



# **Women's Policy Group NI**

## **COVID-19 FEMINIST RECOVERY PLAN: Summary of Recommendations**

July 2020

### **Abstract**

This summary of the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan will cover all recommendations made to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women in NI

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**Women's**  
**Policy Group NI**

# Women's Policy Group NI - COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Summary of Recommendations

## Introduction

This paper has been created by the Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland (WPG).

The 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, migrant groups, 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, 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.

The WPG is endorsed as a voice that represents all women of Northern Ireland on a policy level. This group has collective expertise on protected characteristics and focus on identifying the intersectional needs of all women. The WPG membership is broad and has a deep understanding of how best to approach the impact COVID-19 is having on women in Northern Ireland. The impact on all protected groups will be severe, and this paper will use evidence of the disproportionate impact the pandemic is having on women to make recommendations to policy-makers.

Special thanks to the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women for their Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19, which helped to inspire this document.

*Please note, not all member organisations of the Women's Policy Group have specific policy positions on all the recommendations covered throughout this plan. Therefore, individual experts from each of the organisations below contributed to the sections that cover their own areas expertise.*

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The content of this paper is supplemented by additional WPG COVID-19 research and the WPG Women's Manifesto 2019 which was written and supported by the following organisations:

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Transgender NI  
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee  
Reclaim the Night Belfast  
Committee on the Administration of Justice  
Politics Plus  
Belfast Feminist Network  
HERE NI  
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform  
Reclaim the Agenda  
Alliance for Choice  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
Women's Support Network  
DemocraShe  
Raise Your Voice

## COVID-19 and Gender - Overview

We recognise that some issues highlighted in the full WPG Feminist Recovery Plan will be of a devolved nature for the Northern Ireland Assembly, others will be issues that require Westminster intervention. This plan is based on all of the issues impacting women and specific policy recommendations will be made to both the Northern Ireland Assembly on devolved matters and to the UK Government on UK-wide issues.

It is essential that all levels of government representing Northern Ireland are fully aware of the unique challenges in Northern Ireland; particularly as the UK government is the duty bearer for human rights in NI. Women in Northern Ireland have suffered immensely due to a decade of Austerity, and any COVID-19 recovery cannot come to the detriment of women's equality and economic well-being.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented challenge across the UK. It has put in sharp focus the value and importance of care work, paid and unpaid, and highlighted the essential nature of often precarious and almost always low paid retail work. Women undertake the majority of this work, and women will bear a particular brunt of this crisis; economically, socially and in terms of health. The WPG is calling on decision-makers across the UK to take action to ensure a gender-sensitive crisis response as we transition from crisis response to recovery.

The current crisis affects men and women differently, and in many cases deepens the inequalities women experience on an everyday basis<sup>1</sup>. These inequalities, along with key solutions, were highlighted in a Women's Manifesto issued by the WPG in preparation for the general election in December 2019<sup>2</sup>. These solutions remain central for a long-term response, but the developing crisis has put a number of issues in sharp focus for urgent emergency action.

Not only does this crisis have a disproportionate impact on women, but that impact is worsened for women from particular backgrounds: for instance, black and racialised women, disabled women, women with caring responsibilities, and LGBT women. The emergency action required, and any recovery programme put in place, must meaningfully take into consideration the institutionalised inequalities that exist within Northern Ireland, and must co-develop a roadmap forward with the communities affected.

## Relevant WPG Research and Publications

The WPG and member organisations have already published several briefings, articles, evidence submissions and reports on the unequal impact COVID-19 is having on Women in Northern Ireland. This has included:

- WPG [briefing](#) for MLAs on COVID-19 and Gender
- WPG [article](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on Women
- WPG and WBG Joint [Statement](#) to DfC on Statutory Maternity Pay, Carer's Allowance and the Two-Child Cap
- WPG [Submission](#) to the Westminster Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry on the Impact of COVID-19 on People with Protected Characteristics
- WPG Domestic Violence and Family Proceedings Bill Evidence [Submission](#) and WRDA Domestic Violence and COVID-19 [Briefing](#)
- WPG [Article](#) on COVID-19 and Gender - NICVA Insights and Impact Series
- WPG [Article](#) on Human Rights Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Just News
- Childcare for All campaign [statement](#) on COVID-19 and Childcare
- Follow-Up Childcare for All campaign [statement](#)

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<sup>1</sup> See Women's Resource and Development Agency Reports on Gender Inequality in NI in 2020 <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Gender-Inequality-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf>; Brexit and the Impact on Women in NI <https://wrda.net/2019/10/18/brexit-and-the-impact-on-women-in-northern-ireland/>; Disabled Women and Discrimination <https://wrda.net/2019/11/18/disabled-women-and-discrimination-facts-we-need-you-to-know/>; Childcare: A Women's Issue <https://www.childcareforallni.com/post/childcare-a-women-s-issue-by-rachel-powell-women-s-sector-lobbyist-at-wrda>.

<sup>2</sup> Women's Policy Group NI Election Manifesto 2019: <http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/Women%27sManifesto2019.pdf>

In addition to COVID-19 research, the WPG and member organisations have also published several submissions on gender-equality related issues in the past two years including:

- WPG Hate Crime Legislation Northern Ireland Independent Review Consultation [Response](#)
- WPG UK Government Marriage Equality Consultations Response
- WRDA [Response](#) to Department of Finance Budget Engagement
- WPG [Response](#) to A New Legal Framework for Abortion Services in NI Consultation
- Women's Regional Consortium [Report](#) - Making Ends Meet - Women's Perspectives on Access to Lending
- Women's Regional Consortium [Report](#) - Impact of Ongoing Austerity: Women's Perspectives
- Women's Regional Consortium [Report](#) - In Work Poverty
- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network - Rural Voices Research [Report](#)
- WRDA [Response](#) to Consultation on Dormant Bank Accounts in Northern Ireland
- WRDA [Report](#) - Gender Inequality in Northern Ireland: Where are we in 2020?
- Equality Coalition [Report](#) - Sectarianism: The Key Facts
- Women's Regional Consortium [Report](#): Brexit and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland
- WRDA [Report](#)- Disabled Women and Discrimination
- Human Rights Consortium [Report](#) - Brexit: Rights at Risk
- Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions [Report](#): Childcare in Northern Ireland: Care, Cost and Gender Equality
- Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions Policy Document [Report](#): Better Work Better Lives
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions: [No Going Back, a New Deal for a Safe and Secure Future for All](#)
- TUC [Report](#) - Forced Out: The Cost of Getting Childcare Wrong
- Women's Sector Lobbyist Childcare for All [Blog](#) - Childcare: A Women's Issue
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform - [Northern Ireland civil society shadow report to CEDAW](#)
- Amnesty International [Report](#) - Toxic Twitter
- Amnesty International with Women's Link Worldwide, International Planned Parenthood Federation: A [Guide](#) for Europe: Protecting the Rights of Women and Girls in times of COVID19 pandemic and its aftermath.

## 1. Economic Justice Pillar Recommendations

### 1.1 Women's Employment and Gender Pay Gap Reporting

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop a women's employment strategy which identifies the labour market issues facing women and an associated cross departmental action plan to tackle these.
- Introduce Gender Pay Gap legislation which is fit for purpose for Northern Ireland. Ensure that this is accompanied by an associated strategy, action plan and accountability measures which should be properly resourced.
- Introduce gender transparency measures to tackle inequality in men's and women's pay and pensions.
- Review flexible working legislation and make this available as a day one right for all workers.
- Make parental leave available as a day one right, introduce 10 days of paid parental leave.
- Reserve a period of paid parental leave for fathers – use it or lose it.
- Introduce a duty on employers to proactively tackle sexual harassment at work to include mandatory training for all employees including managers and HR personnel.
- The Northern Ireland Executive should recognise and promote the importance of collective bargaining and trade unions as a driver for better pay and terms and conditions as well as higher productivity.

One of the measures the European Trade Union Confederation recommends to achieve equal pay is a comprehensive Gender Pay Transparency Directive to create more openness about pay and pay inequalities. This should include measures to:

- Ban pay secrecy clauses in contracts so that workers can discuss pay,
- Require information for job evaluation for the purpose of establishing equal pay for equal work,
- Make all employers produce pay information (audits) and annual action plans on pay equality,
- Support unions to negotiate with employers to tackle the pay gap,
- Require job advertisements to include the pay scale,
- Prevent employers hiding behind privacy, data protection or administrative burden to avoid pay transparency,
- Ensure transparency for the whole pay package including benefits, bonuses, pensions, allowances etc,
- Impose sanctions on employers who do not take action.

## 1.2 Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work

**WPG recommendations to address gender segregation and the unequal distribution of care include:**

- It is essential that home carers, as well as health and social care staff, have access to appropriate advice and where required to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), to protect themselves and society at large.



- Action must be taken to acknowledge the many women who work in precarious, low-paid jobs that are unable to stay at home due to employer reluctance to furlough these workers; particularly as many of these women do not have trade union representation nor can they benefit from collective bargaining.
- In addition to this, action needs to be taken to address how difficult it is for women to complete all aspects of work from home when trying to manage their workloads, childcare and providing education from home.
- Measures should be introduced to prevent employees from being penalised.
- Monitoring gender parity in the professions of the future provides a critical opportunity to guide the emerging labour market to more equitable outcomes in the future of work.
- Urgently increase the supply and visibility of women with disruptive technical skills.
- To ensure that the professions of the future can target gender parity within the coming decade, reskilling and upskilling efforts for women interested in expanding their skills range should be focused on those already in the labour market or looking to re-enter the labour market after a period of inactivity.
- Build on existing good practice evidenced in alteration of policy on Maternity Allowance for women furloughed due to COVID-19.
- Promote conciliation measures and actions finalised to increase equal opportunities in both education and work<sup>3</sup>. Family policies, social protection systems and measures finalised to reduce gender inequalities, encouraging high education and job opportunities for women are some measures that can be taken.
- Analyse the economic value of putting money into caring may help carers get back into paid employment and thus improve their health and financial wellbeing and consequently reducing pressure on the health and benefits systems in the long-run.
- For a better, more resilient economy, it is essential that we value and recognise care work. It needs to be a valued job that is paid well, attracts investment in education and training, provides opportunities for promotion and is seen as a valued career.
- Require all workplaces to record and publish gender segregation and gender pay gap data.

**The WPG also supports the below medium-term and longer-term recommendations from the UK Women’s Budget Group<sup>4</sup>:**

- Require employers to report the numbers of people made redundant with breakdowns by gender and other protected characteristics.
- Require the reinitiation (or implementation in the NI context) of gender pay gap reporting; including reporting on pay gaps during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Do not turn to austerity measures to pay for the cost of the crisis.
- Invest in social infrastructure, including health, care and education.

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<sup>3</sup> Rosalia Castellane et. al. (2019), ‘Analyzing the gender gap in European labour markets at the NUTS-1 level’, *Cogent Social Sciences Vol 5. 2019 Iss. 1.*, (available online): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2019.1595294>

<sup>4</sup> UKWBG (May 2020), ‘Briefing from the UK Women’s Budget Group: Easing Lockdown: Potential Problems for Women’, (available online): <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf> [accessed 29.06.20].

- Design a sustainable and stable social care system so that no-one has unmet needs, free to the point of use with well paid, well trained permanent staff and funded via general taxation.
- Reform the social security system so that it protects all people, including migrants, against risk, poverty and destitution.
- Rethink work so that jobs pay a decent wage regardless of age – a true living wage for all – and reflects a shared balance between work, care and leisure for all.
- Take action to address the housing crisis by reducing rent and increasing housing support.
- Sustainably funding the women’s sector so that no woman is left in danger.
- Introduce policies to encourage sharing of care and unpaid work between women and men.

**Recommendations from Carers Week Report which we endorse include<sup>5</sup>:**

- There is a significant role for information and advice for carers, forward planning, but also better support so that people can rely on what they need.
- Whilst Governments in every nation across the UK have implemented measures to support carers, there is no doubt that there are gaps that need to be plugged to improve carers’ lives in the short term. In the longer term, the Government needs to build a better future for carers that tackles the underlying issues that they face.
- Increase awareness of the role of caring and unpaid carers - the NI Assembly should promote awareness of the important role of unpaid carers and caring, and introduce more concrete support so that value is recognised practically.
- Fund and rebuild social care and health services - the NI Assembly needs to recognise the amount of pressure the system has been under during the coronavirus outbreak, and the funding shortages that were widely recognised for many years before the crisis. There needs to be a significant increase in funding levels to allow the social services and the NHS to rebuild after the crisis, alongside bringing forward plans for long-term reform of social care. Greater investment in care will lead to a healthier and happier population that is better able to balance important aspects of their lives, including personal relationships, work and family.
- End carers’ financial hardship - Financial support for carers must be urgently improved, which would particularly benefit women who are more likely to be caring and providing higher levels of care. The UK Government and NI Assembly should immediately increase the basic level of Carer’s Allowance, and a one-off coronavirus Supplement to those entitled to Carer’s Allowance of £20 a week to match the rise in Universal Credit.
- Greater consistency is needed in connecting carers to support available to look after their own mental and physical health and wellbeing. Support for carers to take part in physical activity, for example, can be hugely beneficial in preventing them developing health problems in later life as well as reducing isolation.
- Support working carers more through employers and by Government - Employers, and the NI Assembly, should ensure that there are carer-friendly policies in place that

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<sup>5</sup> See (n38).

enable working carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work. We fully support the Government's plans to introduce an entitlement to take care leave for working carers; our preference would be for this to be paid.

- Schools, colleges and universities should be encouraged to introduce policies and programmes that support carers and improve their experience of education.

### **The WPG also supports UN recommendations to<sup>6</sup>:**

- First, immediate support for at-risk workers, enterprises, jobs and incomes, to avoid closures, job losses and income decline.
- Second, a greater focus on both health and economic activity after lockdowns ease, with workplaces that are safe, and rights for all.
- Third, mobilization now for a human-centred, green, sustainable and inclusive recovery that harnesses the potential of new technologies to create decent jobs for all, and takes advantage of the creative and positive ways companies and workers have adapted to these times.

### **We also support the following recommendations from Tax Justice UK<sup>7</sup>:**

- **No bailouts for tax dodgers** - require companies receiving large bailouts to end artificial tax avoidance arrangements and tax haven structures, publicly disclose where profits are made and who benefits, and publish their tax policy.
- **Tax companies properly** - close down loopholes, end the tax subsidies many companies enjoy, bringing in a higher effective tax rate and require the publication of corporate tax affairs.
- **Tax wealth more** - Ensure that income from wealth is taxed at least as much as income from work. Reform areas where wealth is currently under-taxed including property, inheritances, capital gains, dividends and pensions. Actively consider a wealth tax.
- **Stop undermining the tax systems of other countries** - shut down the tax loopholes and secrecy provisions that deprive other countries of revenue.
- **Enforce the rules** - clamp down on tax dodging. Properly fund HMRC and Companies House, and give them tools so that they can enforce our laws.

## 1.3 Women's Poverty and Austerity

### **Recommendations for changes in relation to social security benefits:**

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<sup>6</sup> (n7).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

- Direct payments in lieu of school meals should continue throughout the summer months and until such times as all children are fully back to school.
- Increase the level of Child Benefit to £50 per child per week to help poorer families stay out of poverty and reflect the additional costs facing parents.
- Increases in the standard allowances for Universal Credit and Tax Credits by £20 are to be welcomed but the Government should mirror these increases to households on legacy benefits also.
- As Universal Credit is one of the key benefits for those who have lost their jobs or suffered significantly reduced income a range of changes are required to help ensure it better supports people:
  - The basic levels of Universal Credit should be increased in line with real living wages indefinitely to support those who have lost their jobs.
  - At the very least Government should hold on to the increase in the standard allowance even after lockdown has ended to help people get back on their feet.
  - The five-week wait should be removed. If this does not happen then Advance Payments should be converted from loans to grants to ensure people are supported to get through the five-week wait without risking hardship or getting into debt.
  - In Northern Ireland consideration should be given to providing an automatic grant from the Universal Credit Contingency Fund for all those claiming Universal Credit for the first time, reducing the devastating impact of the five-week wait as suggested by the CliffEdge NI Coalition.<sup>8</sup>
  - Extend the suspension of benefit deductions to include Universal Credit Advance Payments.
  - Amend the Universal Credit Regulations so that Maternity Allowance is treated in the same way as Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP). This can leave women in receipt of Maternity Allowance up to £5,000 worse off over 39 weeks of maternity leave relative to women in similar circumstances in receipt of SMP.
- Scrap the two-child limit in Tax Credits and Universal Credit which would help to protect against an increase in child poverty.
  - In Northern Ireland consideration could be given to providing an additional mitigation payment for families who have children and who are impacted by the two-child limit as suggested by the CliffEdge NI Coalition.
- We commend the Department for Communities for extending the existing mitigation payments for the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax in Northern Ireland. However, the pandemic makes it clear that a review of mitigation payments is needed to ensure a strengthened safety net to prevent and alleviate child poverty and homelessness.
- The Benefit Cap mitigation should be extended to new claimants as suggested by the CliffEdge NI Coalition. The pandemic means that increasing numbers of claimants will be subject to the benefit cap as a result of losing their jobs. Extending the Benefit Cap mitigation to new claimants will ensure people can access adequate levels of financial support during this period and beyond.
- Increase the budget for Discretionary Support, remove the income ceiling, extend the eligibility criteria and make more payments as grants rather than loans.

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<sup>8</sup> The CliffEdge NI Coalition is a group of over 100 organisations from across Northern Ireland who came together to express concerns about the end of welfare reform mitigations in March 2020. The Women's Policy Group is a Coalition member.

- Continue the pause for deductions for benefit debts (without pausing deductions for child maintenance).
- Increase the level of Carer's Allowance and consider a one-off Coronavirus supplement of £20 a week to match the rise in Universal Credit as suggested by Carers UK.<sup>9</sup> This would particularly benefit women who provide higher levels of care.

## 1.4 Increasing Debt

### **Recommendations to take action to protect people from getting into problem debt as a result of the pandemic:**

- Households struggling with arrears and debt should be provided with strong protections against unaffordable repayment demands and housing insecurity. Government should extend the existing (time-limited) protections and forbearance measures on a range of credit repayments, benefit debt repayments and in housing (including mortgage holidays, increases in Local Housing Allowance rates, extending notice to quit periods, etc). This would provide a sustainable route back to normality over a manageable period for households whose incomes recover but who are left with a backlog of debt.
- Flexible terms are needed once payment holidays end to prevent a 'cliff edge' for people who have to start paying back their debts. Government should work with stakeholders to develop a package of protections for those negatively affected by Coronavirus which allows them a safe route out of difficulty including allowing for repayments to be made at an affordable level without increasing their debt or incurring poor credit ratings.
- Many people will have turned to high-cost credit to make ends meet since the crisis began. Financial support through the benefits system and through crisis payments is central to preventing crisis borrowing but the need for alternatives to high-cost credit is more pressing than ever. 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.
- Providing short-term relief on debt repayments and evictions is not enough and in many cases will simply defer arrears until a later date. We agree with StepChange who have recommended that in order to be effective in tackling the debt crisis as a result of the pandemic Government must provide financial support. Government should establish a central fund to enable grants for those households negatively impacted by Coronavirus to address arrears and debts accumulated to pay for essential costs during the crisis. The fund should be reserved for the worst affected where realistic chances of repayment may not exist.
- Reforms to Universal Credit including extending the increase to the standard allowance, ending the five-week wait, converting Advance Payments to grants instead of loans and extending the suspension of benefit deductions to include Universal Credit Advance Payments.

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<sup>9</sup> Carers Week (2020), 'Carers Week 2020 Research Report: The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak', *Making Caring Visible*, (available online): [https://www.carersuk.org/images/CarersWeek2020/CW\\_2020\\_Research\\_Report\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.carersuk.org/images/CarersWeek2020/CW_2020_Research_Report_WEB.pdf)

- In Northern Ireland existing welfare mitigations should be strengthened to include new challenges such as Universal Credit (which has seen big increases in claimants as a result of the pandemic).
- The budget for Discretionary Support should be increased, the eligibility criteria should be relaxed including the removal of the income ceiling and more payments should be made as grants instead of loans.
- Sufficient funding should be made available to debt advice agencies to not only continue with their free debt advice services but also to expand in order to meet increasing demand as a result of the pandemic.
- Government should acknowledge and support the role of community-based women-only provision in addressing women's poverty and financial vulnerability in disadvantaged and rural areas. This should include a commitment to increase and provide longer-term funding for grassroots women's organisations to enable them to continue and develop the vital services they provide to financially vulnerable women and their families in disadvantaged areas.

## 1.5 Childcare

### **Recommendations:**

- Investing adequately, based on an informed assessment of realistic needs, to deliver a high quality childcare infrastructure that is affordable for all to access, and providers to deliver.
- Work extensively with the women's sector and childcare sector in the development of a childcare strategy and childcare provision for Northern Ireland.
- Fully implementing the CEDAW recommendations, noting the particular reference to Northern Ireland where we call on the Government to introduce a fully costed Childcare Strategy, underpinned by legislation, that meets the needs of children, parents, childcare providers and benefits the local economy.
- Ensuring all parents and childcare providers are accessing the financial help they are entitled to.
- Address the gender segregation of the childcare sector through the creation of sectoral agreements to provide a mechanism to introduce a skills and wage infrastructure that could improve job quality.
- Promoting family friendly policies and practices across all sectors to reduce barriers to women accessing and progressing in the workforce<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Childcare has been identified as an issue across the world and different solutions implemented. For example in Italy, the Cura Italia economic package includes parental leave of up to 15 days paid at 50% of salary, for parents of children under 12 or children with disabilities of any age. The scheme is designed for employees in the private sector and self employed people, and the days are to be used between both parents (where relevant). Separate provision is being made for public sector workers. Parents can also request a set number of days' paid leave in each month or babysitter vouchers worth up to €600. The package also includes a €5 million ring fenced element for female entrepreneurship in a fund for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In Belgium, paid part time parental leave schemes have been introduced

## 1.6 Rural Women

### **Recommendations:**

- Proposed budgets, PfG and policy recovery plans take account of rural needs.
- Historic underinvestment in rural women is recognised and efforts made to redress when future resourcing is being planned.
- Recognition that all Government Departments have a responsibility to deliver for rural women, not only DAERA.
  
- Rural women are engaged in future rural development policy planning and development.
- Rural women have dedicated rural development resourcing that takes account of gender differentials and Covid-19 impacts.
- NI continues post Brexit to learn from EU policy development and innovation in order to replicate what is advantageous to NI.
- NI Executive work quickly on ensuring we have a future Rural Development policy that supports vibrant, gender equal, rural communities.
  
- Government to view organisations in this sector in a similar light to private and public businesses and employees, providing financial support to sustain their viability.
  
- Resourcing and support for rural community capacity building to aid Covid-19 recovery and sustainability.
  
- Rural business support initiatives are required.
- Rural childcare solutions need to be created to support rural women business owners and workers as we move forward.
- Increase rural women's participation in the digital economy, including digital marketing and digital trade.
- Increase digital identification for rural SMEs to allow innovative ways of securing collateral and credit histories.
- This includes providing digital, virtual, and mobile-based business training, coaching, and mentoring related to economic recovery, digital marketing and communication channels, and overall digital financial literacy.

## 1.7 De-commodification of Housing

### **Recommendations:**

- By restricting home ownership to one per individual as a starting point, and engaging in a process of dismantling large housing monopolies and seizing empty/derelict buildings, as well as those where tenants are living in unsustainable conditions, we can begin ensuring that appropriate housing is available to all those that need it, and that there are no empty homes while families sleep on the streets.
- In the medium and long term, any new housing developments built should be brought under public ownership and maintained by the state, and individuals with multiple

properties who profit from rental income should give up these properties and have the tenancy transferred over to the state.

- Decommodifying the housing system in this way removes the significant rent pressures on the most vulnerable in society.
- Paying for housing and property upkeep through taxation instead of inflated and unpredictable rent requests - which often line pockets instead of going towards upkeep - will mark the beginning of a move towards a Northern Ireland where each individual and family are housed appropriately, fulfilling any accessibility requirements, and tackling the propensity for abuse through financial and housing coercion.

## 1.8 A Feminist Green Economy

**Recommendations from the WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal, which we have applied to Northern Ireland, include:**

### **1. Investment in (social) infrastructure:**

- Co-designing social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account,
- Taking the differing transport needs of women with caring responsibilities into account when creating transport plans; particularly given issues in Northern Ireland of inadequate rural public transport and the fact that women are more likely to rely on public transport.

### **2. Green Jobs:**

- 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 a new green economy,
- Provide subsidies and other incentives to those working in jobs at high risk of being replaced by automaton, particularly as women are at much higher risk of this,
- Encourage women and girls into male-dominated green sectors that are encouraged through a Northern Ireland Green New Deal.

### **3. Sharing Care:**

- Recognising the dual-benefit job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are already done in an unpaid capacity by majority women,
- Through increased investment in care jobs and the care sector, not only will women's employment and economic opportunities increase, but children from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit from increasing qualities of childcare and education,
- Broaden definitions of 'green jobs' beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high compensate sector that is increasingly neglected,
- Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland include a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised,
- Implement a 30-hour paid work week in recognition of unavoidable unpaid care,



- Actively encourage and incentivise care leave and caring responsibilities being undertaken by men,
- Establish a Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services to ensure minimum living standards and recognise and remunerate the £4.6 billion unpaid carers contribute to Northern Ireland each year,
- Balance recommendations for greater food self-reliance with recognition of the gendered, unpaid and low-paid labour involved in producing and providing food, particularly as Northern Ireland may be disproportionately impacted by different food standards to Great Britain post-Brexit,
- Supporting and developing sustainable small businesses that reduce domestic work through mass preparation and distribution of locally grown food.

#### **4. Democracy and Ownership:**

- Promoting 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 equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing various genders, races and classes within civil society,
- Make socio-economic equality of protected characteristics a key goal of any new green new deal framework and ensure co-design of planning and policies with the Women's Sector,
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.

#### **5. (Inter)national Responsibilities:**

UK Level:

- Ending the hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and fully remove information exchanges between public bodies (including those in Northern Ireland) and the Home Office,
- Promote fair tax policies which close tax loopholes, redistribute wealth between women and men and hold transnational corporations to account for exploitation of people and harm to the planet<sup>11</sup>,
- Introduce a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland,

Devolved:

- Protecting human rights, including sexual rights, reproductive rights, and working rights,
- Promote trade justice within supply chains and create ethical procurement guidelines in line with the above recommendations.

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<sup>11</sup> Examples provided by the WBG and WEN include a fossil fuels tax for corporations, a financial transaction tax and reforms of progressive taxation like income and corporation tax, (n83), p.3.

## 1.9 Paramilitarism, Gate Keeping and Control of Funding

### **Recommendations:**

- introduce Unexplained Wealth Orders,
- Introduce need more robust and routine checks on the bona fides of community organisations to screen out those with active involvement in ongoing paramilitary and/or criminal activity.

## 2. Health Pillar Recommendations

### 2.1 Mental Health Concerns due to COVID-19

#### **Going forward, we recommend:**

- We recommend that specific funding is allocated for appropriate, safe and rapid therapeutic services to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence.
- Improving access to culturally competent sexual health services (reducing STI/HIV anxiety),
- Decommodifying housing and ensuring quick access to alternative accommodation in cases of DV/SV/homo- + trans-phobia from housemates and family,
- Improving cultural competency within drug cessation services, safe injection rooms, etc,
- Removing crisis/mental health response from PSNI duties, developing emergency community healthcare support for mental health crisis situations,
- Reducing poverty through significant investment in welfare.

### 2.2 Health Impacts of Austerity on Women

#### **Recommendations:**

- Increase investment in social protection systems - such as unemployment programmes, housing support and income maintenance - to counter the projected recession and austerity,
- Increase investment in healthcare and public health services in the short and long-term, including adequate funding for evidence based preventative and early intervention services.

### 2.3 Abortion, Maternal Health and Bodily Autonomy

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is standardised, starts early, is relevant to pupils at each stage of their development and maturity and is taught by people who are trained and confident in talking about the course content, in line with CEDAW recommendations,
- Set up a dedicated fund specifically for organisations who offer contraception and nondirective information,

- Extend sexual and reproductive healthcare services across Northern Ireland to ensure equal access for all women, particularly those in rural areas,
- Ensure there are free, safe, legal and local abortion services accessible to all who want or need them,
- Introduce telemedicine for early medical abortions,
- Introduce safe access/buffer zones,
- Ensure there is funded assisted fertility treatment for everyone who wants or needs it, including same sex couples and single women,
- Ensure there is funded perinatal mental health provision.

## 2.4 Health Inequalities and Hostile Environment for Migrants and Racialised People

### **Recommendation:**

- Going forwards, as we recover from this pandemic, it is our belief that all NHS Charging and data-sharing with the Home Office should be suspended indefinitely and this must be accompanied by a public information campaign reassuring people that it will be safe for them to access healthcare, regardless of their immigration status.

## 2.5 Trans Healthcare

### **Recommendations:**

- Specialised gender identity services, following a human rights compliant and culturally competent service model, should be fully commissioned by the Department of Health and be available for trans and questioning people who wish to access them to explore their gender identity. This should not be a centralised service for all trans people and access to these services should not be a prerequisite to accessing gender-transition-related healthcare,
- The reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes within Gender Identity Services causes detrimental harm to trans and gender non-conforming patients, in particular those who identify outside the gender binary, and should be removed in favour of a model which affirms the gender identity of the patient and supports diverse gender expression,
- New policies, service models or reforms within the health service which will have an impact on trans communities should be developed in consultation with civil society organisations and the trans community at large,
- Any new gender affirming services should be based in the community and on a sexual health model of care,
- A review of access to mainstream healthcare services for trans patients, and adaptation of materials/advertising to recognise and include trans experiences, should be undertaken by the Department of Health.

## 2.6 Disabled Women

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that programmes and policies dealing with the elimination of exploitation, violence and abuse contain specific actions for disabled women.
- Urgently address the issue of disabled women being denied the same access to maternal health services, including sexual and reproductive health, as other women.
- Promote the employment of disabled women in all sectors, and support entrepreneurship development.
- Introduce staff education programmes, based on the social model of disability, to effect attitudinal change in all sectors; but particularly health and education sectors.
- Urgently address and reform the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application process, Universal Credit and Welfare Reform, to prevent any further discrimination against disabled women in Northern Ireland.

## 3. Social Justice Pillar Recommendations

### 3.1 Racial Justice

#### **Recommendations:**

- We call on all parties to support the urgent cancellation of all fines issued to protesters; particularly as there have been several allegations of black protesters being specifically targeted and fined.
- Immediately close the Larne Detention Centre.
- Develop a Racial Equality Strategy and incorporate accountability mechanisms into the Programme for Government to address systemic racism.
- Better and more transparent collection and reporting of ethnicity data is needed to understand the full impact of COVID-19; including reports from employers of redundancies with breakdowns of protected characteristics.
- As recommended elsewhere in this plan, immediately increase child benefit to £50 per child per week; scrap the two-child cap which can disproportionately impact BAME families across the UK; make UC advanced payments grants instead of loans.
- Scrap No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Ban exploitative zero-hour contracts and increase the real living wage to improve the working conditions of people of colour, particularly women, who are over-represented in low-paid precarious work.
- Complete and publish meaningful and comprehensive equality impact assessments of all COVID-19 policy decisions informed by intersectional data.
- Support families' access to educational resources and equipment at home to minimise the increased racial attainment gaps - including the provision of IT equipment and additional support for parents.
- Introduce quotas and shortlists to increase the levels of representation of people of colour, especially women, in public life in Northern Ireland given the non-existent representation at present.

### 3.2 Politics, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Decision Making

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure women's groups are adequately represented in all departmental COVID-19 recovery planning procedures.
- Recognise and act concretely on implementation of specific measures to realise the full spirit and intention of UNSCR 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.

- Guarantee women's participation in transitional justice mechanisms envisaged in the draft Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill. Implement special temporary measures to advance women's substantive equality.
- Ensure the women's sector is consulted with and included in the co-design of all departmental strategies and the Programme for Government.
- Utilise Section 43A of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 to improve the proportion of women elected to parliamentary institutions through gender quotas. Accelerate action to reach gender equal representation in public bodies.
- Address obstacles to participation including: intimidation and violence by paramilitary groups. As noted by the 2014 inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security, these can include;
  - Online abuse of women political and public representatives;
  - Intersectionalities which compound barriers to participation e.g. specific issues impacting BME women, disabled women, rural women, LGBT+ women, younger women, lone parents and those with childcare responsibilities;
  - The rule obliging political candidates to publish their home addresses for elections which threatens the personal safety of Domestic and Sexual Abuse survivors.

### 3.3 Digital Divide and Access Poverty

#### **Recommendations:**

- Strengthen access to high quality broadband services across Northern Ireland.
- Work with telecommunications providers to ensure access to affordable broadband services.
- Work with the women's sector to ensure women have the appropriate skills to benefit from digital services and communications technologies.
- Ensure women, including women end users, are engaged in development of digital technologies and services, including artificial intelligence and assistive technologies.

### 3.4 No Recourse to Public Funds/Immigration

#### **Recommendations:**

- The NRPF policy must be suspended in light of the coronavirus pandemic and the economic downturn faced as we move out of lockdown.
- Long term, the policy must be abolished in order to ensure that those who have worked and contributed taxes and the most vulnerable in our society can access the support they need to live in safety and dignity.

## 4. Cultural Pillar Recommendations

### 4.1 Women and Girls in the Media, Rape Culture and Violence Against Women

#### **Raise Your Voice made the following recommendations which the WPG endorse:**

- Guidance must require reports to specify who they are quoting when quotations are used, particularly when they are quoting defence teams' characterisation of a complainant or complainant's behaviour.
- Guidance should encourage fact-based headlines, because merely using quotation marks around words does not necessarily convey to the reader that this is a person's opinion or a defence's argument.
- Guidance that encourages the centring of victims, particularly after a guilty verdict, as opposed to centring the wasted potential or the tribulations of the convicted sex offender.
- Guidelines requiring the clear identification of rape myths as rape myths, for example when a defence lawyer says "why didn't she shout or fight", a responsible publication will follow that reporting with the proviso that in fact that most rape victims do not shout or fight.
- The detailed reporting of the very few cases where somebody has been falsely accused of rape or sexual assault should always be balanced by accounting for how rare these cases actually are. Failure to do so fuels a dangerous and common myth that these kinds of false accusations are common.
- Endeavour to make clear the difference between a failure to prosecute or a failure to convict and a proven false accusation.
- In the case of online content, publications should actively and adequately monitor comments or close comment sections entirely. Publications have a responsibility with regards to the spreading of misinformation and the potential damage to the public as well as to the complainant in any given case.
- When reporting on sexual crimes and especially serious sexual crimes, helplines and helpful websites for victims and survivors should be included at the end of the piece.

#### **Further WPG recommendations to tackle rape culture include:**

- Beginning a public awareness campaign as soon as possible and ensuring that funds are identified and ring fenced in order to make sure that this happens without delay.
- In the interim a timetable for implementing the Gillen Review recommendations must be published.
- We also recommend that a comprehensive, inclusive programme is developed on sex and relationships education, for all schools and 3rd level institutions.
- Ensure all awareness raising programmes in schools are in line with CEDAW General Recommendation 35, with a focus on informing and educating individuals on consent,



sexual harassment and victim blaming to dismantle the belief that women and girls are responsible for their own safety,

- Ensure that effective measures are taken within the justice system to address high attrition and low conviction rates,
- Ensure that Violence Against Women and Girls is being reported in a responsible manner across media platforms so as to discourage victim blaming and rape myths as laid out in article 17 of the Istanbul Convention,
- Address issues with reporting gender based violence and threats to eradicate practices of victim-blaming, perpetuating myths and suggestions that women's behaviour should change. Have gender based violence, threats and abuse included as a protected characteristic in any upcoming Hate Crime Legislation Review in Northern Ireland.

Our full evidence submission to the Justice Committee on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill 2020, with detailed recommendations relating to the content of the bill, and most significantly, what is missing, can be read [here](#). A summary includes:

### **Recommendations:**

- Remove the 'reasonable defence' clause 12,
- Introduction of Stalking legislation,
- Introduction of non-fatal and fatal strangulation legislation,
- Recognition of Violence against Women and Girls and gender-based violence in line with the Istanbul Convention,
- Grant of Secure tenancies in cases of domestic violence and abuse with recognition of the differing needs of disabled women, traveller women, trans communities, rural women, migrant women etc.,
- Review of the court systems in NI including criminal, civil and family courts,
- Introduce a Domestic Abuse Commissioner for Northern Ireland (already in post for England and Wales),
- Secure funding for specialised services and a review of tendering and procurement in relation to domestic violence and abuse services,
- Provide guidelines to employers on recognising the signs of abusive behaviour,
- Fully funded programme to raise public awareness of domestic abuse,
- Tackle heteronormative assumptions and increase awareness of domestic violence within the context of LGBT+ people,
- Recognition of disproportionate impact on rural women, areas of paramilitary control, migrant women, LGBT+ groups, disabled women etc.,
- Powers to deal with domestic abuse:
  - Introduction of domestic abuse protection order
  - Introduction of domestic abuse protection notices
- Safer family court and child contact system,
- Improve child safety through:
  - Prohibiting unsupervised child contact for a parent on bail for domestic violence and abuse, or where there are ongoing criminal proceedings,
  - Child contact in cases of domestic abuse is based on an informed judgement on what is in the best interests of children, not the presumption of parental involvement,

- An independent statutory review of family courts in NI to assess how they deal with domestic abuse cases to work towards consistent outcomes across NI.
- More rigorous and innovative evidence collection approaches to support successful prosecutions including:
  - Use of the Domestic Violence register showing the number of times police have been called to the house, to build a picture of the frequency and nature of abuse (in line with CEDAW Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence),
  - Use of PSNI intelligence and evidence gathered from incidents to build a picture of coercive control as a course of conduct,
  - Use of body worn camera evidence from the scene on each occasion to effectively demonstrate the impact and seriousness of abuse. In parts of England where body worn cameras have been rolled out, there is a marked increase in the severity of sentences for domestic violence related crimes.
- NI has not fully implemented an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor service nine years after it's recommendation; any service should be specialised and not gender-neutral and consideration should be given to the introduction of children's IDVAs and making IDVAs mandatory in police stations,
- Ensure there is effective reporting and monitoring of all section 75 groups by the PSNI to ensure the diverse needs of victims from various minority groups can be met,
- Addressing re-offending – highlighting the lack of a framework of prevention, rehabilitation and restorative justice in NI,
- Guidelines for sentencing for coercive control,
- Guidelines for measuring non-physical harm,
- Ensure victims' statements cannot be weaponised by prosecutors,
- Provide guarantees that women with uncertain immigration status can seek justice without their cases being reported to the Home Office,
- Create an inter-departmental approach for the implementation and creation of other legislation with the collaboration of the third sector.

## 4.2 Hate Crimes and Online Abuse

### **A summary of our recommendations includes:**

- Introduce of an adequate working definition of hate crime,
- Create a consolidated hate crime legislation model for Northern Ireland,
- Replacing the enhanced sentencing model with the statutory aggravation model,
- Apply the statutory aggravation model to all protected characteristics,
- Introduce specific guidelines and extensive programmes of training and education on any new model of hate crime legislation; including what the protected characteristics are and the consequences of committing a hate crime,
- Recognising gender as a protected characteristic through specifically treating misogyny as a standalone hate crime,
- Recognise transgender identity a protected characteristic,
- Recognise intersex identity as a protected characteristic,
- Consider recognising sex workers as a protected characteristic,

- Create a legal framework that recognises the importance of intersectionality to adequately reflect the experiences and identities of victims and motivations of perpetrators,
- Require the court to state if offences are aggravated, reflect this on court records and outline the difference the aggravation had on sentencing,
- Record aggravated offences on criminal justice records,
- Introduce a “by reason of” threshold,
- Create a statutory legal definition of “hostility”,
- Add equivalent provisions to Sections 4, 4A and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 to the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987,
- Remove “dwelling” defences,
- Include all protected groups under the stirring up provisions of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987,
- Recognise the severe harm caused by online hate speech against women,
- Update and amend existing legislation dealing with public order, malicious communications and harassment to reflect the changing nature of communications due to social media,
- Ensure online harm is fully covered within hate crime legislation,
- Strengthen law relating to public authorities tackling hate expressions in public spaces,
- Implement victim-led restorative justice programmes in collaboration with community-based organisations,
- Commission extensive research specific to Northern Ireland to tackle the under-reporting of hate crime and mistrust from minorities in reporting services,
- Adequately fund and expand the Hate Crime Advocacy Scheme,
- Restrict the press reporting of hate crime victims where appropriate,
- Create measures for legislative consolidations and scrutiny.

The Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review provides an important opportunity for action to be taken on this issue. We have made several recommendations in the WPG consultation response which can be read [here](#).

## 4.3 Education and Training

### **Recommendations:**

- An increased focus on equality and diversity should be introduced into the curriculum when it is next updated,
- While distance learning has to continue, materials should be made accessible to all students so inequalities do not further widen. Opportunities for teaching about equality and diversity through these materials should be considered, particularly when new content is being developed / used,
- Initial teacher training - and subsequent CPD opportunities - should place a greater emphasis on equality and diversity. The teacher competency framework for initial

teacher education (ITE) should cover both how to teach about these themes effectively within the classroom and how to meet pupils' diverse social and educational needs. The latter should include consideration of a wide range of factors that may inhibit children's learning i.e. not just disability, but also covering sexuality or gender identity, etc. Anti-bias training should also be considered,

- Likewise, Principals and senior school managers should, as standard, receive training examining equality and diversity, including the underpinning legislation,
- The Department of Education (DoE) should adequately resource the co-development of equality and diversity workshops, for staff and pupils, with community organisations working with racialised, LGBT+, disabled, and migrant communities,
- Regular guidance should be issued to schools by the DoE on equality and diversity,
- Indicators should be introduced into the inspection process that look specifically at how schools are addressing equality and diversity,
- Furthermore, DoE should prioritise measures on equality and diversity explicitly in the processes of school improvement,
- Section 75 requirements and the Sex Discrimination Regulations should be applied to schools, alongside other relevant equality legislation,
- Any relevant recommendations on education from international treaty bodies, such as CEDAW, should be adhered to,
- Provide support to women impacted by welfare reform, past austerity and COVID-19 to enable them to be work ready through the provision of supported community-based education and training,
- Establish a fund to address the disproportionate cuts to the women's sector community adult education,
- Create targets for apprenticeships to ensure a gender balance,
- Urgently address digital poverty and the impact of educational needs of families across all of Northern Ireland; including access to free internet and technology,
- 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,
  - 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,
  - Ensure there are adequate educational campaigns related to any hate crime legislation review, domestic abuse legislation and all other legislative changes,
  - Promote human rights education in schools which includes a focus on the empowerment of girls and the Convention.

## 5. Brexit and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland Recommendations

### 5.1 Brexit and the Impact on Women: Rights at Risk

#### **Recommendation:**

- In line with our recommendations throughout this recovery plan, we are calling for a gendered approach to policy making relating to Brexit; for equal representation of women in negotiations; and for the hard-won rights for women to be protected and enhanced in Northern Ireland.

### 5.2 Good Friday Agreement legislation, New Decade, New Approach and a Bill of Rights

#### **Recommendations:**

- Bring forward a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
- Complete incorporation of the ECHR.
- Incorporation of the rights contained within the EU Charter of Rights.
- Complete incorporation of CEDAW, ICESCR, CRC, ICERD, ICCPR, CRPD and CAT (including those rights recommended by the NIHRC in their 2009 advice).
- Give further effect to CEDAW, ICESCR, CRC, ICERD, ICCPR, CRPD and CAT through use of devolved powers

## 6. International Case Studies and Recommendations:

### 6.1 Amnesty International UK - International Outlook

In May 2020, Amnesty International, Women's Link Worldwide and International Planned Parenthood Federation published 'A Guide for Europe: Protecting the Rights of Women and Girls in times of Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath'. The guide outlines urgent actions Governments should undertake to protect the rights of women and girls and can be viewed in full [here](#).

### 6.2 Northern Ireland Women's European Platform - International Outlook

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), which is the umbrella network for women's networks in Europe, integrates a focus on feminist economics in its work. EWL has developed proposals for a [financial solidarity plan](#) for Europe in response to the pandemic, which aim to ensure that the recovery is gender responsive, not only at European level but in all EU member states.

#### **Key recommendations for an economic response and recovery include:**

- Providing gender-responsive social and economic measures to support women and girls in precarious situations, including
  - those at risk of losing their jobs,
  - at risk of living in poverty,
  - and/or experiencing in-work poverty.
- Adequate financial support that extends to women working precarious jobs irrespective of their legal status, including:
  - lump sum payments for qualifying individuals including disabled women,
  - tax relief measures,
  - subsidising of goods and services,
  - allowing caregivers and working parents the right to a special leave that guarantees 100% of their income (in the immediate crisis and early stage recovery).
- Introduce temporary special measures to protect women from facing the brunt of the implications of economic recession and austerity (on top of pre-existing measures).
- Ensure alternatives to austerity are identified in response to the economic crisis.

The policy brief also highlights examples of good practice from across Europe. Some examples include:

Domestic violence:

- Austria: expanded economic support to victims of domestic violence during the crisis.
- Spain: increased access to emergency shelters alongside a comprehensive information campaign and measures for victims to access help and support through pharmacies.
- Several European countries including Spain, the Netherlands and Italy, designated staff in organisations providing support to victims and survivors of domestic violence as key workers.

#### Childcare:

- Italy: temporary measures for families and women, including the extension of parental leave and bonuses for child carers at home. A lump sum of 600 euros is also being given to almost five million workers, including the self-employed.
- Czech Republic: parents of children under 13 can claim 60% of their salary from the state while taking care of children.

#### Health care:

- Belgium: contraceptives free for all women under 25 (these initiatives have also been taken previously in other countries, but often not comprehensively: for example in Finland, health care is devolved to local authorities and free contraceptives for under 25s have been trialled in some local authority areas, while others have actively resisted this),
- Latvia: announcement of pay increase for frontline health workers of at least 20%.

## 6.3 The Purple Pact: economics that works for women

### **Key recommendations for action in The Purple Pact include:**

- Introduce gender budgeting as a tool to highlight how budgets impact men and women differentially, and make sure public finance and economic policies work for gender equality,
- Develop and invest in a care economy, where quality, accessible care is available to all and the provision of care is valued as a vital economic activity; this would also contribute to job creation, sustaining a green economy as outlined previously in this plan,
- Developing human rights based sustainable care infrastructure, which takes account of the care needs of an older population, supports the autonomy and agency of service users and addresses the unpaid care burden currently primarily shouldered by women,
- Ensuring developments such as the digital economy do not disadvantage women further; ensuring women's participation in developing the digital economy to support both gender sensitive digital technologies and effective job creation,
- Implementing concepts of decent work, particularly in the 'gig economy'; for example app based 'self employment' options are precarious for all but in particular for women.

## 6.4 Initiatives at UN level

- Ensure women's representation and inclusion in all planning and decision-making, specifically with COVID-19-related policies and responses.

- Provide flexible working arrangements as well as paid sick, family and emergency leave for parents and caretakers, keeping in mind that the majority of unpaid care work falls to women.
- Support employment and income protection for women across the value chain.
- Honour existing contracts with women-owned businesses, support their recovery and engage with them as supply chains are re-established.
- Ensure access to quality healthcare for all women and girls — especially as resources are diverted to address the pandemic.
- Collect data disaggregated by gender, age and other factors to track the impact of all response efforts.
- Help challenge gender norms through marketing and advertising, encouraging unpaid care to be shared more equally.
- Chief executive officers and executive teams can publicly signal their commitment to the advancement of gender equality — particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic — by signing the CEO Statement of Support for the Women’s Empowerment Principles.

### **Recommendations from UN Women:**

- Ensuring that any emergency response and recovery legislation, emergency and/or relief packages and budgets have been developed on the basis of sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis and consultations with gender experts, and include a gender impact assessment.
- Introducing or supporting amendments to response and recovery legislation, stimulus packages and budgets, social protection policies – or introducing new legislation – that seek to rectify any identified sources of gender discrimination or exacerbate gender inequality.
- Establishing a gender-focused parliamentary body.
- Using gender budgeting tools to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and impact of COVID-19 related policy measures on women and girls.
- Engaging gender experts, civil society and trade unions to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of COVID-19.

ENDS

*For questions or queries regarding the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan, please contact Rachel Powell, Women’s Sector Lobbyist, Women’s Resource and Development Agency, [rachel.powell@wrda.net](mailto:rachel.powell@wrda.net)*