



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

# NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan

Recommendations:

Department for the Economy

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# Abstract

This report contains evidence and recommendations specific to the Department for the Economy, taken from the NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, which was published by the Women's Policy Group in July 2020.

The Feminist Recovery Plan highlights the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, including its economic impact on women's employment, and sets out recommendations for action. The issues raised in this report should be considered by the Department for the Economy in all COVID-19 economic recovery planning.

Some of the recommendations in this summary will also be relevant for other NI Departments, as well as the UK Government. Although the Department for Economy will not have direct responsibility for all issues raised in this report, we believe these should be brought to the attention of the Department; as an inter-departmental approach is essential to tackling them effectively.



## Women's Policy Group NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Overview

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. In this way, the current crisis affects men and women differently, and in many cases deepens the inequalities women experience on an everyday basis. 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. 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.

The WPG Feminist Recovery Plan analyses the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in Northern Ireland in terms of economic justice, health, social justice and cultural inequality. In addition to this, implications of Brexit and the need for a Bill of Rights will be examined, and an analysis of international best practice case studies will be done. The plan uses a mix of political and economic policy-making recommendations to advocate for a feminist recovery to COVID-19, with the aim of not only avoiding deepening gender inequalities through recovery planning, but also tackling the gendered inequalities that already exist in our society. 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. 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.

# Women's Policy Group NI

## Women's Policy Group (WPG) NI: 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.



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



## The Feminist Recovery Plan was prepared by:

Rachel Powell (Women's Resource and Development Agency)  
Elaine Crory (Women's Resource and Development Agency)  
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Louise Coyle (Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network)  
Clare Moore (Irish Congress of Trade Unions)  
Geraldine Alexander (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance)  
Helen Flynn (Human Rights Consortium)  
Helen Crickard (Reclaim the Agenda)  
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Aisha O'Reilly (Politics Plus)  
Karen Sweeney (Women's Support Network)  
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## The content of this Plan is supplemented by additional WPG COVID-19 research and the WPG Women's Manifesto 2019 which was written and supported by the following organisations:

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)  
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)  
Transgender NI (Trans NI)  
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Northern Ireland Committee  
Reclaim the Night (RTN) Belfast  
Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)  
Politics Plus  
Belfast Feminist Network (BFN)  
HERe NI  
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)  
Reclaim the Agenda (RTA)  
Alliance for Choice  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
Women's Support Network (WSN)  
DemocraShe  
Raise Your Voice (RYV)

Based on the evidence outlined in each section of the Plan, recommendations will be made for gender-responsive budgeting and policy-making to both the NI Assembly and UK governments. The Feminist Recovery plan advocates for a feminist recovery to COVID-19, with the aim of not only avoiding deepening gender inequalities through recovery planning, but also tackling the gendered inequalities that already exist in our society.



# Economic Justice Pillar



## Women's Employment and Gender Pay Gap Reporting

Women in Northern Ireland continue to be more likely to be in insecure and part-time employment, and whilst the overall gender pay gap in NI is the lowest in the UK, women still earn on average around 9.6% less than men.<sup>1</sup> Having dependent children significantly amplifies this difference, and women responsible for dependent children are more likely to be in insecure, part time work. Policy failures around family-leave frameworks fail all workers but have a disproportionate impact on women due to the lack of affordable childcare, which is fundamental to facilitating women's participation in work.

When the hourly earnings excluding overtime across all workers is examined (including full-time and part-time) we see that women earn close to 10% less than men. This is due to the 'part-time effect' evidenced by the fact that women occupy more part-time jobs than men and these jobs tend to be lower paid than full-time jobs. This part-time effect is further illustrated by assessing the gender pay gap in terms of the gap in gross weekly and gross annual earnings between men and women as shown in figure 5 below.

Gross weekly earnings are 27% below that of men, whilst gross annual earnings are almost 30% below that of men.

Figure 5: Percentage point gap in pay between men and women 2018:



Source: *Better Work, Better Lives Report*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PwC (2019) '[Women in Work Index: Summary](#)'; which analyses female economic empowerment in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> ICTU (2019) '[Better Work, Better Lives: Childcare in Northern Ireland](#)' [Policy Report].



The European Trade Union Confederation estimates that if women were paid the same as men, the poverty rate among working women could be halved and 2.5 million children would come out of poverty. **Having one or more children reduces a woman's likelihood of being in a permanent, full-time job by almost one-third**, with only 45% of women with one or more children working in a permanent, full-time job. Fewer than 1 in 3 women with no dependent children work part-time. **This compares to almost 1 in 2 women with dependent children who are employed on a part-time basis.** Women with dependent children work an average of 11 hours less per week than men with dependent children. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into stark relief the totally inadequate childcare support system in Northern Ireland, a system which sees childcare as an individual responsibility rather than a public good.

Furthermore, women continue to experience significant sex discrimination in the workplace, including sexual harassment and discrimination against mothers and pregnant women. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland estimates that around **25% of the queries they get to their legal helpline relate to potential sex discrimination at work.** Of these, they estimate that 21.5% are to do with pregnancy or maternity.<sup>3</sup> The issues raised are not confined to any particular sector and it is happening regardless of the level, type or grade of job held by women. Sex discrimination at work is not an isolated phenomenon, and is closely connected to rates of domestic violence in society.



<sup>3</sup> Equality Commission Northern Ireland (2019), '[Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination Remains an Issue for Working Mothers](#)'

Domestic violence creates a negative spillover effect on the world of work, as recognised by the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206). The Preamble to the Convention notes that:

“Domestic violence can affect employment, productivity and health and safety, and that governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations and labour market institutions can help, as part of other measures, to recognize, respond to and address the impacts of domestic violence.”

As such, the Convention requires Members to “take appropriate measures to ... recognize the effects of domestic violence and, so far as is reasonably practicable, mitigate its impact in the world of work” (Art. 10(f)). Therefore, sex discrimination and domestic violence must be understood as connected issues with implications for both private and public spheres of life.



## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* Introduce a duty on employers to proactively tackle sexual harassment at work to include mandatory training for all employees including managers and HR personnel.
- \* 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.
- \* 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,
  - Put an obligation on all employers to 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.

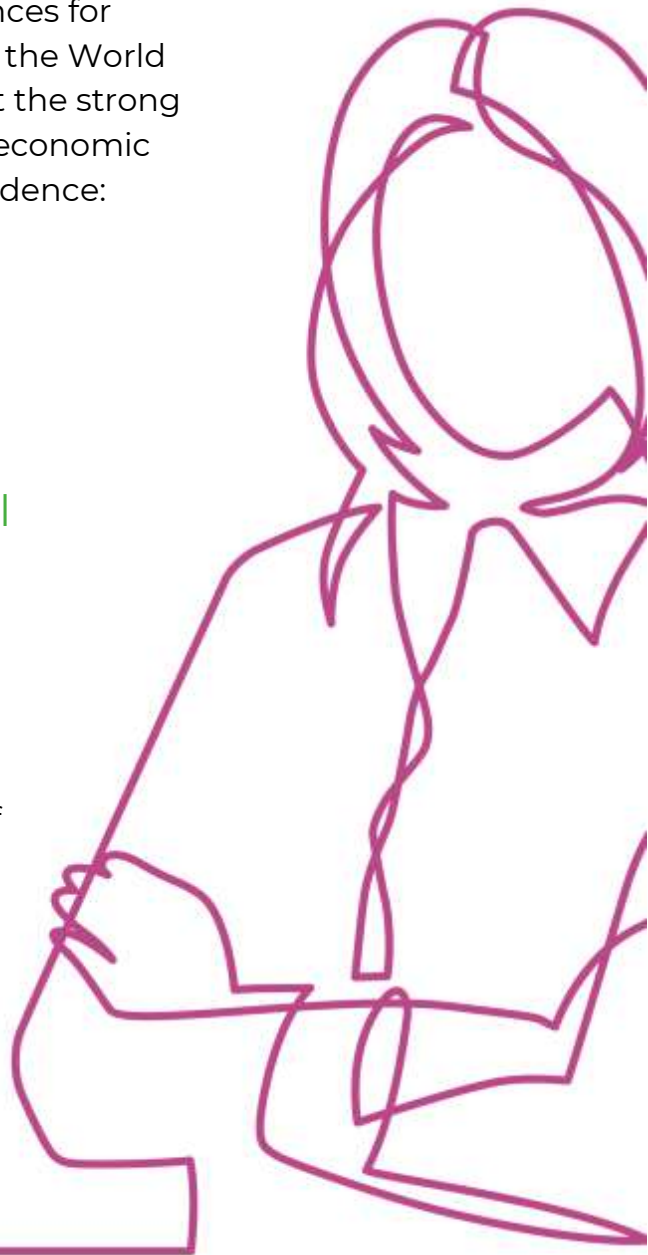


## Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work

When the income of men and women across occupations ranging from the lowest hourly paid to the highest hourly paid is examined, it is apparent that women dominate in the low paid occupations. What is more, across the vast majority of occupations there remains a substantive gender pay gap, with women continuing to earn less pay per hour than men. This gender pay gap is likely to worsen due to the economic impact of COVID-19, which not only has negative consequences for women, but the economy as a whole. Findings from the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2020 highlight the strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its economic performance. The WEF argue that this economic evidence:

“Highlights the message to policy-makers that countries that want to remain competitive and inclusive will need to make gender equality a critical part of their nation's human capital development.”<sup>4</sup>

When looking specifically at Northern Ireland, women are more likely than men to be forced out of the labour market by unpaid, domestic work or caring responsibilities (including childcare), and 69% of carers are women.



<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum (2020) 'Mind the 100 Year Gap', [Global Gender Gap Report 2020](#), p.33.



Research from Carers NI shows that Northern Ireland's carers save the economy **£4.6 billion per year**;<sup>5</sup> whilst unpaid carers across all the UK provide social care worth £57 billion per year.<sup>6</sup> A recent ICTU report on Childcare explains that:

“There is consistent evidence that becoming a mother is the most important factor in explaining gender inequalities in the labour market. Women with children are much less likely to participate in the labour market, and when they do, they are more likely to work in insecure and part-time positions. In addition to this, the pay penalty for motherhood is large, and parental leave entitlements are skewed towards mothers staying at home.”

**Table 3: Percentage difference in nature of labour force participation between male and female, with and without dependent children, 2018**

		S-E FT %	S-E PT %	Perm FT %	Perm PT %	Temp FT %	Temp PT %
All	Male	17.5	1.6	<b>70.5</b>	16.7	2.6	2.2
	Female	4.9	3.7	<b>54</b>	29.8	3.5	4.1
0 children	Male	17.1	1.3	<b>71.3</b>	5.2	2.7	2.3
	Female	4.9	2.3	<b>60.5</b>	24.2	4.6	3.6
1+ children	Male	18.2	2.1	<b>69.2</b>	6	2.4	2.1
	Female	4.9	5.6	<b>45.1</b>	37.6	2	4.8

Source: ICTU (2020) 'Childcare in Northern Ireland' (p 10)

The burden on women to provide the majority of unpaid care in society has increased significantly in the context of Covid-19. What has become clear, is that **care work, which is predominantly undertaken by women and girls, is central to the functions of every economy**; yet it is still treated as a private issue and care workers are undervalued as contributors to economies.

<sup>5</sup> Carers NI (2015), '[NI Carers save government £4.6 billion a year](#)'; see also: Carers NI (2017) '[State of Caring 2017](#)'

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2017), '[Unpaid carers provide social care worth £57 billion](#)'



A combination of measures both at a UK-wide and devolved level are needed from elected representatives to address the systemic gender segregated markets and unequal distribution of care. Investment in care provides strong returns economically in the long run, and we would urge decision-makers to consider the following recommendations to fund adequate investments and to oppose the implementation of further austerity.

### Summary of Recommendations:

- \* Home carers, as well as health and social care staff, must have access to appropriate advice and (where required) adequate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- \* Monitor gender parity in the professions of the future.
- \* Promote conciliation measures and actions finalised to increase equal opportunities in both education and work.<sup>7</sup> For example, introduce family policies, social protection systems and measures aimed at reducing gender inequalities, and encourage higher education and job opportunities for women.
- \* Analyse the economic value of putting money into caring, which will help carers get back into paid employment and thus improve their health and financial wellbeing and consequently reduce pressure on the health and benefits systems in the long-run.
- \* For a better, more resilient economy, care work must be recognised as a valued job. This means making sure it pays well, attracts investment in education and training, and provides opportunities for promotion.
- \* Require all workplaces to record and publish gender segregation and gender pay gap data.
- \* Sustainably fund the women's sector so that no woman is left in danger.
- \* Require employers to report the numbers of people made redundant with breakdowns by gender and other protected characteristics.

*(continued on next page)*

<sup>7</sup> Castellane, R. et. al. (2019), '[Analyzing the gender gap in European labour markets at the NUTS-1 level](#)', Cogent Social Sciences, Vol 5 (1).

- \* Design a sustainable and stable social care system which is free to the point of use for all citizens, with well paid, well trained permanent staff and funded via general taxation.
- \* Introduce policies to encourage sharing of care and unpaid work between women and men.
- \* The Northern Ireland Assembly should promote awareness of the important role of unpaid carers and caring and introduce more concrete support so that value is recognised practically.
- \* Significant increase in funding for the health and social care system to allow services to rebuild after the crisis.
- \* 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.
- \* Employers, and the NI Assembly, should ensure that there are carer-friendly policies in place that enable working carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work.
- \* Schools, colleges and universities should be encouraged to introduce policies and programmes that support carers and improve their experience of education.

## Women's Poverty and Austerity

*Although some of the evidence and recommendations contained in this section are specific to other departments, all issues raised are of relevance to the economy and should therefore be taken into consideration in all economic planning by the Department for the Economy.*

The response to the 2008 financial crash was a programme of austerity and welfare reform. Research suggests that these policies had a disproportionate impact on women, showing that **86% of the savings to the Treasury from the tax and benefit changes since 2010 have come from women.**<sup>8</sup> Women are more likely to claim social security benefits, more likely to use public services, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work, more likely to be caring for children/family members and more likely to have to make up for cuts to services through unpaid work. Research by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex has shown that single mothers and the lowest paid are hardest hit by the loss of income in the Coronavirus crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Demand for food banks in Northern Ireland has soared because of COVID-19. In April the number of emergency food parcels given out by the Trussell Trust locally rose 142% compared to the same time last year.<sup>10</sup> **Women make up the majority of Universal Credit claimants, a figure which rose by 80% between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020 due to the pandemic.** Before the pandemic, women were already more likely to experience poverty; however, in the current climate, job losses and the need to provide increasing levels of unpaid care are likely to increase poverty and dependence on social security benefits, especially for women.



<sup>8</sup> Cracknell, R., and Keen, R. (2017) "Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes" [Commons Briefing Papers](#) SN06758

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Social and Economic Research (2020) [Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study](#), COVID-19 Survey, Briefing Note, University of Essex.

<sup>10</sup> Black, J. (2020) ["Coronavirus crisis sees demand for foodbanks in Northern Ireland soar"](#) Belfast Telegraph [article]

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) has urged the Government not to turn to austerity measures to pay for the cost of the crisis. The WBG stressed that this will repeat the past; impacting poor, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and disabled women the most. The WBG has suggested a range of alternative ways to pay for the measures needed including investment in social infrastructure to boost the economy, increased taxes on wealth and tackling tax evasion, avoidance and havens.<sup>11</sup>

## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* 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>12</sup> This would particularly benefit women who provide higher levels of care.
- \* Direct payments in lieu of school meals should continue until 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:
  - o The basic levels of Universal Credit should be increased in line with real living wages indefinitely to support those who have lost their jobs.
  - o At the very least Government should hold on to the increase in the standard allowance to help people get back on their feet.

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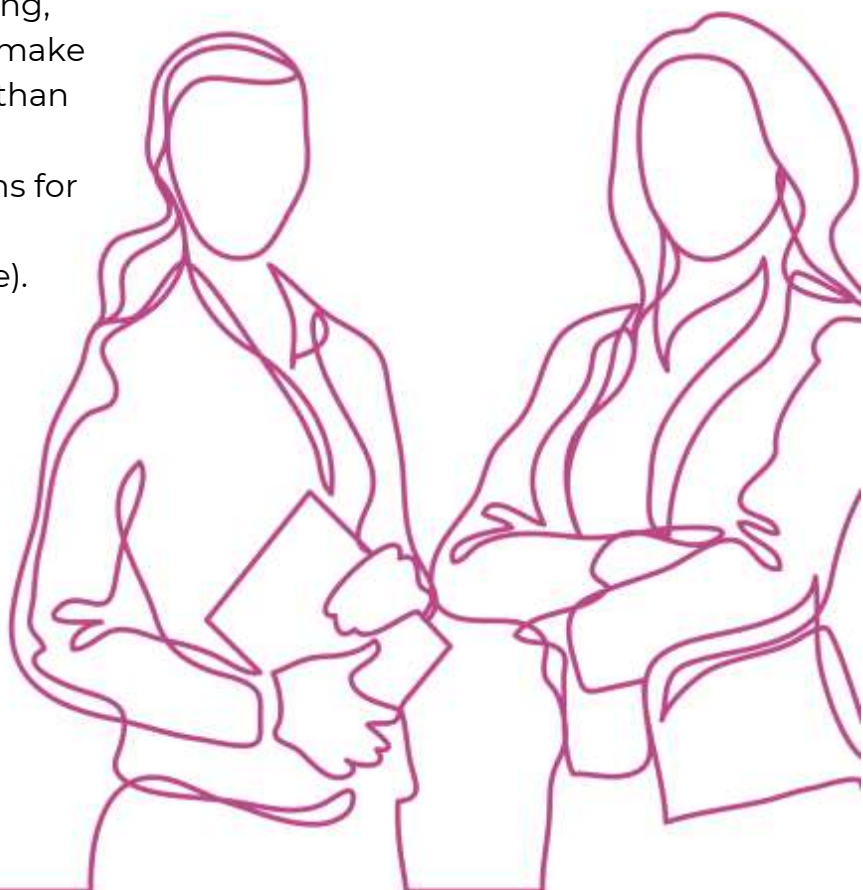
<sup>11</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) '[Easing Lockdown: Potential Problems for Women](#)' [Briefing Paper]

<sup>12</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'





- 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.
- 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).
- \* Scrap the two-child limit in Tax Credits and Universal Credit which would help to protect against an increase in child poverty, and consider 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.
- \* The Benefit Cap mitigation should be extended to new claimants. 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.
- \* Continue the pause for deductions for benefit debts (without pausing deductions for child maintenance).





## Increasing Debt

*Although some of the evidence and recommendations contained in this section are specific to other departments, all issues raised are of relevance to the economy and should therefore be taken into consideration in all economic planning by the Department for the Economy.*

We are already dealing with a debt crisis, but the Coronavirus pandemic will add many more people to the numbers in debt and in need of help to resolve problem debts. This increasing level of debt has the potential to stifle economic recovery and means that debt advice agencies will be inundated when the impact of the crisis on people's personal finances becomes evident in the coming months. Compared with the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland levels of savings are generally lower. **Only 52% of adults in Northern Ireland have a saving account (compared to 59% in the UK),** with more than half of adults in Northern Ireland (54%) having either no cash savings or savings of less than £2,000 compared with 46% in Wales, 45% in England and 43% in Scotland. This leaves them less able to cope with any sudden change of circumstances or income, such as those presented by the pandemic.

Widespread job losses, reductions in income and increasing household bills as a result of the lockdown will mean that many people in Northern Ireland will have little or nothing to fall back on during this unprecedented crisis. Many people on low incomes with little or no savings who find themselves in these situations will have no other option than to borrow money. These families often struggle to manage their debts and are vulnerable to spiralling into problem debt.

As of June 2020, StepChange estimated that 4.6 million people had accumulated an additional £1,076 of arrears and £997 of debt on average each because of the health crisis.<sup>13</sup>

As Universal Credit will be the main benefit claimed by those who have lost their jobs, or who have suffered reduced incomes as a result of the pandemic, it is clear that existing problems with this benefit could also lead to debt problems. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children<sup>14</sup> shows that the crisis is causing:

- Seven in ten families with children claiming Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit to cut back on essentials,
- Six in ten to borrow money,
- Over five in ten to be behind on rent or other essential bills.

Citizens Advice reports<sup>15</sup> that in a survey of those who applied for Universal Credit as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, more than half (53%) have faced hardship during the five-week wait for their first payment.



<sup>13</sup> StepChange (2020) "[Coronavirus and personal debt: a financial recovery strategy for households](#)"

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) "[A lifeline for our children: Strengthening the social security system for families with children during this pandemic](#)" [Briefing]

<sup>15</sup> Citizens Advice (2016) "[Coronavirus claimants facing further hardship in wait for Universal Credit](#)" [Press Release]

This looming debt crisis is likely to impact on women who are already more vulnerable to poverty. Women are more likely than men to claim social security benefits, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work, more likely to be providing care for children and other family members, and more likely to have to make up for cuts to services through unpaid work. This keeps their incomes lower and leaves them vulnerable to short-term financial problems or income shocks. Borrowing and debt is therefore far from gender neutral and women are more likely to have to rely on borrowing to make ends meet. Many women who are struggling financially on benefits and low-income work are vulnerable to high-cost credit and in some cases, this can lead to a never-ending spiral of debt.

Before the pandemic, research by the Women's Regional Consortium<sup>16</sup> on women's access to lending showed that:

- 87% of the women involved in the research needed to borrow money in the last three years.
- Most had little or no savings or the ability to save due to low income or living on benefits.

Other pre-crisis Office of National Statistics (ONS) data<sup>17</sup> shows that women are consistently more vulnerable to poverty:

- 39% of women and 34% of men reported it was a struggle to keep up with bills some or most of the time,
- 26% of women and 23% of men said they ran out of money by the end of the month,
- 29% of women and 23% of men said they would not be able to make ends meet for a month or less if they lost their main source of income.



<sup>16</sup> Women's Regional Consortium, (2020) "[Making Ends Meet: Women's Perspectives on Access to Lending](#)"

<sup>17</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) "[Early indicator estimates from the Wealth and Assets Survey: Bills and Credit Commitments, April 2018 to September 2019.](#)"

Single parents are likely to be particularly affected by this and, in Northern Ireland, the majority of single parent households are headed by a woman (91%).<sup>18</sup> An alarming 42% of single parents are anticipating living on less than £500 per month,<sup>19</sup> due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Debt advice agencies report that single parents may be particularly vulnerable to debt as they are more likely to be in low-paid and part-time work, as well as disproportionately impacted by welfare reform and increases in the cost of living. StepChange reports that single parents are over-represented amongst their debt clients compared to the UK population. Single parents made up 23% of their clients in 2018 yet represent only 6% of the UK population.

For a variety of reasons including low-incomes, job losses, reductions in working hours and caring commitments, this pandemic will cause many women to suffer financial hardship and debt. There are a range of actions which should be taken to provide protection against hardship and debt coming out of this pandemic.

While the costs of implementing these actions may act as a barrier, the costs of not taking action will ultimately be much higher.

A combination of measures both at a UK-wide and devolved level are needed from elected representatives to address the systemic gender segregated markets and unequal distribution of care. **Investment in care provides strong returns economically in the long run**, and we would urge decision-makers to consider the following recommendations to fund adequate investments and to oppose the implementation of further austerity.

<sup>18</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly (2014) Census 2011 – Key Statistics for Gender, Research and Information Service [Research Paper](#), Ronan Savage and Dr Raymond Russell.

<sup>19</sup> Turn2US (2020) Insight [Briefing](#): Coronavirus.

## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* 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).
- \* 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 (affordable repayments without increasing their debt or incurring poor credit ratings).
- \* Financial support through the benefits system and through crisis payments is central to preventing crisis borrowing. 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. 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.
- \* 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 grants instead of loans.

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- \* Sufficient funding should be made available to debt advice agencies to continue with their free debt advice services and 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 giving 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.



## Childcare

*Although some of the evidence and recommendations contained in this section are specific to other departments, all issues raised are of relevance to the economy and should therefore be taken into consideration in all economic planning by the Department for the Economy.*

The Women's Policy Group supports the [Childcare for All Campaign](#) and believes that a universal, free and high quality childcare provision, which meets the diverse needs of children, is essential for economic recovery in Northern Ireland. This is fundamental to facilitating women's participation and ability to access paid work, education and training and progressing gender equality in paid and unpaid work.

Women are more likely to be forced to care for children, either in addition to their work, or instead of paid work. This applies particularly to parents of disabled children, as childcare options are extremely limited even in ordinary circumstances. This increases the risk of poverty and is also likely to have health impacts for parents.

Whilst the Job Retention Scheme, amendments to Universal Credit and other benefits and expansion of the definition of key workers did provide a degree of support for some women, a longer-term plan is required to ensure all women affected by job losses can provide for themselves and their families both now and in the recovery phase.



To do this, adequate childcare provision is crucial. It is extremely concerning that the issue of access to childcare was completely absent from the NI Executive Roadmap to recovery. **Access to childcare is a key part of our economic infrastructure and it is necessary for people to be able to return to work place settings, and for those working from home, and is a key component to any pathway to recovery.** It will not be possible to transition to a stage where the lockdown is fully lifted without childcare being treated as a major factor in being able to do this.<sup>20</sup>

**The Employers for Childcare Survey** results published in November 2020 outline some of the key risks the childcare sector in Northern Ireland face in the absence of a robust Childcare Strategy:<sup>21</sup>

- A collapse in the supply of quality childcare and increase in costs for parents and providers,
- Parents having to reduce their hours at work or leave work altogether,
- Our overall economic and societal recovery from Covid-19 will be held back
- Increase in levels of household and child poverty,
- Prolonged negative impact on the social and educational development of our children.



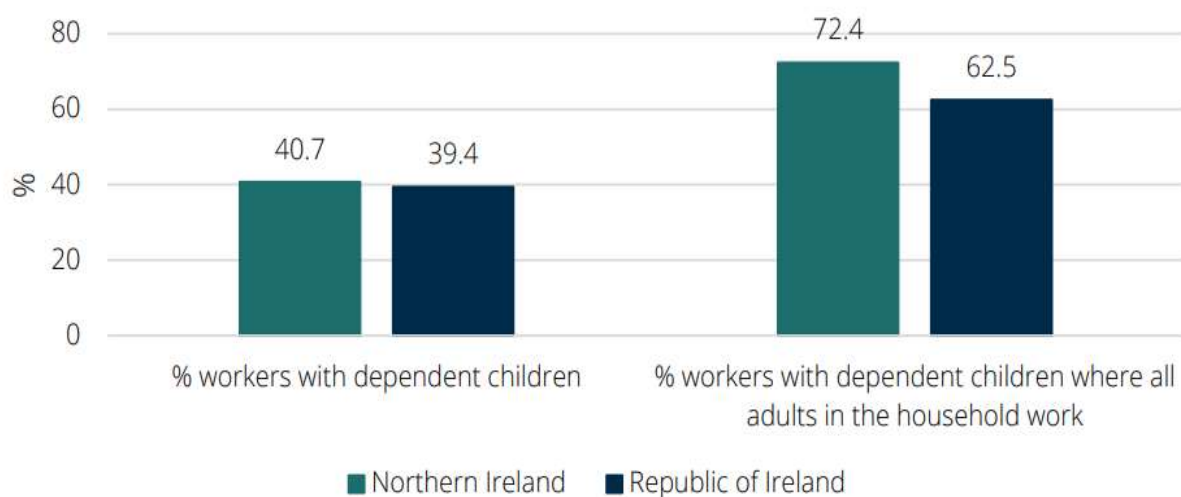
<sup>20</sup> See Childcare for All Campaign Statements on Childcare and COVID-19 ([June 2020](#)); and ([May 2020](#)).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Research suggests that as many as 10,000 childcare settings may be unable to reopen after COVID-19, with roughly 75% blaming financial difficulties for this and 25% referencing fears of parents being able to afford or need the childcare they had previously employed.<sup>22</sup> Research from the Nevin Economic Research Institute found that despite the fact that 40% of families in

Northern Ireland (around 350,000 workers) have dependent children, little consideration appears to be given to the misalignment between the reopening of many sectors of our economy while childcare options remain extremely limited.<sup>23</sup> **Figure 15 from NERI compares the situation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.**

**Figure 15: Employment and Dependent Children in NI and ROI**



Source: Estimates for Northern Ireland are obtained from Q4 2019 data in the Northern Ireland element of the UK Labour force Survey. Estimates for the Republic of Ireland are obtained from 2019 data of the Labour Force Survey.

Source: NERI (2020) 'Employment, Dependent Children and Access to Childcare During the COVID-19 Crisis'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Adams, R. (2020), 'UK childcare industry 'crushed' by coronavirus crisis', The Guardian [article], see also: Berry, C. (2020), 'If we need childcare to reopen the UK economy, why is it so undervalued?' The Guardian [article].

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Lisa Wilson (2020) 'Employment and access to childcare during the Covid-19 crisis' Nevin Economic Research Institute, p. 3

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 4



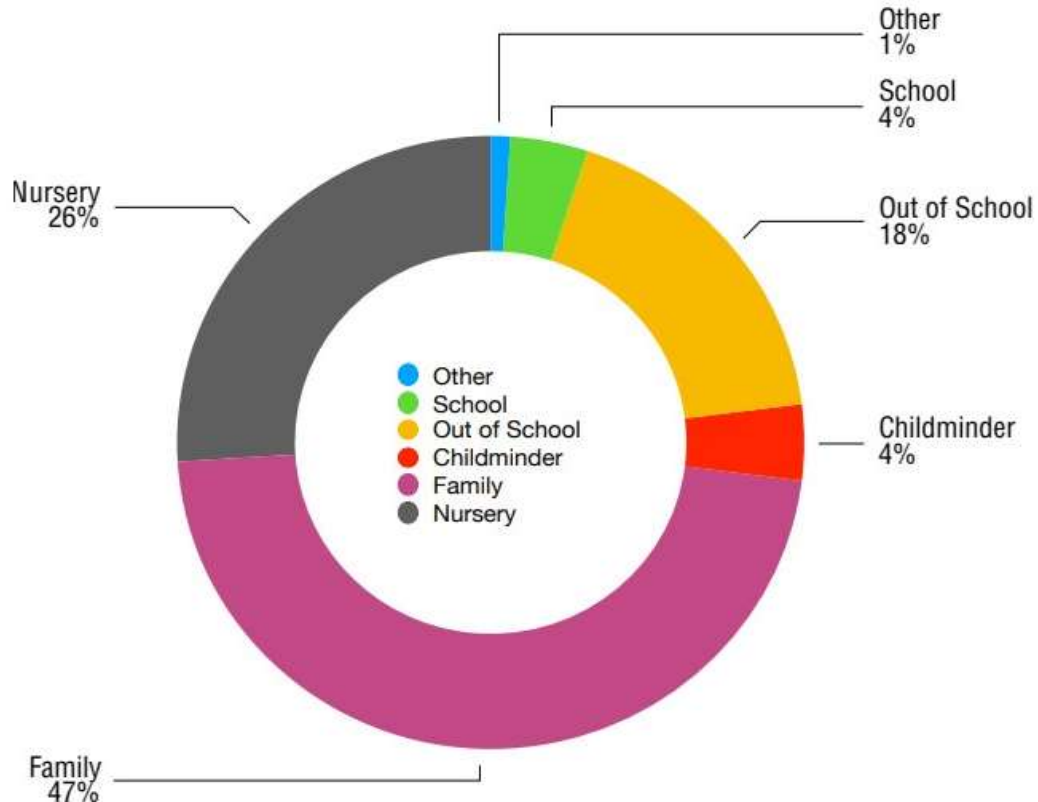


## Sources of Childcare

As you can see from the chart below, the Family Resources Survey conducted between 2015-2016 shows that 47% of families in Northern Ireland rely on support from other family members for childcare, to enable them to access the workforce. This means that without informal childcare provision from family members, almost half of all parents in Northern Ireland would be unable to access the workforce.

40% of families in NI have dependent children and 47% of these rely on support from other family members for childcare.

Clearly, greater understanding of the diverse needs of families, intergenerational relationships and childcare support within families is needed to ensure barriers to work, education and training are removed. The childcare model in Northern Ireland has one of the lowest levels of public provision in the UK. In contrast, 75% of childcare in Scotland is council-run and funded by government.



Source: Family Resources Survey, 2015-2016 (found in ICTU Report 'Childcare in NI'<sup>25</sup>)

<sup>25</sup> ICTU (2019) 'Childcare in Northern Ireland: Cost, Care and Gender Equality,' Better Work, Better Lives [Policy Paper], p. 6.



## Accessibility and Affordability

Research from the Fawcett Society, UK Women's Budget Group and academics also suggests that half of parents with young children are struggling to make ends meet, and women key workers face significantly more anxiety and pressure to work.<sup>26</sup> The lack of an adequate childcare provision in Northern Ireland, as we move further out of lockdown, means that women will continue to face barriers to accessing work, education and training. It also means that more women will have to work outside the home, or struggle with unemployment. These barriers are exacerbated by the rising cost of childcare provision in Northern Ireland.

Research from the Northern Ireland Childcare Survey in 2019<sup>27</sup> shows that the average cost of a full-time childcare place is £166 per week or £8,632 per year. This is an increase of 11% since 2010 when the first NI Childcare Survey was conducted. Furthermore, 50% of families report spending more than 20% of their overall household income on childcare (this rises to 63% for lone parents) and 41% of families resorted to means other than their income to pay for their childcare needs, including savings, an overdraft, loans and credit cards (this rises to 51% for lone parents).



More than 50% of people in Northern Ireland think there is a lack of sufficient childcare in their area, and 45% of mothers attributed a change in their working hours to the cost of childcare.

The WPG believes that childcare should be treated as a key part of our economic infrastructure and a public good, rather than a private family matter, that is preventing many women from working. The cost of not providing accessible and affordable childcare has an impact on parents as well as the economy in general. A recent Trades Union Congress (TUC) report<sup>28</sup> shows how failing to provide such childcare runs the risk of 'reversing decades of progress women have made in the labour market, and increasing the gender pay gap - as well as having a damaging impact on our national economic productivity.'<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> UK WBG et. al., (May 2020), '[Half of parents with young children struggling to make ends meet](#)', UK Women's Budget Group, Fawcett Society, QMUS and LSE.

<sup>27</sup> Employers for Childcare (2019), '[Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2019](#)'

<sup>28</sup> TUC (June 2020), '[Forced out: The cost of getting childcare wrong](#)'

<sup>29</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2017), '[Unpaid carers provide social care worth £57 billion](#)', p.2.

The gendered nature of this issue is evidenced by the fact that five years after a child's birth, only 13% of mums have increased earnings compared to 26% of dads.<sup>30</sup> Women's employment is also most likely to be affected, with 56.2% of mothers having to make a change to their employment due to childcare, compared to 22.4% of fathers.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, 87% of men in paid work were full-time workers compared to 59% of women.<sup>32</sup> Since the crisis began, mums have been 1.5 times more likely than dads to have quit or lost their job or been furloughed.<sup>33</sup>

In particular, we would like to reference TUC concerns<sup>34</sup> that:

*"Women with caring responsibilities and those returning from maternity leave are at higher risk of being unfairly targeted for redundancy and dismissal due to difficulties with their childcare. The Equality and Human Rights Commission have already warned that pregnant women and new mums face being made redundant during the crisis due to discrimination... BME and disabled women also face intersecting barriers to equal participation in the labour market that prevent them from accessing and thriving in the labour market fairly, and additional difficulties accessing childcare could intensify and damage the discrimination they face [...]"*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> ONS (2019) [Families and the Labour Market](#), p.6.

<sup>33</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (2020) ['How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?'](#)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 27., p.4.



## Childcare Workers

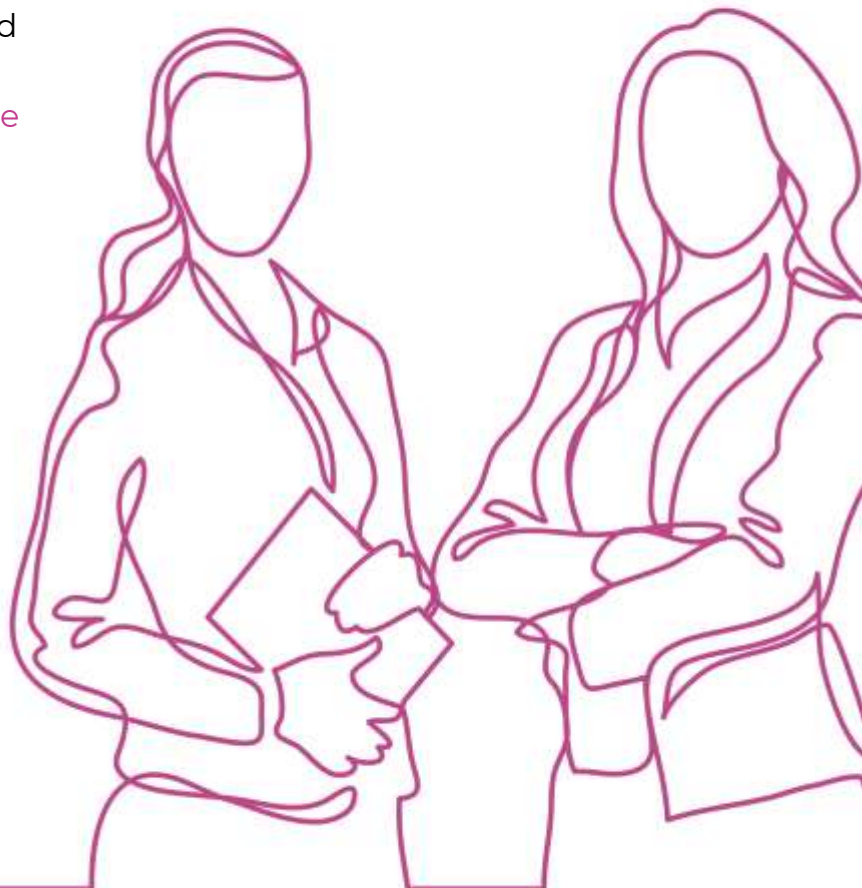
In relation to workers in the childcare sector, there are major concerns relating to the attitudes of undervaluing care work through the underinvestment and gender segregation in the sector.

Almost half of all childcare workers earn below the real living wage (48%). This is a significantly higher figure than the proportion of all workers who earn below the real living wage (30%). More worryingly, the median annual gross pay for childcare workers is almost half of that compared to the average of all workers (£11,028 compared to £21,254).

This is related to the fact that not only are childcare workers likely to earn significantly less per hour worked than the average employee, but they are also more likely to work on a part-time basis. The current situation regarding pay and job quality shows that workers are underpaid and undervalued. If childcare is to become an important and valued service, then the workers who provide that service also require to be valued.

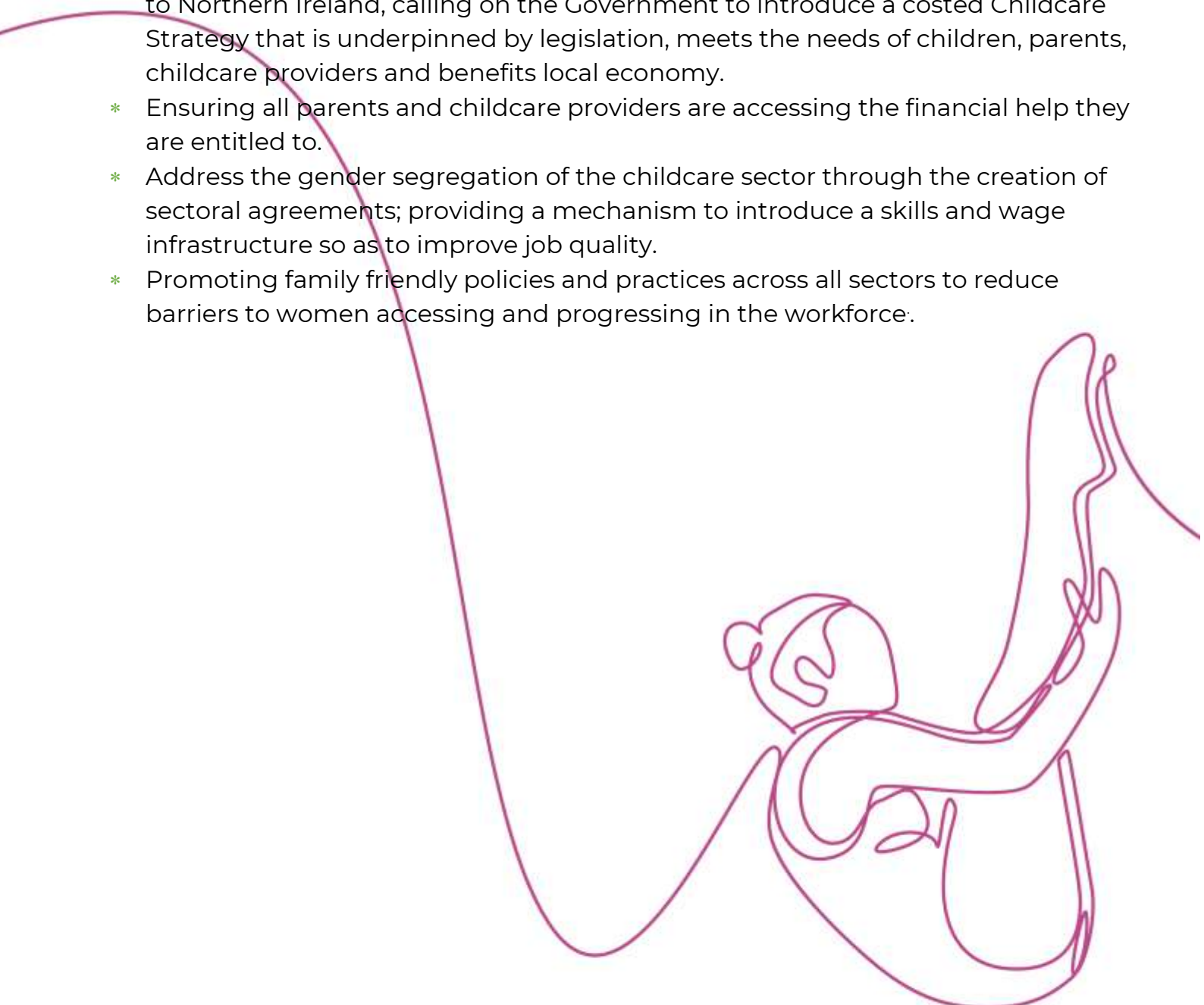
To bring workers into the childcare sector, to maintain staff morale and reduce turnover, there needs to be significant action in properly valuing childcare workers and rewarding skills and experience.

It is clear that a gendered approach to dealing with childcare is urgently needed. Northern Ireland still does not have a childcare strategy, nor a childcare provision, despite commitments in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. The childcare sector is one facing a sustainability crisis and deep gender segregation. Focus needs to be placed on creating greater diversity within the sector to support the needs of BME families and children with disabilities, to remove stereotypes of working in childcare being seen as a “woman’s job,” and to ensure that any provision in place is one that supports the needs of women, families, children, providers and wider society.



## Summary of 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 CEDAW recommendations, noting the particular reference to Northern Ireland, calling on the Government to introduce a costed Childcare Strategy that is underpinned by legislation, meets the needs of children, parents, childcare providers and benefits 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; providing a mechanism to introduce a skills and wage infrastructure so as to improve job quality.
- \* Promoting family friendly policies and practices across all sectors to reduce barriers to women accessing and progressing in the workforce:



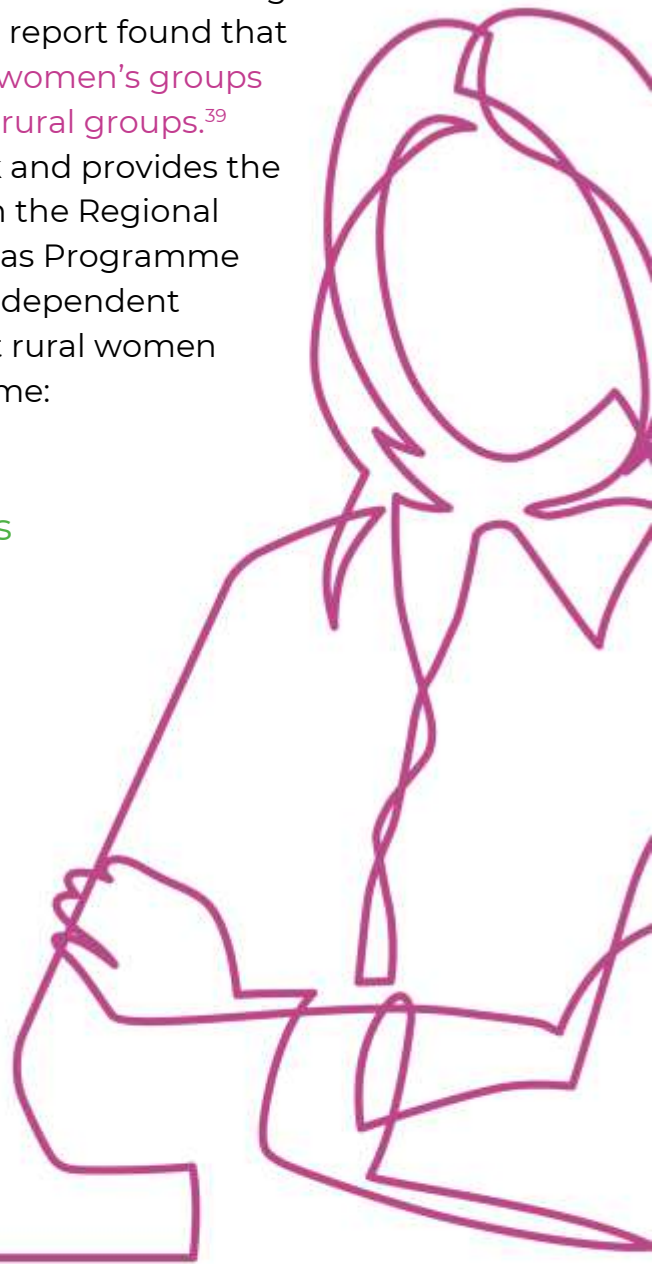


## Rural Women

Gender inequality is amplified for women in rural areas due to Access Poverty.<sup>35</sup> The accessibility of education, training, work and childcare provision and the cost and availability of public transport are factors in determining women's participation; particularly in rural areas.<sup>36</sup> Women in Northern Ireland remain under-represented in public and political life<sup>37</sup> and rural women's participation in public and political life is further hindered by geography and distance from decision making spaces.

Even within the wider women's sector, rural women still need a stronger voice and increased Government funding.<sup>38</sup> A recent report found that 98.7% of Government funding for service delivery to women's groups went towards urban groups, compared with 1.3% for rural groups.<sup>39</sup> NIRWN is the only dedicated rural women's network and provides the regional rural element of support to women through the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas Programme (funded by DAERA Rural Affairs Programmes). An independent Evaluation of this Consortium work concluded<sup>40</sup> that rural women needed additional financial support in this Programme:

“The rural investment in proportional terms is not sufficient to animate and build critical mass versus urban interests (circa 20% of staff resources in the Consortium are linked to rural delivery i.e. two 25 hour posts in NIRWN) which is out of step with the proportion of rural dwellers in NI.”



<sup>35</sup> DAERA (2016) Public [Consultation](#) on TRPSI Framework

<sup>36</sup> NIRWN (2015) 'Rural Women's [Manifesto](#): Rural Women Speak'

<sup>37</sup> NI Assembly (2014) 'Women and Public Appointments in NI: [Briefing Paper](#)'

<sup>38</sup> Evaluation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (Final Report, June 2015) [Unpublished]

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 37.



NI Government funding support for the work of the only dedicated regional service to support rural women in their communities (NIRWN) is now 13% of what it was in 2007.

As a result of no Executive in place for three years this has never been redressed. It is imperative that women in rural areas have proposed future budgets; Programme for government and policy recovery planning assessed for rural impacts to ensure the inequity of Government resourcing does not continue.

In the context of Covid-19, older people are more likely to require critical care and/or die as a result of a coronavirus infection.<sup>41</sup> Rural areas typically have a population distribution skewed to older people compared to urban areas.<sup>42</sup> There are also more older women than men as women have a longer average life span. UK Government advice, which mirrors that in many other European countries, is that those aged over 70 should socially isolate, making them dependent on others to collect shopping and medical prescriptions.

Self-isolating and shielding behaviour will disproportionately impact rural areas through the availability of ('grey') labour for businesses, social enterprises and volunteer work and through the impact of their reduced expenditure on goods and services from local businesses ('grey pound'). As labour relocates to a home working context, this could be more difficult in those rural areas suffering from inferior access to high quality broadband.<sup>43</sup> This weakness will also affect home-schooling during closures and be exacerbated by concurrent demands for limited available bandwidth (data transfer capacity) among multiple household members.<sup>44</sup>

Rural women account for 40% of all women in Northern Ireland, and the responsibility to support rural women falls to all departments, including the Department for the Economy.



41 Wu, Z. and McGoogan, J.M. (2020) '[Characteristics of and Important Lessons from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Outbreak in China](#)' JAMA Network, Vol. 323, pp 1239–1242.

42 Eurostat (2017) '[Eurostat. Statistics on Rural Areas in the EU](#)' Eurostat: Brussels, Belgium, 2017.

43 Commission for Rural Communities (2013) '[Rural Micro-Businesses: What Makes Some Thrive in a Challenging Economic Climate?](#)'

44 Phillipson, J., Gorton, M., Turner, R., et. al. (2020) '[The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Implications for Rural Economies](#)'

The COVID-19 crisis is predicted to have far-reaching consequences that will be felt for years to come. The trajectory of rural development has thus changed, and so must we. We must think differently in order to help rural entrepreneurs cope with economic stresses amid the pandemic. *The added difficulty we face in NI is that, due to Brexit, we will no longer have access to EU Rural Development funding and policy development and we have no indigenous rural development policy of our own.* Development of our own rural policy post Brexit has been halted to prioritise dealing with the pandemic but the timeline for the Protocol implementation remains unchanged.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst the rural voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is adept at balancing social, economic and environmental needs, it has been heavily stretched in the years leading up to the pandemic and now faces even more challenges.<sup>46</sup> This sector is heavily reliant on older volunteers and female leaders, and with social shielding of older populations, the sector is facing challenges linked to labour availability.



<sup>45</sup> UK Government (2019) [Northern Ireland Protocol](#)

<sup>46</sup> Milbourne, L. and Cushman, M. (2015) '[Complying, Transforming or Resisting in the New Austerity? Realigning](#)

[Social Welfare and Independent Action among English Voluntary Organisations.](#)' *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 44, pp 463–485.

There is a need for governments to view organisations in this sector in a similar light to private and public businesses and employees, providing financial support to sustain their viability. Support is especially justified, given that in many rural communities these organisations play the leading role in organising and supporting older and vulnerable residents. These demands need external support, but the VCSE sector often falls between business, charity and household policy frameworks.<sup>47</sup> COVID-19 has demonstrated the imperative for community capacity building and support through the rural VCSE sector, to allow it to help individuals, households and communities during the pandemic and recovery.

This is the opportune time to increase rural women's participation in the digital economy, including digital marketing and digital trade. Of course, this means that the necessary enablers must first be addressed, starting with increasing digital identification for rural small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to allow innovative ways of securing collateral and credit histories. With the social distancing phenomena, the era of gathering rural people in groups for capacity building will end. Development organisations should adapt to ICT-based capacity building. This includes providing digital, virtual, and mobile-based business training, coaching, and mentoring related to economic recovery, digital marketing and communication channels.

<sup>47</sup> Agapitova, N., Sanchez, B., and Tinsley, E. (2017) '[Government Support to the Social Enterprise Sector](#):'

[Comparative Review of Policy Frameworks and Tools](#).' The World Bank: Washington, DC, USA.

## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* Proposed budgets, the Programme for Government and policy recovery plans should take account of rural needs.
- \* Historic underinvestment in rural women should be recognised and efforts should be made to redress these when future resourcing is being planned.
- \* Recognition that all Government Departments have a responsibility to deliver for rural women, not only DAERA.
- \* Rural women should be engaged in future rural development policy planning and development.
- \* Rural women should have dedicated rural development resourcing that takes account of gender differentials and COVID-19 impacts.
- \* Northern Ireland should continue post Brexit to learn from EU policy development and innovation in order to replicate what is advantageous to NI.
- \* Government should 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; in particular, 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.



## A Feminist Green Economy

The NI Executive commitments to ‘tackle climate change head on with a strategy to address the immediate and longer-term impacts of climate change’ in the New Decade, New Approach agreement<sup>48</sup> must be met from a perspective that will support tackling gender inequality.

The lockdown exposed the severe impact of governmental decisions to neglect public services on our society, with many existing socio-economic inequalities being exacerbated during the lockdown. The need for basic levels of income, access to food, childcare, a fully-functioning health service, education, changing considerations of “low-skilled” work to essential work, recognising the importance of unpaid care, digital poverty, holiday hunger, access to the internet and many more factors have been the topic of a lot of conversations in recent months.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reassess our economic decision making and recent history of severely under-resourced public goods. Northern Ireland would not have been able to cope without those working in the areas above, and it is necessary to recognise this undervalued work; redistribute care responsibilities and reduce the levels of harm to our social, health, economic and environmental infrastructures.



<sup>48</sup> [New Decade, New Approach Agreement](#) (2020) p.8.



The WPG endorse taking an intersectional feminist perspective to a Green New Deal for Northern Ireland in relation to our economic recovery and the NI Executive's aims for tackling climate change. The UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, 'Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK'<sup>49</sup> outlines some ideas of what a Feminist Green New Deal might look like:

- *Redressing economic and social disadvantages faced by women,*
- *Changing social norms of gender at home and at work to share and value care,*
- *Increasing women's representation in all aspects of public life and decision-making,*
- *Ending violence against women and girls.*

The WPG would add that in the context of Northern Ireland, the need for women's involvement in peacebuilding processes should also be a priority, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>50</sup>

### Summary of Recommendations:

- \* Co-designing social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account,
- \* 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,

*(continued on next page)*



<sup>49</sup> Cohen, M. and MacGregor, S. (2020), '[Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK: A Paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy](#)', UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations (2000) Security Council: [Resolution 1325](#) (UNSCR 1325) Women, Peace and Security.

- \* 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.
- \* 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 NI economy 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.
- \* 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.
- \* Promote trade justice within supply chains and create ethical procurement guidelines in line with the above recommendations.



# Health Pillar



## Disabled Women

Disabled women and girls can be subject to discrimination on two levels; marginalised on account of their disability, and on account of their gender. The Government needs to recognise and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) effectively within Northern Ireland to ensure that disabled women live in an equal society which is free from economic, social and cultural barriers.

Only 7% of disabled people are employed, but those who are face low-paid work and underemployment. In addition, disabled women earn 22.1% less than non-disabled men, 11.8% less than disabled men, and 26% of households with a disabled person live in poverty compared to 22% of households overall.

Disabled women are set to lose 13% of their annual net income by 2021 due to cumulative tax-benefit changes and austerity. Furthermore, disabled single mothers will have lost 21% of their net income by 2021, and 32% if their child is also disabled.<sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Women's Budget Group (2018), '[Disabled Women and Austerity](#)'



## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* Promote the employment of disabled women in all sectors, and support entrepreneurship.
- \* Introduce staff education programmes, based on the social model of disability, to effect attitudinal change in all sectors; but particularly health and education sectors.
- \* NI Assembly and local councils should work with supermarkets to recognise that disabled people/women's needs for groceries and shopping are prioritised.
- \* Creation of intersectional strategies for future emergencies on the groups that share protected characteristics so that disabled people impacted will not be deprived of food, similar to that of a crisis zone.
- \* Ensure COVID-19 information is available in accessible formats such as Easy read, Large print, and in BSL and in various languages.
- \* Ensure that disabled parents are prioritised for social care support. Require local councils to assess those disabled parents facing increased need for support as a result of school closures, limited access to childcare and other effects of lockdown,
- \* Ensure all disabled women's rights are upheld and protected throughout the entirety and recovery of COVID-19,
- \* Create greater flexibility in the provision of care packages, particularly for disabled women trapped in social isolation and in danger from Domestic Abuse.



# Social Justice Pillar



## Racial Justice

The WPG stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. We are deeply concerned about how the PSNI treated the Black Lives Matter protesters in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry on Saturday 6th June 2020. We note that it has been confirmed that a last-minute amendment was made to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020<sup>52</sup> just hours before the anti-racism protests started, which attached enforcement powers to the regulations and enabled the PSNI to fine those in attendance; despite evidence of safety and social distancing being in place. *Since the protest, the PSNI's actions have been described as both discriminatory<sup>53</sup> and unlawful.<sup>54</sup>* 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.

Racism is an issue that is highly prevalent in Northern Ireland. In 2016-17, statistics show that racially motivated hate crime overtook sectarian hate crimes<sup>55</sup> for the first time in the history of Northern Ireland. *More recently, the PSNI recorded 936 racist incidents including 626 racist crimes<sup>56</sup> between April 2019 and March 2020.* Many people may not have felt able to report to the police and so the real figure is likely much higher. We are calling for the urgent creation and implementation of a Racial Equality Strategy (which was already committed to within the New Decade, New Approach agreement) and for further measures to be taken in the Programme for Government to tackle the systemic racism that exists in NI.



<sup>52</sup> Department of Health (2020) 'The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) ([Amendment No. 5](#)) Regulations'

<sup>53</sup> Young, D. (2020) "[Policing of Black Lives Matter Protests was Discriminatory – Ombudsman](#)" Belfast Telegraph [article]

<sup>54</sup> Northern Ireland Policing Board (2020) '[Report](#) on the Thematic Review of the Policing Response to COVID-19'

<sup>55</sup> PSNI (2018) "[Trends in Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes Recorded](#) by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2017/18," p.6

<sup>56</sup> PSNI (2020) "[Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation](#) Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland," p.4

In Northern Ireland, racism is so deeply embedded in our society that it is even in our built environment. In Newry, there is a statue and a street dedicated to John Mitchel, a supporter of the trade in enslaved people who called for the reopening of the African slave trade in 1957 and described Black people as “innately inferior.” We have a duty to recognise our own privilege and begin to dismantle the pillars that uphold systemic racism; including aspects of our built environment that glorify prominent racists.

We also support calls for the closure of the Larne House Immigration Detention Centre in the Larne PSNI Station. This centre houses women and men together. There is no women-only recreation space and so many women are forced to self-confine to their rooms due to safety concerns. The poor conditions and inadequate facilities for traumatised people needlessly incarcerated here has been highlighted by HM Inspectorate of Prisons multiple times. *It is entirely inappropriate to house an immigration detention centre in a PSNI station as this prevents people with irregular immigration status from coming to the PSNI for help. This is a situation that disproportionately impacts people of colour.*



In the context of COVID-19, evidence suggests that the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on racialised communities and health and care staff.

The NHS Confederation BME Leadership Network have outlined the below concerns to ensure senior health leaders and policy makers can make informed decision-making to address this:<sup>57</sup>

- Overrepresentation of BME health and care professionals among COVID-19 fatalities.
- Some BME groups are at higher risk of certain diseases and conditions and a number of BME staff from various socio-economic backgrounds have died from the virus.
- Better and more transparent collection and reporting of ethnicity data is needed to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on racialised communities.

Research from the WBG, LSE, Queen Mary University of London and the Fawcett Society has also produced significant evidence on racialised women and the impact of COVID-19:<sup>58</sup>

- Women of colour are more worried about debt as a result of the pandemic - 49.9% compared to 37.1% of white women and 34.2% of white men.
- Work-related anxiety for those working outside the home was highest among people of colour, with 65.1% of women and 73.8% of men reporting anxiety.
- Of those working from home, a higher proportion of people of colour (41.0% of women and 39.8% of men) reported working more than they did before the pandemic compared to white people (29.2% of women and 28.5% of men).
- Nearly half of women of colour (45.4%) said they were struggling to cope with all the different demands on their time at the moment (work, home schooling, unpaid care, domestic labour) compared to 34.6% of white women and 29.6% of white men.
- For all questions regarding struggling to balance paid work and unpaid care, women of colour were the most likely to report struggling and white men were the least likely.
- Twice as many women and men of colour reported that they had recently lost support from the government (42.5% and 48.3%) than white women and men (12.7% and 20.6%).
- Only 47.4% of people of colour said there were people outside of their household who they could rely on for help, compared with 57.2% of white people.

<sup>57</sup> NHS Confederation (2020) [BME Leadership Network Member Briefing](#)

<sup>58</sup> WBG et. al. (2020), '[BAME women and COVID-19 - Research Evidence](#)'





## Summary of 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.
- \* 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.
- \* Support scrapping of 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.





## Politics, Public Life, Peacebuilding & Decision Making

The 2014 Stormont House Agreement (SHA) outlined structures to deal with the past in Northern Ireland, contained no specific mechanisms for increasing the involvement of women. The COVID-19 crisis with its particular impacts on women's income, socio-economic independence and increased caring responsibilities is likely to compound barriers to women's involvement in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.

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 and economic decision making.

Multiple reports, including annual reports of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland; the Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security (2014); and repeated CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations,<sup>59</sup> have concluded that women's under-representation in political and public life and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland is a serious matter to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

<sup>59</sup> Concluding Observations [2019](#), 2013, 2008 on examinations of the UK under CEDAW

In the context of COVID-19 recovery planning, it is imperative that women are included in decision making across all departments in Northern Ireland. Already, we have seen recovery planning take place with little to no consultation with the women's sector, who have been consistently producing evidence of the disproportionate impact COVID-19 is having on women. We have also seen significant delays to all commitments set out in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. COVID-19 is exacerbating existing inequalities, and women's equality cannot be de-prioritised due to COVID-19 response planning. Rather, gender equality should be embedded within all governmental decision-making relating to COVID-19, health, the economy, education, infrastructure, budgets, the Programme for Government and more.

### Summary of Recommendations:

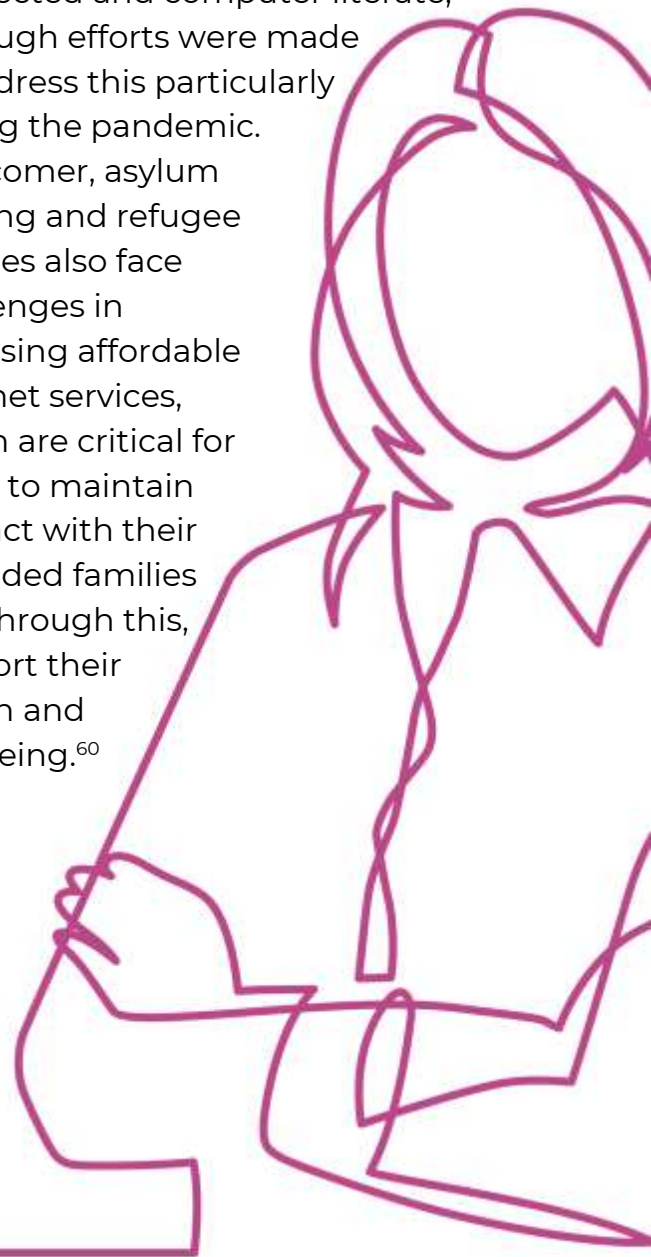
- \* Ensure women's groups are adequately represented in all departmental COVID-19 recovery planning procedures.
- \* Ensure the women's sector is consulted with and included in the co-design of all departmental strategies and the Programme for Government.



## Digital Divide and Access Poverty

Access to digital technologies is still limited in Northern Ireland, primarily due to uneven broadband access and coverage, especially in rural areas. Many women, in particular older women, also report lack of skills and confidence in using technology. Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) hosted a conference on CEDAW in January 2020, featuring CEDAW Committee vice chair Nicole Ameline as keynote speaker. In her keynote, Mme Ameline highlighted the gender aspects of the digital divide and emphasised that women and girls need to be fully engaged in the development of technology, including artificial intelligence. Mme Ameline emphasised the risks of artificial intelligence, as **current evidence indicates algorithms are male oriented and often produce discriminatory results for women in all spheres of life**, from assessing eligibility for loans or credit cards to accessing social protection. This is also true when it comes to the use of facial recognition technologies (where it is allowed) as women are more likely to be misidentified.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gendered aspects of the digital divide, with reports of mothers struggling to support their children's education on mobile phones, and **teenagers scrambling to complete schoolwork on mobiles or a single family laptop**. Older women are among the groups least likely to be digitally connected and computer literate, although efforts were made to address this particularly during the pandemic. Newcomer, asylum seeking and refugee families also face challenges in accessing affordable internet services, which are critical for them to maintain contact with their extended families and through this, support their health and wellbeing.<sup>60</sup>



<sup>60</sup> See the [Participation and Practice of Rights \(PPR\) campaign](#) 'Internet Access for All' with 670 signatures [as of 07.01.21]

It is also important to note that digital literacy and poverty among vulnerable sections of our community is likely to be a barrier to the effectiveness of contact tracing apps. This includes, though is not exclusive to, the elderly and those with irregular immigration status.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential of technology in connecting people and also in providing support services, and these advantages should be shared out among all of society.



### Summary of 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.





# Brexit and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland





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

Women in Northern Ireland are greatly underrepresented in public and political life. This was clearly evident in the lead up to the Brexit referendum and Brexit negotiations. Under-representation in political negotiations and decision-making, alongside several other areas lacking in gender parity, such as access to education, training, work, affordable childcare and more, highlight the profoundly negative impact Brexit is set to have on women in Northern Ireland. This is compounded with the political instability creating several barriers to women having their voices heard, and the shifts in focus by governments in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many areas of women's human rights have yet to be achieved, and Brexit has added a new threat to existing, hard-fought rights women currently have.

Northern Ireland faces unique constitutional complexities meaning Brexit presents a unique threat to this region.<sup>61</sup> With women's voices being largely absent from negotiations, at a local, national and EU level, it is necessary to analyse the unique and disproportionate impact Brexit will have on the women of Northern Ireland.

We note the UK Government's commitment to 'no diminution' of certain rights, including equality rights, under Article 2 of the Northern Ireland Protocol.<sup>62</sup> It has also committed to keeping pace with any EU changes to certain equality laws including particular gender equality laws.<sup>63</sup> However, there are a number of issues regarding women's rights in the context of Brexit which have yet to be addressed.



<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Consortium (2018), '[Brexit and Northern Ireland: Rights at Risk Report](#)'

<sup>62</sup> UK Government (2020) '[UK Government commitment to 'no diminution of rights' in Northern Ireland](#)' [Explainer document]

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Women's Rights Achieved Through EU Membership

Many of the rights we enjoy today have come through membership of the EU over the past four decades; particularly in areas of economic activity and employment law. For women, there are great concerns that Brexit will erode many of these protections. Some of these protections include:<sup>64</sup> equality between men and women,<sup>65</sup> the right to equal pay for equal work,<sup>66</sup> protection against discrimination on the ground of pregnancy and maternity,<sup>67</sup> introducing measures to provide specific advantages to the underrepresented gender,<sup>68</sup> prohibition of discriminations on the grounds of sex,<sup>69</sup> and introduction of paid holidays.<sup>70</sup>

Other areas of EU legislation, representation and funding that are relevant to the protection and enhancement of women's rights and participation include the European Protection order, which is significant in recognising women's rights as they cross the border; the Rural Development Programme;<sup>71</sup> the European Social Fund (important for increasing women's access to the workforce); and the European Parliamentary Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.<sup>72</sup>

## Missed Opportunities: Current EU Work on Rights

There are many missed future opportunities for the enhancement of rights that would benefit the lives of women in Northern Ireland. For example, as highlighted by the Human Rights Consortium, the EU has also sought to extend parental rights to leave<sup>73</sup> and encourage better childcare support for families<sup>74</sup> with the strategic aim of reducing the gender pay gap and advancing women's rights more

generally. Furthermore, as NIRWN have highlighted, there is a new ongoing consultation of trade unions and employers launched at EU level focusing on a new package of rights to improve work-life balance, including proposals for carers' leave, flexible working and stronger protections from dismissal for new mothers.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the EU recognises the need for wide-spread structural change to deal with systematic gender discrimination through their commitment to Gender Mainstreaming and the [Gender Recast Directive 2006](#). The Gender Recast Directive covers a range of areas including access to employment, promotion, vocational training schemes and working conditions to ensure the rights of women are considered central to decision making.

<sup>65</sup> The [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) (2012)

<sup>66</sup> [Article 119 Treaty](#) (2016) establishing the European Economic Community.

<sup>67</sup> This is still an issue in Northern Ireland today: Equality Commission Northern Ireland (2016) ["Expecting Equality: A Formal Investigation into the Treatment of Pregnant Workers and Mothers in NI Workplaces"](#)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>69</sup> Sex and other grounds for discrimination are covered in Article 21, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Ibid. 60)

<sup>70</sup> NIRWN (2018) [Rural Voices Report](#), p.30: 'Many of the two million workers who had no paid holiday before the Working Time Directive, were part-time working women'; Human Rights Consortium (2018) [Rights at Risk Report](#), p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 65 (NIRWN 'Rural Voices Report 2018')

<sup>72</sup> Alongside various EU funding streams that support the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

<sup>73</sup> EU Council (2010) [Directive 2010/18/EU](#) implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave (8<sup>th</sup> March 2010)

<sup>74</sup> European Commission (2013) ["Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage"](#) Recommendations.

<sup>75</sup> Trades Union Congress (TUC) (2016) ["Women Workers' Rights and the Risks of Brexit"](#)

It is evident that women in Northern Ireland are in line to face the brunt of the impact of Brexit. The UK Women's Budget Group maintains that women will be adversely impacted by the economic impacts of Brexit.<sup>76</sup> This can only get worse for women in Northern Ireland, who have greatly suffered from the past decade of austerity and are deeply concerned about the impact of welfare reform<sup>77</sup> and future austerity on gender equality.<sup>78</sup> In particular, the economic consequences of Brexit are set to have disproportionately negative impacts on rural women, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women, women of colour, women living on the border, migrant women, as they lose many human rights protections and funding streams supporting their participation and empowerment.

Women in Northern Ireland are already facing great barriers due to political instability, an arguably failed peace process, catching up on legislation after three years of a collapsed Assembly, the lack of implementation of the UNSCR 1325, an outdated Northern Ireland Gender Strategy, unprecedented levels of poverty and having limited representation in Brexit negotiations. With all the hard-fought women's rights protections won at an EU level now at risk, and many human rights still failing to have been implemented at all, there are many reasons to be deeply concerned about the impact of Brexit on the women in Northern Ireland.

## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* A gendered approach must be taken towards all policy making relating to Brexit; for equal representation of women in negotiations; and for the hard-won EU rights for women to be protected and enhanced in Northern Ireland.
- \* Northern Ireland should continue post Brexit to learn from EU policy development and innovation in order to replicate what is advantageous to NI.
- \* 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 impacted by differing food standards post-Brexit.



<sup>76</sup> UK Women's Budget Group (2017) '[Economic Impact of Brexit on Women](#)'

<sup>77</sup> Harding, S. (2019), '[Impact of Ongoing Austerity: Women's Perspectives](#)', Women's Regional Consortium.

<sup>78</sup> NIWEP (2018), 'Women and gender equality in a changing Europe: A roundtable to explore women's priorities in Brexit' [Unpublished]

# International Best Practice





## The Purple Pact: Economics that Work for Women

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) proposals for COVID-19 recovery draw from The Purple Pact,<sup>79</sup> an EWL initiative launched in early 2020, which sets out principles for feminist economics in Europe. **The aim of the Pact is economic wellbeing for all and full participation of women in all areas of life**, and it also emphasises that feminist economics strives for peace and wellbeing for all, on a healthy planet. The core proposal of the Pact is a new economic framework based on three pillars: (1) A new macro-economic policy framework encompassing three fundamental dimensions: economic justice, social justice and environmental justice, (2) A universal social care system with an infrastructure that can provide social and care services for all and quality services which are accessible and affordable, (3) An inclusive labour market where equality, social protection and caring take centre stage.

### *Key issues within existing economic models that work against gender equality:*

- GDP has limitations as a measure of economic well-being, and critically does not include the value of unpaid care and voluntary work, which means that this is ignored in economic decision-making. Failure to address this, along with failure to address environmental degradation, sends harmful signals to public and private decision-makers and encourages unsustainable investment and consumption patterns.
- Education must be treated as an investment, rather than an expenditure as is current practice in national accounts. Education is critical for a future sustainable economy, and is also an investment in the prevention of future burdens in relation to health, crime, unemployment and so on.
- The financialisation of the economy works against the productive activities that directly contribute to the employment and wellbeing of most people. Similarly, unfair tax competition between states in Europe, where labour is taxed much more stringently than capital income and states are allowed to create tax incentives for multinational corporations, creates perverse conditions that in practice encourage tax evasion and fuel economic and political corruption.

<sup>79</sup> European Women's Lobby (2020) "[The Purple Pact](#): A Feminist Approach to the Economy"

## Summary of Recommendations:

- \* 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.

## Initiatives at UN Level

The UN Global Compact<sup>80</sup> has developed a series of policy briefs designed to guide stakeholders on policy and practical action designed to support companies to recover stronger and build back better.<sup>81</sup> These include a brief on gender equality,<sup>82</sup> which emphasises the critical role women play in sustainable and resilient economies, while highlighting the specific gendered issues and risks that the pandemic has underlined. The brief also provides access to resources developed within the UN, including gender impact assessment tools and checklists for gender responsive recovery. **Actions recommended by the Compact in this brief include:**

- 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
- Honour existing contracts with women-owned businesses, support their recovery and engage with them as supply chains are re-established.
- 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.

<sup>80</sup> [UN Global Impact Support for Businesses Resource](#) [Website]

<sup>81</sup> UN Global Impact (2020) [20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign](#) [Website]

<sup>82</sup> UN Global Compact (2020) ["COVID-19 Impact Brief: Gender Equality"](#) [Website]

UN Women has been very active in developing guidance for stakeholders on how gender equality can be effectively integrated in COVID-19 response and recovery, and have highlighted the need for action to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. The key actions set out for governments include; ensuring appropriate resourcing for organisations supporting victims and survivors of gender-based and domestic violence, and ensuring women are at the centre of policy change, response and recovery. **A critical element needed is sex-disaggregated data to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on women, domestic violence and also on the economic activities of women.**

### Summary of 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.





## Conclusion

The Feminist Recovery plan provides a roadmap to recovery that will address gender inequality in Northern Ireland. This plan has been created by experts working in women's rights, LGBT+ sector, human rights, trade unions, campaigning organisations, rural groups NGOs and more. This plan provides significant evidence under the multiple pillars, including:

1. Economic Justice Pillar
2. Health Pillar
3. Social Justice Pillar
4. Cultural Pillar
5. Brexit and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland
6. International Best Practice

Experts have provided evidence under each pillar of this plan and our recommendations are clear - the recovery from COVID-19 cannot come on the backs of women. If the recommendations throughout this plan are taken on board, significant progress will have been made to tackle deep gender inequality in Northern Ireland.

### Further Information

The evidence and recommendations included in this report are department-specific and have been specifically developed for the Department for the Economy. The full WPG Feminist Recovery Plan can be accessed [here](#), which includes more detail on the issues raised in this report and further recommendations for other NI departments, the NI Executive and the UK Government.

*For questions or queries regarding the WPG  
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## Snapshot

Although the Feminist Recovery Plan was published in July 2020, as of February 2021, the majority of issues highlighted in the Plan are yet to be addressed. **It is crucial that the Department for the Economy works with other NI Departments to tackle the issues raised in this report.** As a matter of urgency, the Department should:

- \* Introduce a fully funded Childcare Strategy which recognises the provision of affordable and accessible childcare as a necessary facilitator of women's full and equal participation in the economy.
- \* Use gender budgeting to inform all economic decision-making and encourage other Departments to do the same.
- \* Meaningfully engage with women's sector organisations in the drafting of the upcoming government budget (2021).
- \* Carefully consider the gendered impacts of all policies and take action to mitigate against any adverse impacts.