



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update –Nov-Dec 2020

Summary

In the period 17th November-30th December, there have been a number of political developments surrounding three key themes as highlighted within the [Women's Policy Group COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#). Domestic violence legislation continues to be a key topic for legislation development both in NI and Westminster. Additionally, period poverty has featured on the agenda within both governments. Similarly, maternal health care and workplace discrimination have been discussed.

Domestic Violence has been a prominent agenda point in both the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster government. The Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill in Northern Ireland has reached the further consideration stage. Additional consultation for a bill to legislate for paid leave for victims has also been initiated in NI. In Westminster, a bill to introduce a commissioner for the issue has undergone its second reading in the House of Lords.

Across both regions there has been an increased acknowledgement of the disproportionate **economic** effect of COVID on women. Questions have been asked in both legislative bodies, highlighting the issue and asking specifically about gendered initiatives within economic recovery plans. Economic discrimination against pregnant and new mothers was also discussed at Westminster, recognising this as a contributing factor to the gender pay gap.

In terms of women's **health**, period poverty has prominently featured on the agenda of both governments. Within NI, progress has been made to introduce a period poverty bill to legislate for access to free sanitary products in schools, universities, and colleges. In Westminster, the focus has been on the international development of the availability of these products. Maternal healthcare has also featured with questions around the regulation of private scans discussed.

In terms of **justice**, in Westminster steps to increase the prosecution rate for rape and sexual assault were discussed. This is significant as low prosecution rates in this area breed a culture of victim blaming and distrust in the justice system.

Stormont

Bills- introduced during period Nov-Dec 2020

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	Comments	Links to the feminist recovery plan
Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill	Naomi Long-Minister for Justice	Further Consideration stage	<p>The Bill creates a course of conduct offence and sentencing aggravation concerning domestic abuse. It makes rules as to procedure for giving evidence in criminal cases involving domestic abuse; and prevents cross-examination in person of certain witnesses in family proceedings in the civil courts.</p> <p>The Bill has entered the further consideration stage. This included debating several key issues such as information-sharing with schools in cases involving children, further protective measures and eligibility for civil legal aid for victims.</p> <p>The final stage for this legislation to reach before being law is due to be scheduled.</p>	<p>Incidences of domestic abuse have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>There was already insufficient support for women and families suffering domestic abuse, therefore the creation of the bill offers provisions etc. in order to address the issue.</p> <p>Recommendations from the WPG in relation to the bill can be viewed in Pillar 4 of the Feminist Recovery Plan.</p> <p>The WPG evidence submission to the Justice Committee can be viewed here.</p> <p>All amendments and progress on the bill can be viewed here.</p>

Non-Executive Bills

Issue	Proposed by	Stage (as of 3 rd Jan)	Comments	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Period Poverty Bill	Pat Catney MLA	Consultation period	<p>The Bill aims to ensure free access to sanitary products. This includes making them accessible in schools, colleges, and universities.</p> <p>The deadline for the consultation period is the 26th of January.</p>	<p>Lack of access to menstrual hygiene products serves as a barrier to education and training for women.</p> <p>Link to the consultation survey and more information.</p>
Domestic Abuse Leave Bill	Rachel Woods MLA	Consultation period	<p>The Bill aims to introduce paid leave from work for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.</p> <p>The deadline for the consultation period is the 29th of January.</p>	<p>Financial barriers are recognised as a common factor trapping women within domestic abuse. Paid leave allows victims time and financial assistance to access services and medical care connected to domestic abuse.</p> <p>Link to the consultation survey and more information.</p>

Questions asked- tabled during period Nov-Dec 2020

Issue	Date	Asked by:	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Support for young women financially affected by COVID-19	23/12/20	Dolores Kelly (SDLP - Upper Bann) To Diane Dodds, Minister for the Economy	<p>The question: ‘To ask the Minister for the Economy given that she has stated that females, younger workers and those on low pay may have been most adversely affected by the impact of COVID-19, how her recovery plan targets resources at those most in need of support.’</p> <p>In her answer Dodds, didn’t specify any gendered initiatives or policies within the economic recovery plans. She emphasised investment in supporting younger workers i.e. through apprenticeship schemes, free flexible training schemes and business support schemes.</p>	<p>Women due to their over-representation in insecure and lower paid work are disproportionately affected by the economic instability caused by COVID. As such recovery plans need to both recognise and account for this within their support initiatives.</p> <p>Recommendations on tackling the economic effect of COVID 19 on women can be read under pillar 1 of the Feminist Recovery Plan.</p> <p>Full statement from Dodds in response to the question can be read here.</p>
Regulation for private baby scans.	30/11/20	Kellie Armstrong (APNI-Strangford) To	<p>The Question: To ask the Minister of Health to identify the body with responsibility for regulating private baby scan studios operating in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Comprehensive and regulated maternal healthcare is a factor in good birth outcomes for mother and baby.</p>

		Robin Swann, the Minister for Health	<p>He responded, stating private baby-scan studios are not included in the list of regulated establishments and agencies as set out in the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. However, if ultrasounds are carried out in those studios by radiographers, the radiographers are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Independent hospitals and clinics may carry out private baby scans, and those establishments are regulated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) under the 2003 Order and the Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.</p> <p>Armstrong highlighted concerns over issues in some private clinics in England, failing to recognise serious medical issues as well as the lack of access to a paediatric pathology service and answered for assurances for mothers in NI.</p> <p>In answer to the first issue, Swann referenced the access of scans through the health service and said any private scan is in addition to this. In answer the accessibility of paediatric pathology service, he stated that there is currently an open call within NI to recruit medical staff with this skill set. Currently the health service refers pregnant women onto services in the UK- however he does recognise traveling for this type of healthcare especially in the event of baby loss doesn't provide emotional support to families.</p>	Full report of Swann's answer to the question can be read here .
Legislation for additional paid leave for the victims of	8/12/20	Órlaith Ní Flynn (SF - West Belfast)	<p>The question: 'To ask the Minister for the Economy whether she intends to bring forward legislation to provide additional paid leave entitlements for workers that are victims of domestic abuse'</p>	Paid leave for victims of domestic abuse can be used to overcome financial barriers to enable victims

domestic abuse		To Diane Dodds, Minister for the Economy	<p>She answered by referencing support for the introduction of paid leave entitlements for victims of domestic abuse from both within the Assembly and among some key stakeholders. She also said their growing recognition among employers of the need to provide better support for employees who are victims of domestic abuse. Some employers already provide this, but it isn't universal. Therefore, she has asked officials to consider this important issue alongside a range of other employment related matters when planning for the medium to long term. They are also maintaining a watching brief over the ongoing BEIS review into support in the workplace for survivors of domestic abuse and NI stakeholders were able to contribute directly to this. A full impact and cost analysis need to be conducted. Ultimately, it will be a decision for the Executive if this type of measure is to be introduced, of which she would be supportive.</p>	<p>to arrange and move into alternative accommodation in order to escape abuse etc.</p> <p>Read full statement here.</p>
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[Westminster](#)

[Bills Nov-Dec 2020](#)

Issue	Date	Sponsored by	Stage	Notes	Links to Feminist Recovery Plan
Domestic Abuse Bill	5/1/21	Priti Petal MP (Con), Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con)	Second reading in the House of Lords	The bill aims to establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; to prohibit cross-examination in person in family proceedings in certain circumstances; to make provision about certain violent or sexual offences, and offences involving other abusive behaviour, committed outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.	Domestic abuse has been recognised as a prominent problem within the UK. As exacerbated by COVID new legislation to tackle

					<p>all associated factors is welcomed.</p> <p>The full bill can be read and it's progress can be accessed here.</p> <p>This does not affect or impact NI domestic abuse and family proceedings bill.</p>
International Development (Women's Sanitary Products) Bill	31/12/20	Wendy Chamberlain (Lib-dem)	Second reading	A Bill to require the Secretary of State to report on the use of official development assistance to increase the availability of women's sanitary products; and for connected purposes.	<p>Period poverty and resultant lack of access of menstrual hygiene products inhibit women in employment and education both here in the UK and internationally.</p> <p>The full Bill can be read here.</p>

Questions asked tabled during Nov- Dec 2020

Issue	Date	Proposed by	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Domestic abuse in relation to Covid-19	14th Dec	Sarah Owen (lab) To Victoria Atkins, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department	<p>The question: What steps the Government plan to take to protect domestic abuse victims in response to the increase in domestic abuse incidents during the covid-19 outbreak</p> <p>She answered in response to the pandemic, the government have provided unprecedented additional funding to domestic abuse service providers. There was further funding announced last month and the relaunched the #YouAreNotAlone campaign. The police continue to target perpetrators of abuse proactively.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Bill has passed its scrutiny in the House of Commons and awaits its scrutiny in the House of Lords. The government has commissioned a designate domestic abuse commissioner to map the services that are available in the community. They are in the process of launching a support for migrant victims scheme, which is a pilot scheme to support victims of domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds.</p>	<p>Domestic abuse during the pandemic has been highlighted as prominent throughout the UK. Due to heightened vulnerability to its effect due to successive lockdowns, this is an issue, urgently needing to be addressed and incorporated into recovery plans.</p> <p>Read full answer to the question here.</p>
Rape and Sexual Assault: Prosecutions	10 th Dec	Tom Lloyd (lab) To, Suella Braverman, The Attorney General	<p>The question: <i>'What steps she has taken to increase the number of prosecutions relating to rape and sexual assault.'</i></p> <p>She responded by referring the 3 million that has been awarded to the CPS in this year's spending review specifically for rape and serious sexual offence work. This year the CPS published its own rape strategy, "Rape and Serious Sexual</p>	<p>Low prosecution rates for serious sexual assaults consolidate a culture whereby victims, often women, don't feel as though the justice system supports them. It aids a victim blaming culture,</p>

			<p>Offences (RASSO) 2025” and has updated rape legal guidance and training for specialist prosecutors. It is also engaging stakeholders on a joint action plan on rape, with the police, aimed at improving joint working.</p> <p>She continued, the Government have decided to delay publication of the end-to-end rape review until 2021, so that they can ensure proper engagement with the views and perspectives of stakeholders.</p> <p>The Government have commissioned an end-to-end rape review. The CPS is making improvements, including the publication of its strategy, which aims to deal head-on with trying to support victims and to address the concerns expressed in the 2019 inspectorate report. It has also published updated rape legal guidance for public consultation.</p>	<p>where people find it difficult to be believed, access support and obtain legal justice.</p> <p>Full statement to the question can be read here.</p>
Workplace Discrimination: Pregnant Women and New Mothers	25 th Nov	<p>Maria Miller (con)</p> <p>To Paul Scully, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy</p>	<p>The question, <i>‘With reference to the Government-commissioned research on pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination and disadvantage, published in 2015, what progress the Government have made in tackling unlawful discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace’</i></p> <p>He answered, since the publication of research on pregnancy and maternity discrimination, the Government have worked with ACAS and published updated guidance to ensure that women and employers understand their rights and obligations, consulted on measures to extend redundancy protections, and committed to introduce these in an employment Bill.</p>	<p>Workplace discrimination is a significant factor contributing to a gender pay gap. Maternity and pregnancy are important factors relating to this gendered discrimination.</p> <p>Read detail on this effect within the context of NI in the WPG and WBG Joint Statement to DfC on Statutory Maternity Pay, Carer’s Allowance and the Two-Child Cap here.</p>

				Read the full statement here.
Covid-19: Economic Effect	25 th Nov	Rebecca Long-Bailey (lab) To Kemi Badenoch, Minster for Equalities	<p>The question: <i>'What discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak on (a) women, (b) disabled people and (c) Black, Asian and minority ethnic people.'</i></p> <p>The minister starts by emphasising the pandemic as affecting all communities across the country. She sates, the government has provided targeted economic support. Citing the example of, rolling out economic support for those working in shut-down sectors such as retail and hospitality, the workforces in which are disproportionately young, female and from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background. She reflects the government as having taken action to ensure that disabled people have access to disability benefits, financial support and employment support, such as the Work and Health programme. She says they have extended the self-employment income support scheme, in which some ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented.</p>	<p>The economic impact of COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women, disabled people and Black, ethnic and minority ethnic people. Therefore, any economic recovery plan needs to both acknowledge this disparity as well as introduce targeted initiatives to mitigate against this.</p> <p>Read full statement here.</p>