

Women's Policy Group NI

£76m of Emergency Funding for Domestic Violence and Sexual Health - Exclusion of Northern Ireland

28th May 2020

We are writing to you on behalf of the membership of the [Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) to ask for your urgent support in gaining emergency funding from Westminster for domestic violence and sexual health support groups in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Policy Group NI (WPG) is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBT+ organisations, support service providers, NGOs, human rights and equality organisations and individuals. Over the years, this important network has ensured there is good communication between politicians, ministers, policy makers and women's organisations on the ground. The WPG represents all women of Northern Ireland and we use our group expertise to lobby to influence the development and implementation of policies affecting women.

As you will be aware, it was announced at the beginning of May that Westminster created a £76 million package of extra emergency funding for domestic violence and sexual abuse support groups in England and Wales. UK Communities Secretary Robert Kenrick acknowledged that the COVID-19 lockdown made it increasingly difficult for domestic violence victims to seek help and committed to this financial package. This £76 million package is funded through the £750 million emergency funding for charities announced on 8th April.

The Department of Finance confirmed that the Treasury would not allow it to draw down any of the extra cash, despite pleas for help on behalf of local domestic violence and sexual health groups. The Treasury has rationalised the decision to exclude Northern Ireland from the emergency funding to protect victims by stating that that the Executive has already received a Barnett Consequential allocation from the emergency funding announced on 8th April; and should therefore not receive additional money.

Support for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse should be allocated based on need. Additional support should from Westminster should be made available to victims in Northern Ireland regardless of the Barnett consequential allocation for emergency charity funding announced on 8th April. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Northern Ireland has seen a drastic surge in the reported incidents of domestic and sexual abuse. In 2019, NI had the highest levels of reported domestic violence on record and had the joint-highest levels of femicide in Europe. In the months since lockdown began, reported domestic violence incidents have surged and four women have been murdered by their partners, this is a higher domestic violence death rate than all in of 2019. In addition to this, Northern Ireland does not currently have adequate domestic violence legislation and is not included in the upcoming Domestic Abuse Bill in Westminster. The Northern Ireland Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill is not expected to be in place until the end of 2020.

The UK government has a duty to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence under the Istanbul Convention; this duty includes protecting women living in Northern Ireland. As abusers continue to take advantage of social distancing and the government implemented lockdown, domestic violence and sexual abuse will continue to rise. In the aftermath of COVID-19, significant additional support will be needed to address the trauma victims have faced during lockdown. We are in unprecedented times, and it is not appropriate to use the Barnett Consequential as a reason to deny much-needed additional support for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland.

We are asking the Executive Office to support the Women's Policy Group NI in our call to ask Secretary Robert Kenrick and the UK Treasury to urgently allocate additional emergency funding package to domestic violence and sexual health support groups in Northern Ireland. Further, we want the Executive to confirm:

- What proportion of the previous Barnett Consequential allocation of emergency funding for charities announced on 8th April was allocated to Northern Ireland,
- What proportion of this emergency funding has been allocated to domestic violence and sexual health support groups in Northern Ireland.

Please contact Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency rachel.powell@wrda.net to indicate your support for additional funding for domestic violence and sexual health groups and to respond to this statement.

Kind regards,

Women's Policy Group NI