

Women's Policy Group NI

WPG Response to Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill 1st February 2021

Introduction:

The [Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) (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, NGOs, LGBT+ organisations, support service providers, 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. We welcome the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the NI Assembly in February 2020. It is imperative that urgent action is taken in Northern Ireland to tackle the climate emergency that we all face. Given the limited time remaining in this NI Assembly Mandate, we would urge the Department to support the Private Members' Climate Change Bill, rather than introduce a separate Climate Change Bill.

The WPG published our COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan in July 2020, and made reference for the need to treat care as a part of our essential infrastructure and for care to be prioritised as a low-emission and green sector. We also made recommendations to introduce a Feminist Green New Deal. We would like to take this opportunity to again outline the recommendations we made in relation to climate change in the Feminist Recovery Plan. We will also be sending a bespoke summary report of the Feminist Recovery Plan to the Department/Minister.

We hope to see these recommendations reflected in future work to tackle the Climate Emergency by the NI Assembly. For questions or queries regarding this response to the Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill, please contact Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, rachel.powell@Wrda.net.

Signed,

Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland

General Comments on Discussion Document for a Climate Change Bill:

Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK or Ireland with no binding greenhouse gas reduction targets and this needs to change urgently. It is crucial that any targets set in a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill are based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence available, rather than political opinion.

In the creation of NI legislation, it is important to make robust legislation that sets achievable targets. The UK target to be net zero by 2050 is inadequate, and research by Tyndall Centre for Climate Action shows that Northern Ireland could achieve net-zero by 2042¹. More ambitious targets for NI should be created given the existential threat of the climate emergency.

We note the cross-party Private Members' Climate Change Bill currently tabled with the Speaker's Office in the NI Assembly. This Bill includes the ambitious and achievable target for greenhouse gas reductions of net-zero by 2045 and the WPG welcomes this.

Further, this Bill includes provisions for 5-year carbon budgets and is progressing through the Assembly. The Private Members' Climate Bill has been developed by legal experts, scientists, academics and environmentalists, and this is a welcome approach. This bill would build on commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create the necessary legislative basis for multi-level climate action.

The WPG is concerned that a separate bill from the Department may slow down progress, particularly as the current mandate is due to end in 2022. Therefore, the WPG believes that the Department should support and facilitate the passage of the Private Members' Climate Change Bill as a matter of urgency in order to avoid the duplication of effort and lost time in tackling the climate emergency.

In light of this, the WPG would like to raise our recommendations on a Feminist Green New Deal as outlined in our WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan in response to this discussion document. These recommendations would support the Private Members' Climate Change Bill in its aims to reduce emissions, tackle the climate emergency as a matter of urgency, and ensure that legislation benefits the people of Northern Ireland.

We believe the Department should facilitate and support the implementation of the Private Members' Climate Change Bill, and that work to reduce emissions includes the recommendations made in this response document by the WPG.

The existing Private Members' Bill has strong cross-party support, has been developed in consultation with experts in this field, and would provide a robust mechanism for achieving the necessary greenhouse gas reductions.

In particular, we support calls for the Executive Office to establish a Climate Action Plan (CAP), which could incorporate many of the recommendations we have made in this response.

¹ Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (Feb 2021), 'Setting Climate Commitments for Northern Ireland', *University of Manchester*, <https://carbonbudget.manchester.ac.uk/reports/NI/>

Endorsement:

The WPG would also like to endorse the response on this discussion document from Friends of the Earth, as an organisation with expertise in this area.

Investing in Care to Reduce Emissions:

The climate emergency is one that needs urgent action from the NI Executive within this mandate, and our response to this discussion document is to call for a creative approach that will also support aims of gender equality.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted the very essential nature of both paid and unpaid care in NI, as our society would not have been able to function without them in this ongoing pandemic. We are calling for care to be placed at the core of our economy, and for investment into care as a means of achieving goals to tackle climate change.

Investing in care will not only strengthen our society and support tackling climate change, it can also be a driver in recognising the unequal distribution of care between men and women. In recognising this unequal distribution, and creating measures to address this, it will support aims of achieving gender equality in Northern Ireland and to meet net-zero emission aims.

Rationale for Northern Ireland Legislation:

As noted in the discussion document, Northern Ireland is significantly behind other UK regions in reducing carbon emissions:

‘In total, the UK reduced emissions by 43% between the base year and 2018. England and Scotland reduced emissions by 46% and 45% respectively. Wales and Northern Ireland reduced emissions by 31% and 20% respectively’²

Whilst the UK Climate Change Act 2008 extends to Northern Ireland, it is clear that the structural differences of the Northern Ireland Economy alongside the considerably lower reductions in carbon emissions warrants the introduction of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act as a matter of urgency.

In section 4 of the discussion document, the rationale for Northern Ireland legislation is outlined as:

Northern Ireland Climate Change Legislation would:

- Be a cornerstone to a response to the declarations of a climate emergency by the UK and Northern Ireland;
- Legally underpin requirements for delivering international agreements and policies (e.g. Paris Agreement);
- Deliver requirements of the NDNA agreement in regard to climate change legislation;
- Be an incremental legal tool in building climate change resilience within Northern Ireland;

² Discussion Document on a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill, p.18.

- Underpin the Northern Ireland Executive's Green Growth Strategy and delivery Framework; and
- Drive forward a local low carbon, circular economy³.

We would like to add another rationale to this list, in that Climate Change Legislation could:

- Promote gender equality in Northern Ireland through prioritising investment for social infrastructure in low-carbon sectors, such as childcare, and contribute towards economic growth.

If the recommendations we have outlined throughout this response are incorporated into a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland and any Green New Deal, we could make significant progress in simultaneously tackling the climate emergency, recognising the essential nature of care, and contributing towards gender equality.

In taking this approach, a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill could be locally-led and designed to meet the circumstances in Northern Ireland, as highlighted by the Climate Change Committee in 2016⁴. Through a NI specific approach, the Private Members' Climate Change Bill could take account for the lack of a government funded childcare provision, the greater gender segregation of labour markers in the social care sector, and create unique approaches to boosting economic growth.

Therefore, the WPG fully agrees that local legislation is needed to tackle the climate emergency. In creating aims for Green Growth, this must be done with a gender lens. We urge the Department to recognise the need to create targets within this mandate, and to do this in supporting the facilitation and implementation of the Private Members' Climate Change Bill.

A summary of recommendations made by the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan in relation to tackling the climate emergency will now be outlined. The full WPG Feminist Recovery Plan can be accessed [here](#).

³ Ibid, p.24.

⁴ The Climate Change Committee 2016, 'The appropriateness of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act - Northern Ireland Report (2015 update)', <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-appropriateness-of-a-northern-ireland-climate-change-act/>

WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan - Summary of Climate Change Recommendations:

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

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

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

The WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan publication was prepared by:

Rachel Powell (Women's Resource and Development Agency)
Elaine Crory (Women's Resource and Development Agency)
Jonna Monaghan (Northern Ireland Women's European Platform)
Siobhán Harding (Women's Support Network)
Alexa Moore (Transgender NI)
Robyn Scott (Committee on the Administration of Justice)
Eliza Browning (Committee on the Administration of Justice)
Uná Boyd (Committee on the Administration of Justice)
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)
Gráinne Teggart (Amnesty International UK)
Emma Osbourne (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland)
Aisha O'Reilly (Politics Plus)
Karen Sweeney (Women's Support Network)
Jacqui McLoughlin (Women's Forum NI)

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

Women's Resource and Development Agency
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
Transgender NI
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee
Reclaim the Night Belfast
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Politics Plus
Belfast Feminist Network

HERe NI
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Reclaim the Agenda
Alliance for Choice
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
Women's Support Network
DemocraShe
Raise Your Voice

Women's Policy group NI - COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan

A Feminist Green Economy:

We note 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 agreement⁵. The NI Executive commitments include⁶:

- *The Executive's strategies to reduce carbon emissions will be reviewed in light of the Paris Climate Change Accord and the climate crisis.*
- *A new Energy Strategy will set ambitious targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero-carbon society.*
- *The Executive should bring forward a Climate Change Act to give environmental targets a strong legal underpinning.*
- *The Executive will establish an Independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee this work and ensure targets are met.*
- *The Economic Strategy will support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal.*
- *The Executive will create a plan to eliminate plastic pollution.*
- *RHI will be closed down and replaced by a scheme that effectively cuts carbon emissions.*

In particular, the WPG would like to make reference to aims for a "fair and just transition" alongside the Economic Strategy that will "support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal". This section of our plan will make recommendations relating to the NI Executive aims for a Green New Deal as identified above from a perspective that will support tackling gender inequality.

In recovering from COVID-19, many have discussed the need to avoid returning to the status quo or having some sort of "new normal" being necessary. The Women's Policy Group would agree with the need to reassess our economic priorities as we recover from COVID-19. The lockdown exposed the severe impact of governmental decisions to neglect public services on our society. Many of the existing socio-economic inequalities were exacerbated during the lockdown, as the lack of resilience or ability to cope with the ramifications of the pandemic became glaringly obvious. 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;

⁵ New Decade, New Approach Agreement, p.8 (available online): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf [accessed 24.06.20].

⁶ Ibid, p.44.

redistribute care responsibilities and reduce the levels of harm to our social, health, economic and environmental infrastructures.

The Women's Policy Group NI endorses 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'*⁷. As described by Cohen and MacGregor in the WBG and WEN paper, discussions on Green New Deal frameworks rarely incorporate gender, race and class⁸. The UK WBG and WEN paper looks at a Green New Deal from an intersectional feminist perspective, and it is an approach that the WPG would endorse for Northern Ireland in relation to our economic recovery and the NI Executive's aims for tackling climate change.

We have already highlighted many gender-equality priorities throughout our [Feminist Recovery Plan](#) and how they align to economic decision making, and will highlight further gender equality priorities throughout the entirety of this feminist recovery plan. Before highlighting what a Feminist Green New Deal may look like, it is important to consider what Green New Deals typically include.

Typical priorities highlighted by the UKWBG and WEN include:

- *Decarbonising the economy,*
- *Democratising the economy,*
- *Creating fair green jobs,*
- *Preserving the natural environment,*
- *Reform of finance and banking systems,*
- *Community organising and ownership,*
- *International responsibilities to repay debts and inequalities.*

In their proposed Feminist Green New Deal, these priorities would be combined with aims of gender-equality, including:

- *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.*

⁷ Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (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*, (available online): <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf> [accessed 24.06.20].

⁸ Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (May 2020), 'What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like? - Summary Briefing', *UK WBG and WEN*, (available online): <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf> [accessed 24.06.20], p.1.

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 Security⁹.

The WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal has several recommendations under five broad themes:

1. **Investment in (social) infrastructure** - including transport, housing, agriculture and social infrastructure such as jobs and training for carers and educators,
2. **Green jobs** - emphasising the need to be aware of reproducing occupational gender segregation and take steps to enrol women in STEM jobs crucial to a green economy,
3. **Sharing Care** - recognising that paid care jobs are low carbon and redress gender inequality and women undertake the majority of unpaid care work,
4. **Democracy and Ownership** - encouraging women's community involvement in governance, especially BAME and disabled women, as they are underrepresented in all areas of political life and this needs rectified to democratise the economy,
5. **(Inter)national responsibilities** - reducing and redressing international inequalities.

In the context of Northern Ireland, previous pillars in the Feminist Recovery Plan have addressed the need to decommodify housing, reduce gender segregated labour markets, tackle professional clusters, redistribute disproportionate levels of care work women face and tackle rural access poverty. The WPG would also like to endorse the following evidence and recommendations from the Feminist Green New Deal:

"WBG research indicates that a 2% GDP investment in care (social care, childcare, parental leave etc.), creates double the amount of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction¹⁰. Investment in free universal childcare especially, returns almost all of its initial investment"

This is of particular importance to Northern Ireland given our calls for a **universal, free and high quality childcare provision**. If the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Department of Education, introduce free universal childcare, statistics from the WBG submission to HM Treasury indicate that a full return would be made on this investment through additional tax revenue generated by the additional jobs created¹¹. In addition to this, when relating the investment in social infrastructure to the environment, WBG and WEN reference Eurostat data which suggests:

⁹ UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security.

¹⁰ ITUC (2016), 'Investing in a Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries', ITUC, (available online): https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf [accessed 24.06.20].

¹¹ Women's Budget Group (February 2020), 'Budget Representation to HM Treasury: Invest in Social Infrastructure', UK Women's Budget Group, (available online): <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/WBG-Budget-2020-FINAL.pdf> [accessed 24.06.20].

“The care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of greenhouse gas emissions) than the construction industry and, the education industry is 62% less polluting than the construction industry”¹².

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

1. Investment in (social) infrastructure:

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

2. Green Jobs:

- Provide subsidies and other incentives, including paid education leave, to support women, particularly low-income and BAME women, in accessing training and development programmes in high-skilled work in a new green economy,
- Provide subsidies and other incentives to those working in jobs at high risk of being replaced by automaton, particularly as women are at much higher risk of this,
- Encourage women and girls into male-dominated green sectors that are encouraged through a Northern Ireland Green New Deal.

3. Sharing Care:

- Recognising the dual-benefit job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are already done in an unpaid capacity by majority women,
- Through increased investment in care jobs and the care sector, not only will women's employment and economic opportunities increase, but children from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit from increasing qualities of childcare and education,
- Broaden definitions of 'green jobs' beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high compensate sector that is increasingly neglected,
- Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland include a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised,
- Implement a 30-hour paid work week in recognition of unavoidable unpaid care,
- Actively encourage and incentivise care leave and caring responsibilities being undertaken by men,
- Establish a Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services to ensure minimum living standards and recognise and remunerate the £4.6 billion unpaid carers contribute to Northern Ireland each year,

¹² WBG calculations from Eurostat data: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> .

- Balance recommendations for greater food self-reliance with recognition of the gendered, unpaid and low-paid labour involved in producing and providing food, particularly as Northern Ireland may be disproportionately impacted by different food standards to Great Britain post-Brexit,
- Supporting and developing sustainable small businesses that reduce domestic work through mass preparation and distribution of locally grown food.

4. Democracy and Ownership:

- Promoting economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through a Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government,
- Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing various genders, races and classes within civil society,
- Make socio-economic equality of protected characteristics a key goal of any new green new deal framework and ensure co-design of planning and policies with the Women's Sector,
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.

5. (Inter)national Responsibilities:

UK Level:

- Ending the hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and fully remove information exchanges between public bodies (including those in Northern Ireland) and the Home Office,
- Promote fair tax policies which close tax loopholes, redistribute wealth between women and men and hold transnational corporations to account for exploitation of people and harm to the planet¹³,
- Introduce a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland,

Devolved:

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

We have endorsed the above recommendations from the WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal and applied them to Northern Ireland and the aims of the NI Executive. In any forward planning for the future of Northern Ireland, the climate needs to be considered. The above recommendations would support the NI Executive in meeting the requirements set out in New

¹³ Examples provided by the WBG and WEN include a fossil fuels tax for corporations, a financial transaction tax and reforms of progressive taxation like income and corporation tax, p.3.

Decade, New Approach, whilst applying a gender lens to support a care economy and gender equality in any new green economy.

WRDA: Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations:

In the current political climate, there has been unprecedented numbers of public consultations, surveys to support private members bills and calls for evidence submissions to a range of committees in relation to various forms of legislation. The Women's Sector has faced funding challenges for many years, alongside additional challenges in working to support women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. WRDA produced a guide for public authorities on 'Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations', and we would like to take this opportunity to share this resource again.

Women in Northern Ireland have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; financially, socially and in terms of health. This has been particularly evident in relation to the under-valuing and under-investment in the care sector; work which is predominantly undertaken by women.

It is crucial that legislative processes on issues relating to women are accessible and open, as women's lived experience is crucial to finding innovative and inclusive ways to tackle the many threats posed by the climate emergency.

The full guidelines can be read [here](#).

For questions or queries relating to this response, please contact Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency - rachel.powell@wrda.net