation recommends using a range of measures. A range of measures should also be used in Northern Ireland to enable comparisons with the UK and Republic of Ireland alongside other international comparisons;
- Across the nine occupational groups in NI, men earn more than women in seven of them. In the two where women earn more, one has a difference of 1p and the other only includes 5% of the total women workforce.; Analysis of the total annual income averages rather than average median wage provide a more accurate picture of the gender pay gap that exists, as men earn more overall, are able to work more hours and get larger bonuses than women;

- Women are over-represented in part-time and low-paid sectors and are under-represented in the private sector where the gender pay gap is widening. Occupational segregation, caring responsibilities, inflexible work policies and gender stereotypes all have an impact on women's earnings;
- It is important to create a monitoring and reporting framework that accurately incorporates all of the above variations, and also recognises the additional levels of discrimination groups face that increase the gender pay gap further. Any gender pay gap regulations must include mandatory reporting for gender and all other section 75 characteristics to effectively tackle discrimination and intersectional gender inequality. This is of particular importance considering substantial evidence in other jurisdictions of wider gender pay gaps for migrant, trans and/or disabled women;
- 99.9% of businesses in Northern Ireland are small-medium sized businesses²⁰. In order to tackle the gender pay gap, monitoring and mandatory reporting must be a requirement for all businesses with 10-20+ employees, in line with the threshold for Fair Employment monitoring. Only requiring reporting of gender pay gaps for organisations with 250+ staff will not address the problem in Northern Ireland, as the vast majority of organisations do not meet this criterion;
- Gender Pay Gap regulations must be robust and include meaningful sanctions for employers who do not report, and for those who fail to take action to address their Gender Pay Gap. In addition, the regulations should stipulate that employers must also share data on their gender pay gaps, explanations and actions to address these with trade unions in a timely manner;
- Measures should be implemented to address pay transparency, including but not limited to, banning pay secrecy clauses in contracts; requiring information for job evaluation for the purpose of establishing equal pay for equal work; making all employers produce pay information (audits) and annual action plans on pay equality; supporting unions to negotiate with employers to tackle the pay gap; requiring job advertisements to include the pay range; preventing employers hiding behind privacy, data protection or administrative burden to avoid pay transparency; ensuring transparency for the whole pay package including benefits, bonuses, pensions, allowances etc. and imposing sanctions on employers who do not take action;
- The gender pension gap is prevalent in Northern Ireland, and in addition to broader recommendations to address gender inequality in the workplace, policy makers must implement measures to reduce the differences in occupational and private pensions between men and women;
- The unadjusted gender pay gap is analysed in detail in a recent report by Dr Lisa Wilson of the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI)²¹. The findings of this report support those outlined above and further highlight the need to dismiss any claims that a gender pay gap in Northern Ireland does not exist, as this is not the case; and

²⁰ <https://www.swinton.co.uk/business/business-trends/northern-ireland/#:-:text=Northern%20Ireland%20has%20the%20highest,private%20sector%20income%20and%20employment>

²¹ Wilson, L. (2020) How Unequal? The unadjusted gender pay gap in earnings in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, NERI Working Paper Series, NERI WP 2020/No. 69,

- Low pay is an issue across Northern Ireland, with 1 in 4 people earning below the real living wage. Legislation should be reduced to ensure all workers should earn at least the living wage. More detail on working poverty and recommendations to address this are in the next section.

Belfast: NERI.

http://nerinstitute.net/sites/default/files/research/2020/Unadjusted%20gender%20pay%20gap%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20and%20the%20Republic%20of%20Ireland%202020%20_1.pdf

4. Poverty and Economic Justice

Summary

Poverty is harmful to people, families and local communities. Living in poverty has negative physical and mental health impacts and these are often long-term affecting educational attainment, happiness and wellbeing, life chances and even life expectancy. Women's poverty is especially harmful because of the strong links between female poverty and child poverty.

Eradicating poverty in all its forms is one of the greatest challenges faced by people and Governments the world over. This has been recognised by the United Nations in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The first SDG calls for no poverty - to end poverty in all its forms, everywhere.²² It commits to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions by 2030. This is an ambitious but nonetheless important commitment which would transform the lives of many men, women and children across the world.

Women are generally more likely than men to live in poverty across their lifetimes. Lone parents (the majority of whom are women) are even more vulnerable to poverty. Welfare reform and austerity measures introduced over the last decade have hit women harder than men and Universal Credit has tended to have more negative impacts for women than men. Women have lower financial wellbeing, are less likely to save and are more likely to be poorer pensioners than men. Lone parents are particularly vulnerable to debt and are over-represented as clients of debt advice agencies compared to the general population.

Existing gender norms including the expectation that women will carry out the bulk of caring responsibilities for children and other family members, the unequal burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities, women's concentration in low-paid, part-time and insecure work and the fact that women are more likely to be in receipt of social security benefits means that women's incomes are generally lower putting them at greater risk of poverty.

Progress on women's poverty cannot be achieved without attention to these existing gender inequalities which contribute not only to women's poverty but to the poverty of their children. This will require action on the structural issues which impact on women's ability to work including accessible, affordable childcare and transport, the availability of flexible working and family friendly employment practices, valuing unpaid care and investing in education and training programmes for women particularly for those on the lowest incomes.

Current government action on poverty tends to try and address the symptoms of poverty often with a focus on the different types of poverty such as food poverty, fuel poverty, etc. This fragmentation of approaches to poverty often results in piecemeal responses to address it. There is an urgent need for government policy and action to tackle the root causes of poverty across all departments rather than through addressing the symptoms of poverty once it has taken hold. An effective social security system which provides an adequate standard of living and treats claimants with dignity and respect has a vital role to play in the reduction and prevention of poverty for both women and men.

4.1 Recommendations:

There is much overlap between these recommendations and the recommendations for an anti-poverty strategy and it is important that they are not looked at in isolation from each other. Many of these recommendations could fall under the umbrella of an Anti-Poverty Act which is a recommendation for the Anti-Poverty Strategy: “to commit the Northern Ireland Executive to the UN Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and to other human rights standards on work and social security.” There is scope for the co-design group to consider the wider poverty recommendations for the Anti-Poverty Strategy as well as those based on evidence relating to gender in the development of additional and innovative recommendations to address poverty in Northern Ireland.

- End the five-week wait in Universal Credit or convert Advance Payments to non-repayable grants instead of loans to help avoid hardship and debt;
- Make the £20 uplift to Universal Credit introduced to help with the Covid-19 pandemic permanent and extend it to legacy benefits;
- Consider a further £20 per week increase to the child element of Universal Credit to specifically support families with children;
- Make Universal Credit eligibility conditions more flexible for lone parents given the lack of accessible, affordable childcare in Northern Ireland;
- Scrap the Benefit Cap and the two-child limit which disproportionately impacts on women and BAME families;
- Make split payments of Universal Credit the default option;
- Amend the Universal Credit Regulations so that Maternity Allowance is treated in the same way as Statutory Maternity Pay;
- Until changes are made to the wider social security system to protect people from poverty the Northern Ireland mitigations package is vitally important. Government should legislate to extend the existing welfare mitigations package for Northern Ireland and close the loopholes around the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax urgently;
- Government should strengthen the mitigations package for Northern Ireland to include new mitigations for the Universal Credit 5-week wait, to mitigate for the two-child limit and to support low-income households living in the private rented sector;

- Government should work to develop targeted mitigations to specifically help those most impacted by welfare reform including women, lone parents and disabled people as suggested by NIHRC. This could include implementing the Cost of Work Allowance, payments for low income families with young children and payments for households with disabled people;
- Ensure any underspend in the mitigations package is ring-fenced for anti-poverty work.
- Increase the funding available to the Universal Credit Contingency Fund, use it to make automatic payments to new claimants impacted by the 5-week wait and make it easier to apply to the Fund;
- Introduce a new non-taxable weekly Child Payment for all 0-4 year olds and for 5-15 year olds in receipt of free school meals which is a recommendation for the Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- Make provision for an Anti-Poverty Commission with responsibility to monitor progress on reducing poverty and income inequality, promote the reduction of poverty and income inequality and advise the Executive on matters relating to poverty including the impact of UK and Northern Ireland policies and resource use on poverty rates and levels of income inequality which is a recommendation for the Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- Remove barriers to applying for social security for transgender people including removing requirements for multiple forms of ID, improving cultural competency in Universal Credit staff ensuring that transphobic discrimination and mental health issues are accounted for in their ability to get a job;
- Improve financial support for carers by increasing the level of Carer's Allowance and including a Covid-19 supplement of £20 a week to match the rise in Universal Credit.
- Increase the level of Child Benefit per child per week to help poorer families stay out of poverty and reflect the additional costs facing parents;
- Government should be more proactive in informing claimants about the help that is available through mitigations/other sources of financial help so that people do not miss out on help that is available and which they are rightfully entitled to;
- There is a need for long-term investment in social housing ensuring quick access to alternative accommodation in cases of domestic/sexual violence and homo/trans phobia especially in rural areas;
- Increase the Local Housing Allowance rate to help address the shortfall that many private renters experience between their rent and the amount of Housing Benefit they receive.
- Bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK by providing free period products in all schools as a priority. Government should then work to extend the free provision of period products to anyone who needs them as is the case in Scotland;
- Work in partnership with people with lived experience of the social security system to ensure that debt deductions from benefits are not pushing people into hardship and destitution;
- Increase the funding available for the Discretionary Support scheme, widen the eligibility criteria, make more payments as grants rather than loans and make it easier to apply;
- Government should work with charities, financial institutions and other investors to introduce or underwrite the development of schemes to provide low or no interest loans to help those on the lowest incomes access affordable credit;

- Government should work with stakeholders to develop a package of protections for those negatively affected by Covid-19 which allows them a safe route out of debt including allowing for repayments to be made at an affordable level without increasing their debts;
- Government should establish a central fund to enable grants to be paid to households negatively impacted by Covid-19 to address arrears and debts accumulated to pay for essential costs during the crisis where realistic chances of repayment may not exist;
- Funding for independent advice services that provide advice and guidance in relation to social security, money and debt should be increased and provided on a longer-term basis. This should include specific funding for community level information, advice and advocacy work that reaches out to those who are the most vulnerable and marginalised;
- There is a need for an investment in poverty data for Northern Ireland disaggregated by gender and across all the Section 75 groups to allow for analysis of impact and intersectionality. This would help to ensure that targeted and measurable actions can be taken to reduce poverty in the long term;
- Poverty data should be published at the individual level as well as the household level to take account of power imbalances within couple households;
- Poverty data for Northern Ireland should include measurements of food insecurity, persistent poverty, severe poverty and destitution disaggregated by gender and across all the Section 75 groups so that particularly vulnerable groups are more visible in the data;
- Produce survey data on wealth for Northern Ireland disaggregated by gender and across all the Section 75 groups; and
- Abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds policy. Short of this the NRPF condition should not be imposed on parents with dependent children under 18, pregnant or maternity stage people, disabled people and their dependants, people who have been subject to domestic abuse and pensioners.

5. Adult Social Care

Summary:

Care, paid and unpaid, is mainly provided by women. While demand for care is growing, the care workforce is chronically under-valued and has suffered from systemic under investment.

The number of men and women providing unpaid care for adults has increased by 15% for men and 21% for women (from 2000-2015). Women have a 70 per cent chance of providing care in their adult life, compared to 60 per cent for men. By the time they are 46, half of all women have been a carer (11 years before men). Lack of investment in social care means that levels of unmet need are increasing, leading to a greater reliance on unpaid carers and a further diminishing of choice about whether to care. Women's responsibility for the care of older and other dependents has limited their access to paid work and their ability to participate in public life. 2011 Census data and subsequent research has highlighted how unpaid caring can have a negative impact on a carer's financial circumstances and on their health and wellbeing.

The evidence that many carers want to work in the paid labour market is strong. Changes to social security provisions, including higher pension age entitlement and increasing welfare conditionality, means women will participate in the paid labour market for longer. But, the evidence also shows they find it hard to balance work with caring. Provision of even one formal support makes a positive difference. Evidence about the positive impact of flexible working policies on making it easier to combine paid work with unpaid care is mixed. This is because the ability to work flexibly depends on household income, the structure of the local labour market and opportunities for decent flexible work. As outlined in the Feminist Recovery Plan, existing criteria relating to flexible working disadvantages women and low paid workers. Financial and other support for unpaid carers is poor. Carer's Allowance is one of the lowest benefits in the benefit system. Since 2002, carers have been entitled to a separate assessment but the number of carers receiving support as a result of a Carer's Assessment remains low relative to the number of carers.

While COVID-19 exposed failings in the care system these were not new. The treatment of care workers during the pandemic highlighted the low status and value attached to this sector and this workforce. Direct employment in the adult social care sector represents 5 per cent of all jobs in NI, making it a critical area in terms of employment. These jobs generate between £532m and £605m in GVA. The workforce is predominantly female; wages are low and working conditions poor. The average care worker's wage is almost half the average FTE wage in NI.

There is limited opportunity for career progression in social care work – only about half of the workforce holds any relevant qualifications and there is no framework for progression. As elsewhere in the UK, there are challenges recruiting and retaining staff. There is evidence that investing in social care could generate additional jobs and be good for the economy. Analysis for the Women’s Budget Group shows that investment in care could produce 2.7 times as many jobs as the equivalent investment in construction. Investment in the social care workforce is critical to improving the quality of social care services

5.1 Recommendations:

- The term unpaid care rather than informal care should be used;
- Policies and strategies with regard to support to unpaid carers should be updated, be evidence based and properly resourced;
- A review of carers’ assessments should be conducted to establish; a) reasons for the relative low level of assessment; b) the reasons why a significant number of assessment offers are declined; c) the reasons for the variation across HSC Trusts;
- Assessment data should be gender disaggregated with regard to: offer of assessment; request for assessment; accepts and declines of assessment; services and support provided;
- Data on community and residential care should be gender disaggregated.;
- Unpaid work must be recognised in policy, and addressed through investment, including in policies on poverty. The value of Carer’s Allowance should be increased at least in line with developments in Scotland;
- The Department of Health needs to collect and collate data on unmet need. This is required to make transparent the gap between need and formal care. This is important for two reasons: those in need of care should expect that those needs be met and because it is likely that in many cases unpaid carers are filling the care gap;
- Policy measures to reduce unpaid care work are needed to redress inequalities in the provision of care. This includes investment in social care infrastructure to fund high quality care services, reduce levels of unmet need and ensure that there is a genuine choice about whether to take on unpaid care (for the carer and the recipient of care);
- There is an immediate need for increases in salaries of paid care workers. This should be linked to the professionalisation of training (within the development of a training and qualifications framework, including Higher Level Apprenticeship) for adult social care workers with opportunity for workplace progression and secure contracts for all care workers. These actions are critical to building a sustainable care system and will benefit the quality of care provided to users and the economy; and
- The concerns and fears of LGBT+ people with regard to discrimination in social care should be addressed and their needs and wishes taken account of in an informed, sensitive way.

6. Health

Summary

Health outcomes for women and men are strongly linked to deprivation and there has been little progress in addressing health inequalities. Historically life expectancy has been higher for females than males. The gender gap in life expectancy in NI is 3.7 years. However, female life expectancy has declined in the most deprived areas of some local government districts. There has also been a negative change with regard to women's Healthy Life Expectancy in the most deprived areas. Disability Free Life expectancy has changed negatively for both genders since 2012-14 with the inequality gaps widening. Data on health outcomes for Black and Minority Ethnic groups and the Travelling community in NI is very poor. The infant mortality rate in NI is the worst in the UK (4.2 deaths) and there has been no improvement since this was included as an indicator in the Programme for Government.

Department of Health data shows that women and girls are more likely than men and boys to experience mental health problems- and this is the case across the life cycle. Men are more likely to die by suicide (in 2018, 228 males died by suicide compared to 79 females). The marginalisation and discrimination faced by the transgender community impacts negatively on physical and mental health, including self-harm and attempted suicide. There is a dearth of data on the health care needs and experiences of LGBTQI+ people.

There are a number of health policies which government has committed to addressing but where there has been little/no progress. The chapter highlights concerns about the failure to develop and implement a perinatal mental health strategy, to implement the commitment to improve IVF provision and improve diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis. There has also been delays in establishing abortion services in NI which means that women's access to essential health care is restricted. Experience during the COVID-19 pandemic has provided evidence of the benefits of telemedicine for abortion provision particularly with regard to more vulnerable and marginalised populations.

6.1 Recommendations

- The RCOG has called for women's health strategies across the UK with the aim of improving health outcomes of women and girls. A Women's Health Strategy for NI should be developed and implemented. This should include recognition of the role played by the social determinants of health and be aligned to the anti-poverty strategy; address longstanding issues including perinatal mental health, endometriosis diagnosis and treatment, IVF policy and services and sexual and reproductive health;
 - There is evidence globally that men's health strategies can have a positive impact on access to services, uptake of health services and health outcomes. A Men's Health Strategy for NI should be established;
-

- The findings of the 2013 RQIA review of specialist sexual health services in NI should be implemented. There is an opportunity with the development of abortion provision, to set up an integrated sexual and reproductive health service. This would assist with meeting the CEDAW Committee recommendations on sexual and reproductive health services;
- In line with the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, women must have access to high quality abortion and post-abortion care. As a matter of priority the Department of Health must fund and establish abortion provision as required by legislation;
- A new maternity strategy must be developed which would include action on the recommendations of the RQIA review of the previous strategy and a focus on addressing inequalities;
- The financial commitment made to IVF in New Decade, New Approach should be made available and the actions to ensure three cycles of IVF are available progressed;
- Resources should be committed to improve the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence standards on endometriosis should be implemented –these were endorsed by the Department of Health in NI in October 2017. Menstrual wellbeing education should be mandatory in all schools;
- GPs need more effective and appropriate training on detecting and addressing IPV and on appropriate referral for victims. A code of practice should be developed for identifying, recording and responding to inter-personal violence across health and social care;
- There is a need for research exploring inter-personal violence against males to identify the best strategies for prevention and service provision;
- There is a need for research on the health care needs of and health outcomes for LGBTQI+ people and their experience of accessing health services, including with regard to enhancing understanding of the intersectionality of health inequalities;
- Gender affirming healthcare services should be available to all LGBTQI+ people We reiterate the need for such an approach and endorse the recommendations of that expert group regarding the rights of all LGBTQI+ people to have access to the full range of health services, including fertility services;
- The gender data gap must be addressed, including by funding more studies which focus on women’s health and responses to treatment to eliminate the gender bias evident in diagnosis, treatment and medical research. A much stronger focus on social care research is also needed given the dearth of work in this area on unmet need and experience of the care system by users and carers;
- The Race Equality Strategy (RES) refers to the Health and Social Care Board strategy to improve ethnic minority monitoring. It noted data gaps for the achievement of the RES outcomes including health indicators such as infant mortality, life expectancy and morbidity rates by ethnicity. The measures set out in the National Institute for Health and Clinical Evidence Quality Standard (QS 167)²³ introduced in 2018 in response to a need to promote health and prevent premature mortality in black and other ethnic minority groups should be adopted; and
- There is a need for systems wide data across the S.75 groups – only then can people’s multiple identities be recognised.

²³ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs167/chapter/Quality-statements>

7. Representation, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Community Cohesion

Summary:

Women in NI today remain economically, culturally and politically unequal. Women continue to struggle with dominant patriarchal values and structures in every sphere of private and public life and are underrepresented in public life and the political arena where change may be influenced and enacted. The process of social change in NI has been impacted by the NI Conflict²⁴ and Post Good Friday Agreement policy making has not improved matters for women in NI²⁵. The lack of gender parity that exists throughout Northern Irish society is a key factor hindering the development of a new shared future. Women in NI have not been afforded the opportunity to participate equally in progressing the country from a post conflict society to a peaceful society. This is having a negative impact on their social and economic development, particularly those already experiencing disadvantage. It is imperative that our region has ‘visible’ women at every decision-making space if sustainable peace is to be achieved.

At international policy level, the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction is formally recognised by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security²⁶, which affirms the particular and important role of women in peace building and in post-conflict reconstruction.

Research²⁷ has consistently highlighted the barriers to women’s willingness and ability to participate in public and political life. The lack of childcare, poverty, low levels of skills, experience and confidence, lack of flexibility, and lack of travel and transport are all significant barriers to participation.

²⁴ Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation; Dr Helen Mc Laughlin

²⁵ Review of Gender Issues in Northern Ireland, Michael Potter NIAR 510-13, 2014
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RalSe/Publications/2014/ofmdfm/1514.pdf>

²⁶ UN Security Resolution 1325 (2000) <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

²⁷ Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation; Dr Helen Mc Laughlin

It is essential that the Executive Office proactively works to increase the participation of women in public consultation. Gender neutral policy making is very common, there remains a lack of understanding that equality of opportunity is not the same thing as equality of outcome. Women have long been conspicuous in community organisations promoting peace and reconciliation and have been at the forefront of peace-building efforts. These groups need to be supported, resourced and engaged in policy making and co-design processes.

7.1 Recommendations

- The Commissioner for Public Appointments NI develops an action plan to actively encourage more women region wide to engage in public appointments process and address existing structural barriers such as; childcare, location of meetings;
- Analysis of all public appointments should be required by whoever oversees the appointments process, not just by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. This should include seeking feedback from applicants;
- The Executive and the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI take measures to address the lack of gender parity in Chair positions;
- The Executive resources training targeted at under-represented groups including those geographically under-represented;
- Ensure women's groups as well as marginalised communities that have been specifically impacted by the pandemic (i.e. trans communities, racialised groups, disabled people) are adequately represented in all departmental COVID-19 recovery efforts;
- Recognise that women need to be included in all discussions including those related to finance and economy;
- Clear guidance for public bodies on identifying barriers and implementing positive action measures;
- Support for public bodies to put in place time-bound, measurable plans for increasing the participation of women, particularly women from disadvantaged, under represented and rural communities;
- Long-term, strategic provision of training, confidence building and support for women to participate in public and political life;
- Decision-making bodies to meet in local areas and provide financial support for travel costs;
- Clear inclusive and accessible measures to facilitate rural women's participation in decision-making processes as per CEDAW;
- Consistent, mandatory support for childcare/caring, travel and other costs associated with participation in local decision-making structures, public bodies and political life;
- Adequate investment in regional transport infrastructure which takes account of rural need
- Government Departments and statutory agencies consulting apply the learning from 'Women At The Heart of Public Consultation;'
- Ensure co-design groups are gender balanced;

- Ensure co-design groups include community level representation, taking the lead from established community organisations and working with them to establish co-design procedures that work for the specific communities being engaged with;
- Government Departments apply 12 weeks as the standard best practice consulting period;
- Government Departments integrate the Strategic Guide and Toolkit: Women Peace and Security as normal practice;
- NI Executive and Assembly take account of International Standards and their findings and make the appropriate changes;
- NI Executive and Assembly resource and facilitate the women of Northern Ireland to engage as NGOs at International level to ensure the voices of women in NI are heard at International level;
- Women’s work in the NI Community Voluntary sector is valued through long term resourced employment; and
- Resourced adult Community Education which addresses systemic barriers for women
- Rebalancing of resourcing for rural women to address historic imbalance.

8. Gender-Based Violence, Misogyny and Justice

Summary:

Gender-based violence and misogyny are issues that are unfortunately deeply embedded in Northern Ireland. The gender-neutral policy-making approach that exists in Northern Ireland has prevented progress on tackling gender-based violence and misogyny and major legislative reforms are needed. As well as wide-spread justice legislation reform, more preventive measures are needed through fully resourced education and training programmes to prevent the ever-increasing levels of gender-based violence and crimes in Northern Ireland. In addition, the relationship between poverty, marginalised women and the criminal justice system needs to be examined, particularly as the majority of women incarcerated in Northern Ireland are convicted of crimes linked to poverty.

Domestic abuse is a serious issue in Northern Ireland and accounts for 19.1% of all police recorded crime²⁸. Trends have shown consistent yearly rises in reported domestic abuse incidents and crimes and this is an issue that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (see appendix 3, figures 1 and 2). Whilst anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, it is an issue that disproportionately impacts women, as statistics from the PSNI show that out of all reported domestic abuse crimes, 69% of victims were women, 31% of victims were men, and 86% of perpetrators were men. The current Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill should be welcomed. However, without adequate resourcing attached to this Bill it will not be operational nor lead to any transformative change. Provisions of support for victims need to be adequately resourced to be effective.

There are a number of worrying gaps in the bill including the lack of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; the lack of a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy; the need for stalking legislation; granting of secure tenancies for victims; providing guidelines to employers of victims of domestic abuse and statutory paid leave for victims; a non-fatal and fatal strangulation offence; funding for specialist organisations supporting victims; resources for a public awareness campaign on coercive control and other forms of domestic abuse; guarantees for victims with uncertain immigration status; mandatory recording of section 75 characteristics of victims and perpetrators and recognition of the unique forms of coercive control faced by victims of minority communities such as disabled people or LGBTQI+ people.

²⁸ PSNI (November 2020), 'Domestic Abuse Statistics 2020-21', <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2020-21/q2/domestic-abuse-bulletin-sep-20.pdf>

Sexual violence, harassment and harmful gender stereotypes are also extremely prevalent in Northern Ireland. Police recorded reports of sexual offences have also been steadily rising yet low conviction rates remain. Widespread rape myths, harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming culture act as a major barrier to victims coming forward to seek justice and are a major contributing factor to low reporting levels of sexual offences. With technological developments, current legislation is inadequate in addressing online harassment and abuse; an area of sexual violence that increased by 88.2% in August 2020 compared to August 2019. This is evidence how fast harassment levels are rapidly growing, particularly online.

These issues are all inherently gendered and disproportionately impact women and girls. Without recognising the gendered nature of these crimes, it will not be possible to transform attitudes in society that prevent crimes such as these from happening and create a culture of zero tolerance. Northern Ireland has disproportionately high levels of gender-based violence and inadequate, under-resourced, gender-neutral legislation that perpetuates these issues and fails to comply with the Istanbul Convention²⁹. Recommendations from the Gillen Review need to be implemented urgently. In addition, misogyny and trans misogyny need to be recognised as forms of hate crime in the implementation of recommendations from the Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review, as a means of tackling gender-based violence against women and girls.

As argued by the WPG, any new law in Northern Ireland, whether relating to domestic abuse, sexual offences or hate crime, are only as good as how it is understood, implemented and used.³⁰ For legislative reform to be effective, it must be supported by adequate resources so that the police and criminal justice system have the necessary information and training to properly enforce the law. In addition, adequately funded public awareness campaigns, with insights from expert groups supporting victims of these crimes, are necessary to create a culture of zero tolerance where everyone understands the law, how to use it, and the implications for breaking it.

8.1 Recommendations:

Domestic Violence and Abuse:

- Domestic abuse crimes and incidents have been steadily growing in Northern Ireland since records began in 2004/5. Domestic abuse crime accounts for 19.1% of all crime in Northern Ireland. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence and a specific strategy for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls is needed in order to comply with the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW Recommendation 35;
- Despite the introduction of new legislation, several gaps remain in the protections afforded to victims in Northern Ireland compared to other regions. Victims in Northern Ireland should have equal protections and their geographical location should not impact their recourse to justice;

²⁹ Council of Europe Istanbul Convention of Action against violence against women and girls and domestic violence: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home?>

³⁰ WPG (2020) Submission to the Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WPG-Hate-Crime-Consultation-Review-Response-30.04.20.pdf>

- Inadequate recording on the Section 75 Characteristics of both victims and perpetrators makes it impossible to adequately address the objective need of all victims in NI. Specialist support provisions are needed for women and girls, rural victims, disabled people, men, LGBTQI+ people, migrants and more;
- There needs to be a recognition that coercive control can take unique forms for various intersectional groups, particularly disabled people and LGBTQI+ people. In line with similar recommendations in the LGBTQI+ Equality Strategy, there should be the removal of the spousal veto to prevent a trans partner accessing legal gender recognition;
- For rural victims, there needs to be recognition of the additional barriers in access support or fleeing domestic and sexual abuse. As communities tend to be smaller and less anonymised than urban settings, and fleeing a domestic violence situation can have consequences such as giving up rural life or access support, or leaving a family farm business, additional support must be adequately funded in rural areas;
- Split Universal Credit payments should be made the default, rather than opt in, to ensure victims have access to financial resources and to overcome general unawareness of the split payments option;
- The granting of secure tenancies for victims of domestic abuse should be implemented in line with requirements for the Istanbul Convention, to ensure that there is appropriate funding for refuge units; that this is increased with costs of living; and that housing allocations are reviewed to ensure the needs of all survivors are met;
- Given the increasingly high levels of femicide in Northern Ireland, and the plans to launch Domestic Homicide Reviews in Northern Ireland, it is crucial that these reviews are used as a learning tool to reduce domestic homicides. Monitoring this work could also be overseen by an Independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner;
- Training and education are needed across the entire criminal justice system, and wider society, to ensure any new domestic violence legislation is operational and that a culture of intolerance towards domestic violence is created;
- Addressing gender-based violence in all forms requires funding more than just education and public awareness campaigns. This needs to include robust statutory funding for support services for groups such as Rape Crisis, Women's Aid Federation NI, Men's Advisory Project, HErE NI/The Rainbow Project etc. as many of these groups currently rely on third party funding which is not sustainable, nor does it enable these organisations to provide full services to match other jurisdictions; and
- Adequate resourcing is needed to ensure meaningful change, and there must be robust oversight of the application of any new legislation relating to domestic abuse to ensure it is working properly. An independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner could oversee the implementation of this legislation and the identification of remaining gaps.

Sexual Violence, Harassment and Rape Culture:

- None of the recommendations contained in the Gillen Review Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland that require legislation have been brought into place. A timetable to implement all recommendations from the review should be published urgently;
- Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) needs to be standardised across all schools to ensure topics are dealt with appropriately and inclusively to ensure it provides the necessary information and skills for vulnerable demographics. This needs to be in line with CEDAW Recommendation 35 to inform individuals on consent, sexual harassment, victim-blaming and dismantling beliefs that women and girls are responsible for their own safety from sexual harassment and assault. RSE must also be actively pro-LGBTQI+ inclusive; be delivered in an age-appropriate manner from primary school age onwards and be developed in collaboration with civil society groups with expertise in these areas. RSE will be explored further in section 9;
- An adequately funded public awareness campaign on tackling victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture, as recommended in the Gillen Review, needs to be co-designed with community organisations working in this area and rolled out as a matter of urgency;
- Barriers to reporting sexual harassment and inadequacy in tackling growing online harassment needs to be addressed through robust legislation. This needs to include greater consequences for perpetrators and provisions to tackle issues such as image based sexual assault;
- Adequate funding and resourcing should also be made available to support groups such as the Raise Your Voice campaign works on tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence in Northern Ireland through work directly with the community, increasing public awareness, educating organisations on best practice and lobbying for legislative advances in this area; and
- An All-Party Working Group on Misogyny should be established.

Hate Crime:

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK without specific hate crime legislation and the recommendations from the Hate Crime Review, alongside recommendations from the women's sector and LGBTQI+ sector, should be implemented as a matter of urgency;
- Misogyny is deeply embedded in Northern Ireland and both misogyny and trans misogyny should be recognised as specific forms of hate crime. Research shows that gender is the most common cause of hate crimes towards women in the UK. In the extension of protected characteristics to include gender, there must be very specific recognition of the role power dynamics play in hate crime, and the fact that hate crime exists to reinforce those power dynamics;
- In addition to the recognition of misogynistic hate crimes and the inclusion of gender as a protected characteristic, there must be the inclusion of the specific inclusion of transgender identity as a protected characteristic or transphobia as a category of hate crime;
- Nottinghamshire Police became the first police district to introduce misogynistic hate crime recording, and this should be introduced in Northern Ireland;

- With the introduction of new legislation, adequate funding for training and awareness raising is essential to tackle the normalisation of misogyny, to make people aware of the law and the consequences for breaking it, and to ensure people know what hate crime actually means;
- Any new form of hate crime legislation must include provisions for tackling the rapidly increasing levels of online misogynistic abuse towards women; and
- Intersectionality must be recognised at the core of hate crime legislation to better understand the experiences of hate crime victims, and to ensure specialised support provisions are in place. This will enable instances of transmisogyny, for example, to be recognised and appropriately addressed.

Victim Blaming, Stereotypes and Media Representation:

- Ensuring Violence Against Women and Girls is being reported on in a responsible manner across media platforms to discourage victim-blaming and rape myths is a requirement laid out in Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention;
- Recommendations from Raise Your Voice on IPSO guidelines for the reporting on sexual violence and Women's Aid 'Responsible Reporting Matters' for reporting on Domestic Abuse should be implemented through legislation;
- The vilification of trans people in the media, in particular targeted at trans women, must be tackled through the strengthening of incitement to hatred legislation. Consideration should be given to a review of LGBTQI+ representation in the media; and
- In line with CEDAW Recommendation 35, the NI Executive should take measures to address the harms of gender stereotypes.

Racial Justice:

- There have been 3,500 racist hate crimes reported to the police within five years. Racist hate crimes have been steadily growing and have outnumbered sectarian hate crimes for the past four years. Issues with low levels of reporting, and extremely low conviction rates (half compared to other crimes), need to be urgently addressed;
- The fines against protesters at the Black Lives Matter protests should be dropped;
- The human rights violations within direct provision centres, including specific issues of violence against women, need to be urgently investigated. The industrialisation of immigration detention centres needs to end and all asylum seekers should have the right to seek asylum under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, rather than being housed within a police station;
- A Racial Equality Strategy should be developed and implemented as a matter of priority in line with commitments in New Decade, New Approach; and
- LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are routinely required to justify or prove their sexuality and gender identity to the Home Office in order to qualify for asylum. This is tantamount to cruel and inhumane treatment and there should be a Westminster review treatment of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers alongside the implementation of measures to protect asylum seekers from this in Northern Ireland.

Justice System - Incarceration, Poverty, Sentencing and Processes:

- Whilst the vast majority of prisoners in Northern Ireland are men, the number of men imprisoned has been decreasing while the number of women prisoners has been increasing each year since 2000;
- There is substantial evidence that supports the need for the decarceration of women based on the distinct vulnerability and gender-specific needs of women imprisoned in Northern Ireland;
- Evidence shows that the majority of women imprisoned in Northern Ireland is in relation to mental health issues, homelessness, addiction and poverty. 57% of women sent to prison are awaiting trial and are sent to prison as there are no alternative resourced forms of support;
- Prison is being used in the absence of social and community care for vulnerable women, and the Department of Justice plans to further develop new estate strategies for imprisoning women should be focusing on inconsistencies in increasing levels of women prisoners and gaps in community care, rather than increasing prison capacity; and
- The Department of Justice should monitor all aspects of the criminal justice system by gender and other identities and ensure that there is better understanding of how mental health, poverty and vulnerability impacts the likelihood of women coming in contact with the justice system.

Post-Conflict Justice, Transitional Justice and Historical Abuse:

- Women's International Human Rights Mechanisms, such as CEDAW and UNSCR 1325, need to be incorporated into domestic law in Northern Ireland;
- The harm women and children faced through historical abuse in institutions such as the Magdalene laundries needs to be urgently addressed through inquiries, unsealing of records and other mechanisms; and
- The 'Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past' should be incorporated gendered principles to transitional justice should be applied in Northern Ireland legislation and to the Stormont House Agreement.³¹

³¹ Legacy Gender Integration Group (2015), 'Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past': https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/66285/Gender-Principle-Report-Sept-2015_Final-Version.pdf

Review of Court Systems:

- Introduce a full review of court systems in Northern Ireland;
- Implement training across all levels of the court and for juries (as recommended by the Gillen review) on how domestic abuse and sexual abuse presents, on harmful myths and internalised beliefs;
- Make it a requirement that there are separate rooms for victims of domestic abuse and their families, so they do not have to interact with perpetrators. Other special measures can be put in place (for example, video links) within courts and victims must be made aware of these measures in advance and they must be put in place;
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) still have not been introduced in Northern Ireland, despite this being recommended by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. IDVAs must be introduced as a matter of urgency and this must recognise the need for specialist support; and
- Ensure that victims are kept up to date on court proceedings and procedures. IDVAs could assist with this.

9. Education, Training and Changing Culture

Summary:

The right to education³² is one of the most important means to achieve gender equality. Education and training need to be delivered over the course of a lifetime, adapting to changing life circumstances and reflecting needs at the time. Education is an area that is widely acknowledged to be central to tackling poverty and inequality. Low educational attainment correlates highly with socio-economic deprivation. People with no or low qualifications are at a much higher risk of unemployment, low pay, poor conditions and poor mental health.³³

As a region if we are to comply with CEDAW Article 10³⁴ much needs to improve. Key educational inequalities in NI include:

- Bullying
- Attainment Levels and
- Evidence Gaps

There is a clear issue of gender stereotyping; a lack of women in STEM and the proportion of apprenticeship options available into traditionally better paid career areas are those that favour male stereotyped careers and which currently do not attract female participation.

Barriers to education such as: lack of flexible, affordable accessible childcare, poverty, travel and transport, health and wellbeing and digital inclusion; must be addressed, particularly for those over 25 years.

The role and importance of community based education must be resourced and recognised; particularly in relation to how at its best (using the WCCF Model) it seeks to address the barriers to participants and offer ongoing, holistic support.

³² Human Rights Act Protocol 1, Article 2 protects your right to an effective education

³³ 'No-one Left Behind'; (2015) Heenan-Anderson Commission Report

³⁴ CEDAW Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training

To live in a society where misogyny is recognised and challenged we need to begin with a clear, comprehensive Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) programme which begins at Early Years and is delivered to students in an age appropriate way throughout their school years. Gender should be a protected category in Hate Crime Legislation.

9.1 Recommendations:

- Bullying strategy; including staff training, to take account of the specific experiences of Trans, LGB and SEN students in order to eradicate these experiences for students;
- Develop robust data sets for all equality groups;
- Recognition that the addressing poverty is most likely to make the most significant impact on attainment outcomes for all;
- Gender stereotyping recognised and an education strategy implemented from Early Years
- Abide by CEDAW recommendations to;

- Strengthen efforts to encourage girls to pursue non-traditional subjects and take coordinated measures to encourage girls to take up courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;

- Recognition of the business case for gender equality in STEM;
- Create targets for apprenticeships to ensure a gender balance. These need to be short, medium and long term to allow for education on gender stereotyping to take effect;
- Gender stereotyping recognised and an education strategy implemented from Early Years
- Abide by CEDAW recommendations to:

- Strengthen efforts to encourage girls to pursue non-traditional subjects and take coordinated measures to encourage girls to take up courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;

- Recognition of the business case for gender equality in STEM;
- Create targets for apprenticeships to ensure a gender balance. These need to be short, medium and long term to allow for education on gender stereotyping to take effect;
- Develop education policies that recognise the barriers to inclusion and seek to address them;
- Urgently address digital poverty and the impact of educational needs of families across all of Northern Ireland; including access to free internet and technology;
- Dedicated budget and targets for adult community education; including for non-accredited training;

- Resourcing to address the disproportionate cuts to the women’s sector community adult education;
- Ensure regional balanced resourcing;
- Resource and develop the WCCF Model regionally;
- RSE in NI needs evaluation to assess impact for students;
- An expert panel to direct future RSE such as that established in Wales would be beneficial;
- RSE in NI needs to be fit for purpose and inclusive of the experiences of all young people; engage students, parents and community. It should take account of CEDAW Recommendations³⁵ 41 (c) to: Take measures to introduce mandatory age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive rights in school curricula, including issues such as gender relations and responsible sexual behaviour, throughout the State party;
- RSE is delivered in schools by trained professionals, not teachers; with the support of schools, parents and students; and
- Parents have a critical role in RSE and require adequate support to assist their children effectively

³⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Concluding observations on the eight periodic report of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, March 2019

10. Environment and Climate Change

Summary

The environment is central to the way we live our lives, acting as not only our home but providing everything that keeps us alive from the food we eat, the water we drink to the air we breathe. It is therefore crucial that we care for the environment and use the resources it provides in a sustainable way to safeguard it for future generations.

The current economic model has damaged the environment and the long-term effects of this will be felt for many generations to come. Concern for the environment has led to calls for global Government action on environmental issues. Many of these Government proposals contain broad goals to reduce carbon emissions and create new jobs in green energy sectors. Concerns for the environment are also high on the public agenda with climate change the biggest environmental concern for households in Northern Ireland.

The 'green economy' has the potential to provide better, more decent jobs. However, there are concerns that women may not have the same access to these jobs as they are mostly located in male-dominated sectors and because women often lack the necessary training and experience to apply for them. In greening the economy there is a need to acknowledge existing gender inequalities to ensure that women and men can benefit equally from the opportunities provided by the green economy.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has put a focus on the need to value care work and resulted in proposals for a more 'caring economy' which prioritises care for each other and for the environment in which we live. Research has shown that investments in the care economy create twice as many jobs as investment in construction and promote gender equality. Added to this the fact that the care industry is less polluting than the construction industry which makes these types of investments economically, environmentally and equality sound.

Rural women are often disproportionately impacted by environmental issues and climate change and while rural women play an important role in rural businesses and the rural economy in Northern Ireland they continue to be underrepresented in rural programmes and policies. There are opportunities to make positive changes to the lives of rural women by actively engaging them in decision making processes which can benefit their lives and the wider environmental and sustainability agenda.

10.1 Recommendations:

- Co-design social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account. This should include transport which is one of the biggest contributors to climate change, taking into account inadequate rural public transport in Northern Ireland and the fact that women are more likely to rely on public transport;
- Conduct a skills-needs analysis to establish the skills required by men and women to equally participate and benefit from opportunities created in the green economy. The information should be used to create targeted green skills development and training initiatives for both men and women;
- Provide subsidies and other incentives, including paid education leave, to support women, particularly low-income and BAME women, in accessing training and development programmes in high-skilled work in any new green economy;
- Ensure funding and resource allocation prioritises programs that train women and girls for non-traditional roles to enable them to make the transition into male-dominated occupations in the green economy;
- Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland are paid at a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised;
- Put in place accountability procedures to ensure all relevant stakeholders are held accountable for operating in a gender-responsive manner to achieve gender equality outcomes in the green economy. This can be done through gender responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that measures to advance gender equality in the green economy are having the desired impact;
- Invest in gender-disaggregated data which is critical for understanding the constraints affecting women and men's equal representation and participation in green job sectors;
- Broaden definitions of 'green jobs' beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high recompense sector;
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy;
- Recognise the dual-benefit of job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are mostly done by women;
- Actively encourage and incentivise care leave and caring responsibilities being undertaken by men;
- Promote economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through a Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government;
- Ensure the equal participation of rural women and girls in policy making processes on disaster mitigation and climate change;
- Ensure rural women are a target group in the development and delivery of a new Rural Development Programme for NI;
- Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing all Section 75 characteristics; and
- Reallocate spending according to equality, wellbeing and sustainability objectives, for example, from polluting industries to green industries.

11. Conclusion:

This executive summary provides an overview of the thematic areas of research and subsequent recommendations from the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel. The Expert Advisory Panel members would like to stress these recommendations are not exhaustive, and the co-design group can certainly expand on a range of these recommendations when developing an action plan for the Gender Equality Strategy. This executive summary gives an indication of some of the priority recommendations for each thematic area, and as the co-design group may wish to expand on the recommendations of this report, they may be able to identify further urgent priority recommendations to be implemented.

The data and evidence analysis that led to these recommendations can be viewed in the full report created by the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel. The length of the full report is indicative of how pervasive gender inequality is in Northern Ireland, and the harm of decades of producing gender-neutral policy making.

The Expert Advisory Panel has also given some recommendations for the duration of this Gender Equality Strategy, and how this should be monitored and enforced. Again, the co-design group may wish to expand on this with a more detailed action plan for enforcement.

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