

Gender Inequality in Northern Ireland: Where are we in 2020?

In 2020, Northern Ireland has vast gender inequality across all aspects of society. Despite this, gender-neutral policy making is still the standard in all budgetary, policy and legislative decision making across Northern Ireland. It is essential that gender equality is embedded at the core of all levels of government and decision making across the public and private sectors of Northern Ireland.

This report will highlight the extent of gender inequality across several pillars which will reflect both the diversity and issues of women in Northern Ireland; including age, socio economic background, life experience, sexual orientation, disability, racial or ethnic background and political or religious belief.

1. Economic Pillar:

Women's Employment, Austerity, Poverty and the Gender Pay Gap

Women's employment in Northern Ireland is characterised by gender segregated labour-markets, gender gaps in pay, higher levels of part-time work and a high concentration in low paying and precarious sectors such as caring, cleaning and the service/hospitality industry. The interruption of women's employment for unpaid care work continues to significantly undermine women's career progression and lifetime earnings, including pension provision.

Systemic issues often see women twice as dependent on social security as men with welfare reform and the wider austerity agenda having a disproportionate impact on women's access to resources, security and safety.

- In employment, only **30%** of women are **self-employed**. Women represent **82%** of all **part-time workers** and 52% of women are unemployed¹.
- On average more than a fifth of complaints of discrimination received by the Equality Commission are about **sex discrimination**; of these **21.5%** are to do with **pregnancy or maternity**².
- Having one or more children reduces women's likelihood of being in a permanent full time job by almost one third, with only **45%** of women with **dependent children** working in a permanent **full time job**. By the age of 42, mothers who are in full-time work **earn 11% less** than full-time women without children³.
- Only **7%** of disabled people are in **employment** and **disabled** women earn **22.1% less** than able-bodied men, and 11.8% less than disabled men⁴.
- Women are more likely than men to be forced out of the labour market by **unpaid, domestic work** or **caring responsibilities**; **69%** of carers in Northern Ireland are women.
- Women have **70%** chance of providing **care** in their adult life; compared to 60% for men. By the time they are 46, **half of all women** have been a carer (11 years before men)⁵.
- It is estimated that **austerity** since 2010 will have cost **women** a total of **£79bn**, against £13bn for men. It shows that, by 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts, compared with **86% for women**⁶.
- The group with the highest poverty throughout the last decade and worst impacted by welfare reform have been **lone parents**⁷ in Northern Ireland; of which **91% are women**⁸.
- Hunger and **foodbank** use disproportionately impacts women, as women are twice as likely to be food insecure as men and **single mothers** are a third of all food bank users⁹.
- **Disabled single mothers** are losing out the most from these tax and benefit changes since 2010. By 2021, they will have **lost 21%** of their net **income** if they do not have a disabled child and 32% if they do have a disabled child too. One third of this loss is due to a shift to **Universal Credit**¹⁰.

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK without a government-funded **Childcare** Provision. **Lone parents** and families with a **disabled child** are less likely to be able to afford formal childcare and face further barriers to employment¹¹
- **Rural** women suffer further due to the centralisation of services and access poverty; only **1.3%** of government funding for women's groups goes towards rural women¹².

2. Social Justice Pillar:

Violence against Women, Education and Training

Despite startling statistics in Northern Ireland, domestic and sexual violence continue to be under-reported and prosecutions remain low and, as noted by CEDAW, Domestic Abuse Legislation remains inadequate.

- In 2018-19 the PSNI recorded **31,682 domestic abuse incidents**, this increased **10%** on the previous year and is the highest level in 15 years. There were **16,182** recorded **domestic abuse crimes**.
- On average the PSNI responded to a **domestic abuse** incident every 17 minutes, while domestic abuse accounted for **16% of all crime**.
- In the same period the PSNI recorded **2,423 sexual offences** and **1,023 reports of rape**¹³.
- Northern Ireland was identified as having the **joint highest levels of femicide** in Europe in 2017, with 8 women murdered in a homicide with a domestic motivation¹⁴. In 2018-19 the PSNI recorded 4 murders with a domestic motivation, all of those **murdered** were **women**.

In addition, the extent to which women feel prepared to participate in education and training depends on a number of factors including childcare, transport and cost. Women's organisations offer community education which attempts to address these barriers particularly for women from disadvantaged and rural areas. Women need access to education and training to make the move from benefits to work, yet the Government are not supporting this. CEDAW has set out a number of recommendations to address gender inequality through education and training including:

- Strengthen efforts to encourage girls to pursue **non-traditional subjects** and take coordinated measures to encourage girls to take up courses in STEM subjects;
- Continue to implement the recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee contained in the report of October 2018 on **sexual harassment of women and girls in public places**;
- 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 UK;
- Promote human rights education in schools which includes a focus on the **empowerment of girls** and the Convention.

3. Cultural Pillar:

Politics, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Decision-Making

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement committed to increasing women's representation in public and political life, yet women remain under-represented in all spheres of political life, at Westminster, in the Stormont Assembly and in local government, as well as in public life, peacebuilding and economic decision-making. In almost every aspect of society, women are underrepresented in positions of power and decision making and overrepresented in low-paying and part time work. Even in sectors

where women are the majority of the workforce, such as Teaching or the Health and Social Care sector, men still dominate the senior positions within these professions.

- In NI politics, women represent **37%** of **Lord Mayors**, **26%** of **Local Councillors**, **33%** of **MLAs** and just **22%** of **MPs**¹⁵.
- In Public Appointments, women represent **28%** of **Chairs** and **42%** of all **Public Appointments**¹⁶.
- Women represent **0%** of **Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justices of Appeal**, just **25%** of **High Court Judges** and **33%** of **County Court Judges**¹⁷.
- In the PSNI, **zero women** hold the position of **Chief or Deputy Chief Constable** and only **20%** are **Assistant Chief Constables**. Women represent **30%** of **police officers** and **58%** of **all PSNI staff**¹⁸.
- In the Civil Service, women represent **33%** of **Permanent Secretaries**; **38%** of **Senior Civil Servants** and **50%** of the **total NICS workforce**¹⁹.
- In the Education Sector, women represent **27%** of **University Chancellors** or Pro/Deputy Vice Chancellors, **29%** of **FE College Principals** and **60%** of **School Principals**; despite **77%** of **all teachers** being women²⁰.
- In the Health and Social Care Sector, women make up **79%** of **all staff** but just **20%** of **Trust Chairs** and **20%** of **Trust CEOs**²¹.
- In Local Government, women are **42%** of **all employees** but just **27%** of **Council CEOs**²².

4. Equality Pillar:

Rights at Risk and Rights in Sight

Many of the rights women enjoy today are derived from our membership of the EU over the past four decades; particularly in areas of economic activity and employment law²³. Given the statistics outlined above, it is necessary that these hard-fought rights currently at risk are protected *and* enhanced. Some of the rights achieved through EU membership include **equality** between men and women²⁴, the right to **equal pay** for equal work²⁵, protection against **discrimination** on the ground of **pregnancy** and **maternity**²⁶, creating measures to provide specific advantages to the **underrepresented gender**²⁷, prohibition of discriminations on the **grounds of sex**²⁸ and the introduction of **paid holidays**²⁹. Worryingly, no guarantees have been made to protect, or enhance, these rights. Further rights at risk include:

- The **removal** of the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** from all applications in UK law and judiciary systems. Whilst the UK government would still be required to abide by the **European Convention of Human Rights** (ECHR), the removal of the EU Charter is deeply worrying as it has a much broader level of protection for human rights³⁰.
- Existing EU case law through the **Court of Justice of the European Union** can now be **overturned** in future cases in UK courts and a departure from current jurisprudence may lead to a divergence on human rights standards on either side of the border in NI.
- The EU human rights framework is much more robust than the **UK Human Rights Act**, however, the **removal** of both the **Human Rights Act** and the **EU Charter** will make it much more difficult for people to access their rights through the courts, as the **ECHR** is nowhere near as broad or strong as a standalone human rights framework.

When looking through the context of the recently reformed Northern Ireland Assembly, there are several commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach'³¹ (NDNA) deal that relate to women's rights. These include commitments to deliver equality-based strategies on **childcare**; **anti-poverty**; **gender**; **disability**; **sexual orientation** and more. Further commitments have been made to address

the **Gillen Review**³², to increase funded cycles of **IVF treatment**, and to extend **Welfare Reform mitigations** beyond March 2020. However, the NDNA deal does not mention women or many of the issues outlined above. Further rights that need to be addressed through the Northern Ireland Assembly include:

- Domestic violence and coercive control legislation that is fit for purpose;
- Tackling gender pay gaps and discrimination;
- Scrapping the Universal Credit Two-Child Limit;
- Addressing the historic underinvestment in rural women;
- Rectifying the under-representation of women in politics, public life and decision-making;
- Tackling the rise of misogyny as a hate crime, particularly towards trans women, BME women and disabled women;
- Standardising RSE and tackling rape culture;
- Fully supporting and financing perinatal mental health services and much more.

Conclusion:

The statistics presented verify that gender inequality is prevalent in all aspects of society in Northern Ireland; including the public and private sectors. To address the structural barriers that women face, gender equality needs to be embedded at the core of all policy, legislative and budgetary decision making. Despite existing legislation banning discrimination against women, and recommendations from international bodies such as CEDAW to address such issues, wide-spread discrimination and structurally supported barriers still exist for women. With all factors considered, it is necessary to not only protect existing human rights protections for women, but to enhance them and totally reform decision-making and power structures in Northern Ireland. For decades, legislation in Northern Ireland has not been considered through a gender budgeting lens and women have suffered disproportionately as a result. Further gaps in legislation, alongside inadequate funding provisions and absent, insufficient or outdated strategies, have negatively impacted the lives of women in Northern Ireland. The women of Northern Ireland have created a roadmap on how to address these issues [here](#).

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² Equality Commission Northern Ireland, (2019), 'Pregnancy and maternity discrimination remains an issue for working mothers', <https://www.equalityni.org/Blog/Articles/August-2019/Pregnancy-and-maternity-discrimination-remains-an>

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⁴ UK Women's Budget Group, (2018), 'Disabled Women and Austerity', <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-women-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

⁵ Carers UK (2019), 'Will I care? The likelihood of being a carer in adult life': http://www.carersuk.org/images/News_campaigns/CarersRightsDay_Nov19_FINAL.pdf

⁶ Keen, R., Cracknell, R. (2017), 'Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes', Commons Briefing Papers SN06758, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>

⁷ UK Women's Budget Group, (2016), 'A cumulative gender impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies', https://wbg.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/11/De_HenauReed_WBG_GIAtaxben_briefing_2016_03_06.pdf

⁸ Women's Regional Consortium, (2019), 'Impact of Ongoing Austerity: Women's Perspectives', <http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/Impact%20of%20Ongoing%20Austerity%20Women%27s%20Perspectives.pdf>

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- ¹² Women's Policy Group NI, (2019), 'Women's Manifesto: General Election 2019', <http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/Women%27sManifesto2019.pdf>
- ¹³ PSNI, (2019), 'Domestic Abuse Incidents', <https://www.psnipolice.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/>
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- ²⁴ The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- ²⁵ Article 119 Treaty establishing the European Economic Community
- ²⁶ *ibid*2
- ²⁷ *ibid*24
- ²⁸ *ibid* 24 (Article 21)
- ²⁹ According to the NIRWN, Rural Voices Report (2018, p.30): 'Many of the two million workers who had no paid holiday before the Working Time Directive, were part-time working women': <https://www.nirwn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NIRWN-Rural-Voices-Research-Report-March-2018.pdf>
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