

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

**COVID-19 FEMINIST  
RECOVERY PLAN**

**Climate Justice**

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## Introduction

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.<sup>1</sup>

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

The Women’s Policy Group (WPG) NI endorses the UK Women’s Budget Group (WBG) and Women’s Environmental Network (WEN) paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, *‘Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK.’*<sup>2</sup> As described by Cohen and MacGregor in the WBG and WEN paper, discussions on Green New Deal frameworks rarely incorporate gender, race and class.<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s Policy Group NI (2021) [WPG Response](#) to Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill.

<sup>2</sup> 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*.

<sup>3</sup> Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (May 2020), [‘What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like? - Summary Briefing’](#), *UK WBG and WEN*.

## Why is Climate Justice a Feminist Issue?

As discussed in the WEN and UK WBG's Report 'Towards a Feminist Green New Deal,'<sup>4</sup> gender equality must be at the heart of plans to tackle the climate crisis. The climate crisis requires urgent action to transform the economy and society. Some key statistics on women's current situation in the UK include:<sup>5</sup>

- \* 85% of care jobs are done by women
- \* 32% of MPs in the House of Commons are women
- \* 80% of people displaced by climate change are women.

Women are disproportionately represented in the care work sector, both in paid and unpaid roles. As WEN argue: "Paid and unpaid care work are an integral part of a transition to a green economy, and are, for the most part, already low carbon. The systemic lack of recognition and investment in social infrastructure has created industries in which small amounts of investment can create significant returns in both employment opportunities and service improvement..."

From a feminist perspective, it is essential to balance the emphasis on decarbonising the economy with the stated commitment to redressing social injustice, and this requires both awareness of and strategies for changing gender norms and stereotypes...

Central to feminist ecological economics is the normative claim that gender equality should not be achieved at the expense of ecological degradation or the exploitation of nature and other species, and that environmental sustainability must not be achieved by exploiting feminised labour."

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<sup>4</sup> Women's Environmental Network and UK Women's Budget Group (2020) '[Towards A Feminist Green New Deal](#)'

<sup>5</sup> Women's Environmental Network (2021) '[Feminist Green New Deal](#)' [Website]



## Care Work: A Key Sustainable Industry

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 construction.<sup>6</sup> Investment in free universal childcare especially, returns almost all of its initial investment.”<sup>7</sup>

“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.”<sup>8</sup>

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 created.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ITUC (2016), '[Investing in a Care Economy](#): A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries', *ITUC*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> WBG calculations from Eurostat data: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> found in *ibid*, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) '[Budget Representation to HM Treasury](#): Invest in Social Infrastructure', *UK Women's Budget Group*.

## A Feminist Green New Deal for Northern Ireland

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 agreement.<sup>10</sup> The NI Executive commitments include:<sup>11</sup>

- *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.*

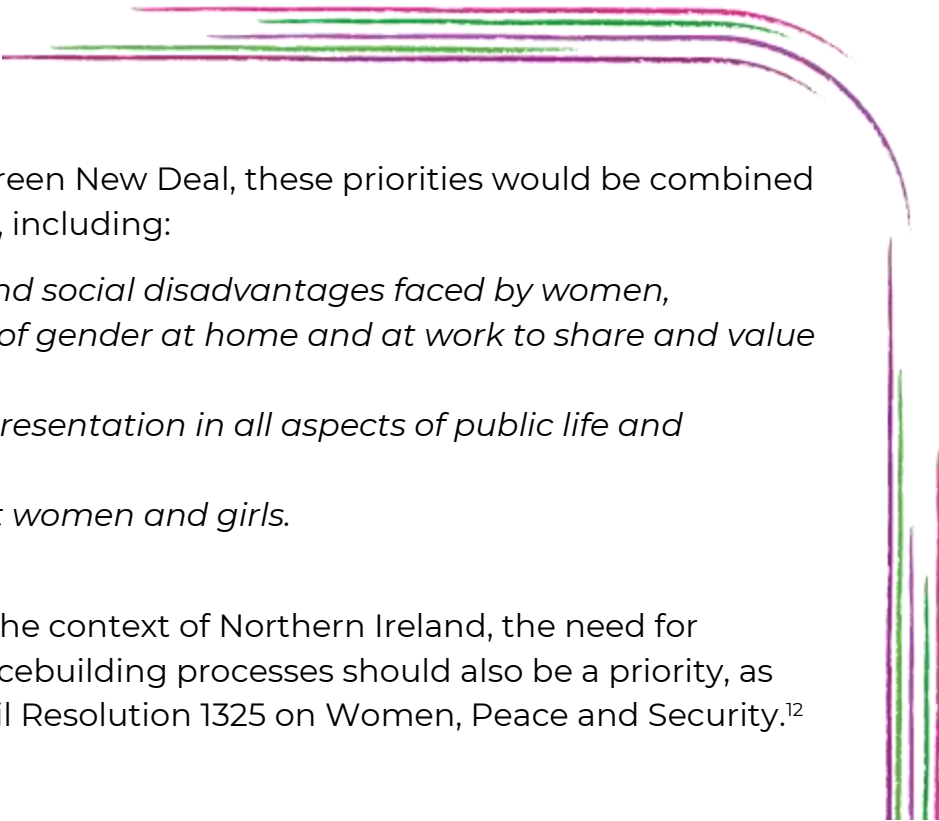
In particular, the WPG would like to make reference to aims for a “fair and just transition” alongside the Economic Strategy that will “support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal.” Before highlighting what a Feminist Green New Deal may look like, it is important to consider what Green New Deals typically include. Typical priorities highlighted by the UK WBG 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.*

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<sup>10</sup> [New Decade, New Approach Agreement](#), p.8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.44.



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.*

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>12</sup>

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.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations (2000) Security Council: [Resolution 1325](#) (UNSCR 1325), *Women, Peace and Security*.



## Key Recommendations

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

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

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

### 2. Green Jobs:

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

### 3. Sharing Care:

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



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

#### 4. Democracy and Ownership:

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

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

- Ending the hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and fully remove information exchanges between public bodies (including those in Northern Ireland) and the Home Office,
- Promote fair tax policies which close tax loopholes, redistribute wealth between women and men and hold transnational corporations to account for exploitation of people and harm to the planet,<sup>13</sup>
- Introduce a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland,
- 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.

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

## Conclusion

It is crucial that efforts are taken to mitigate against the impacts of the climate crisis on all people in Northern Ireland, but particularly women. Tackling gender equality must be at the core of these efforts, and recognition must be given to the unavoidable links between environmental and feminist issues. The above recommendations would support the NI Executive in meeting the requirements set out in New Decade, New Approach, whilst applying a gender lens to support a care economy and gender equality in any new green economy.

The evidence and recommendations contained in this briefing have been taken from the WPG NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, published in July 2020. The full Plan can be accessed [here](#). For further information on the issues highlighted in this briefing, please see the Women's Policy Group's Response to the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill (February 2021) which can be accessed [here](#).

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