

# **Women's Policy Group NI**

## **COVID-19 FEMINIST RECOVERY PLAN**

---

Carers' Act: Private Member's  
Bill Consultation Response

---

**Contact: Rachel Powell**

Women's Sector Lobbyist  
[rachel.powell@wrda.net](mailto:rachel.powell@wrda.net)

# Contents

Introduction	1
Women's Policy Group NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Overview	2
Women's Policy Group (WPG) NI: Introduction	3
Abstract	5
<b>Economic Justice Pillar</b>	6
Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work	7
A Feminist Green Economy	24
<b>Health Pillar</b>	29
Women with Caring Responsibilities and Dependents	30
<b>International Best Practice</b>	32
The Purple Pact: Economics that Work for Women	33
Consultation Survey Questions Responses	35
Main Proposals - Statutory Duties	35
Young Carers	36
Other measures	37
Conclusion	38

# Introduction

## *Valuing Care Work at the Core of Our Economy*

---

We welcome this consultation on a Carers Act Private Members Bill, as the women's sector has long campaigned for care to be at the core of our economy and for the conditions of carers, the majority of whom are women, to be improved urgently. We have also called for the introduction of a range of measures to be implemented in relation to the undervaluing of care work, the unequal distribution of care between men and women, and in relation to the essential nature of both paid and unpaid care in recent years.

This has included our [General Election Women's Manifesto in 2019](#) and in the WPG [COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#) published in July 2020. However, other recent reports regarding care work which provide a comprehensive overview of the topic include: '[Creating a Caring Economy](#)' (2020) by the UK Women's Budget Group and '[State of Caring in Northern Ireland \(2019\)](#)' by Carers NI.

We would also like to endorse responses to this consultation from individual members of the Women's Policy Group (WPG), such as the Women's Regional Consortium, who have provided significant evidence on the experiences of carers in NI. The WPG hope to see our consultation response reflected in the future work on the Carers Act PMB.

We would also like to highlight the Women's Resource and Development Agency's recommendations for making future consultations more accessible for women; particularly as women are the vast majority of carers in NI. Guidelines on putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations can be found [here](#).

# 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. 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.

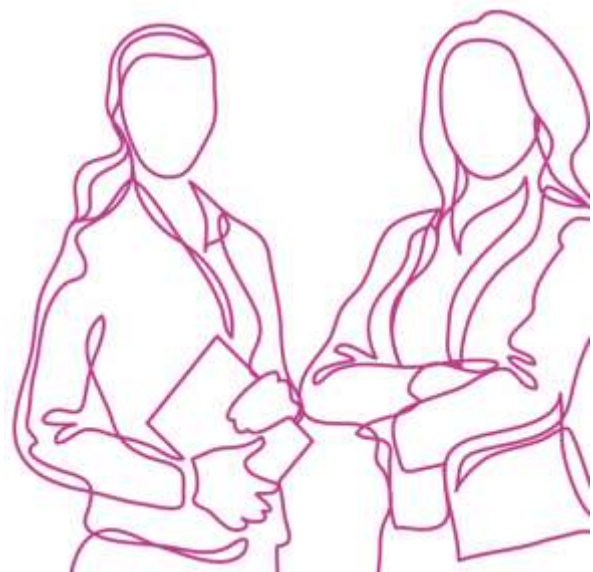
**Our full Feminist Recovery Plan is available [here](#).**

# Women's Policy Group NI

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





# Abstract

This report will begin by providing a summary of evidence and recommendations regarding carers and care work in Northern Ireland, taken from the various pillars of the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan which was published in July 2020.

This summary is followed by short responses to the Carers' Act Private Member's Bill Consultation survey questions, as most of our main points are already raised through the evidence and recommendations from the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan.



# Economic Justice Pillar





## Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work



Substantive gender segregation remains in the labour market with men continuing to dominate in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing and construction, and women continuing to dominate in public administration, education and health. The same is true in terms of occupational segregation – both men and women continue to dominate in occupations that have traditionally been associated with them.

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.

According to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, lone parents, 91% of whom are women, also experience occupational segregation in employment, with lone parents with dependent children mostly employed in 'Personal Service' and 'Elementary' occupations.

Care-giving has been identified as one factor influencing occupational segregation with women and lone parents choosing occupations allowing sufficient flexibility to balance the demands of care-giving. This may have a potential impact on the sustainability of employment, with women and lone parents having to consider pay and career progression with flexibility in employment.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> ECNI (2018), '[Delivering Equality Employment - Key Inequalities](#)'

Gender-segregated labour markets are a reality across the world, and Northern Ireland is no exception to this. In the context of the ongoing global health crisis, increased attention has been drawn to the fact that women constitute over 70% of health and social care staff (79% in Northern

Ireland), with a significant proportion from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. For many this involves a double burden, as women also shoulder the lion's share of unpaid care work. UNICEF defines care work as:

*'Supporting daily activities of individuals (such as cooking, cleaning, and providing daily essentials), as well as the health and wellbeing of others, including children and elderly.'*<sup>2</sup>

Before the pandemic, globally, women and girls carried out on average **three times** the amount of unpaid care and domestic work compared to men and boys<sup>3</sup>. Pre-covid disparities in unpaid care work between men and women in the UK can also be seen in figure 5 below.<sup>4</sup> During the lockdown, these responsibilities have increased significantly as women have faced increased responsibilities in relation to homeschooling, providing basic health care, childcare, shopping for vulnerable family members, ensuring dependents are abiding by new health and hygiene requirements and more.

This puts women at increased risk of infection, as well as spreading infection to vulnerable family members. In addition to this, people over the age of 60 have the highest risk of infection, but they are also often the source of childcare to support many families and enable younger women to access work, education and training. As highlighted by UNICEF, the intergenerational impacts of the virus on long-term care arrangements, whereby children need to be separated from older family members, needs to be better understood.

<sup>2</sup> Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed and Ramya Subrahmanian, (April 2020), '[Caring in the time of COVID-19: Gender, unpaid care work and social protection](#)', UNICEF.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women (2019), '[Families in a Changing World](#)', *Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020*, p.15.

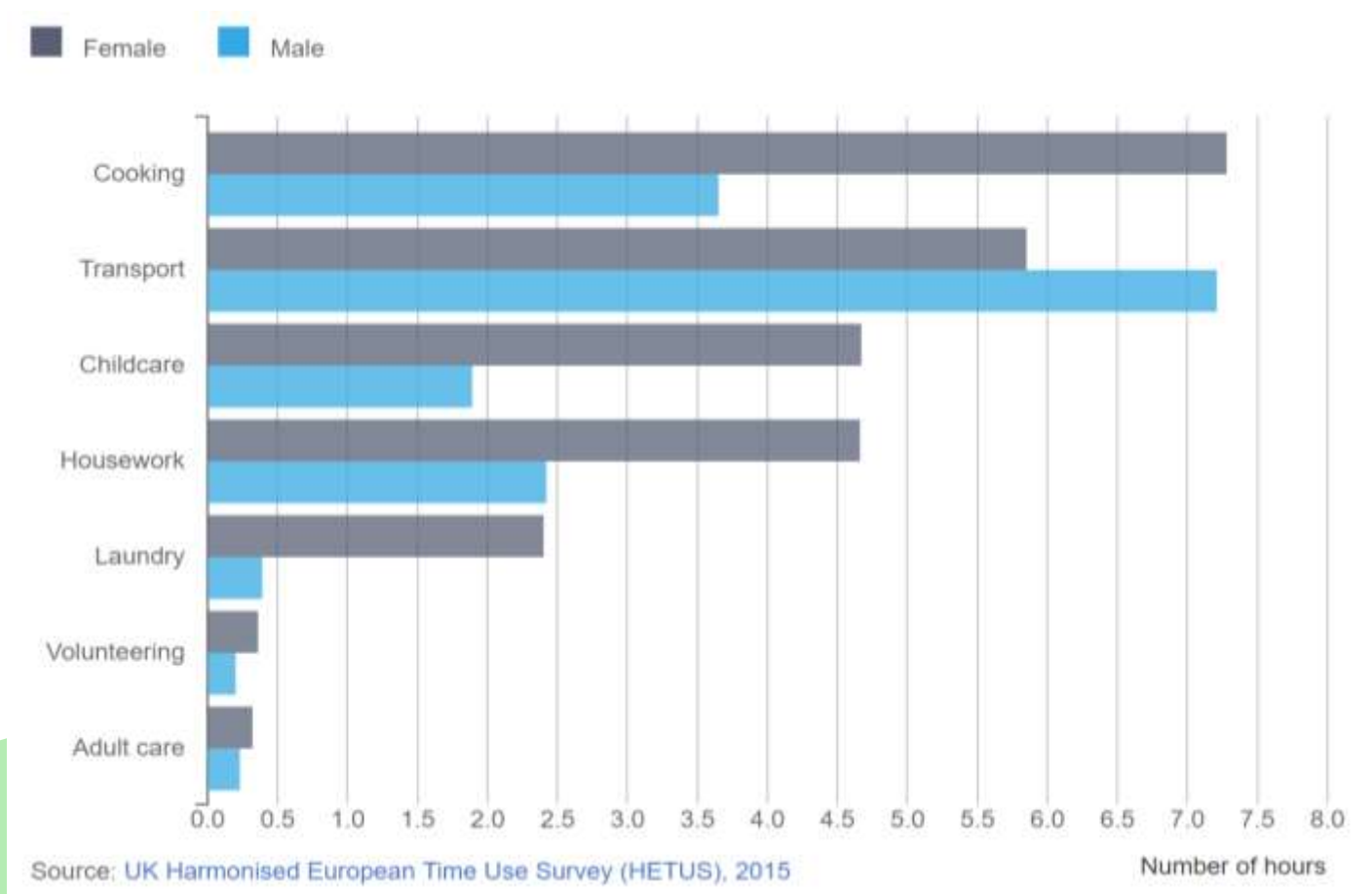
<sup>4</sup> The only exception of where men's responsibilities are greater than women is transport, in which this data includes transport to work for the individual.

Further evidence from UNICEF shows that “emerging data indicates that...when it comes to the economic and social fallout of the pandemic, women and girls face much greater risks [than men].”<sup>5</sup> A UN policy-brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women also states:

*“Women will be the hardest hit by this pandemic, but they will also be the backbone of recovery in communities. Every policy response that recognises this will be the more impactful for it.”<sup>6</sup>*

Figure 8 highlights the unpaid care differentials in the UK.

**Figure 8: Unpaid Care Work Differentials for Men and Women in the UK**

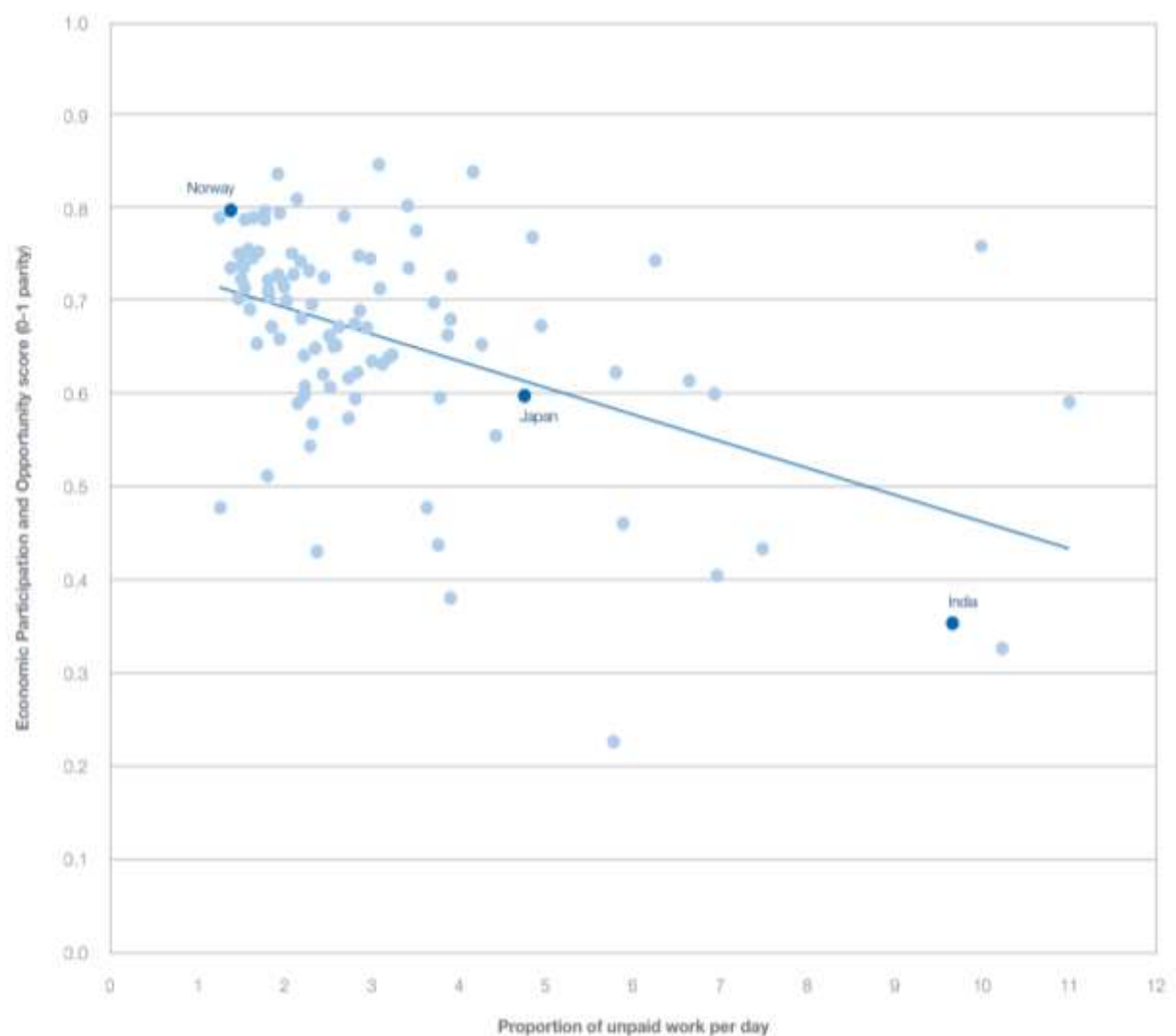


<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, (April 2020), '[Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#)', UN Women.

According to the World Economic Forum, gender segregated labour markets and a lack of gender parity has a negative fundamental bearing on whether or not economies and societies thrive.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, strong correlations can be found between high levels of unpaid work per day and the inability to access economic participation and opportunity, as seen in figure 9 below<sup>8</sup>. How the UK compares to other countries in the unequal distribution of unpaid care can also be seen in figure 10.

**Figure 9: World Economic Forum Data on Unpaid Work and Economic Opportunities Correlations**



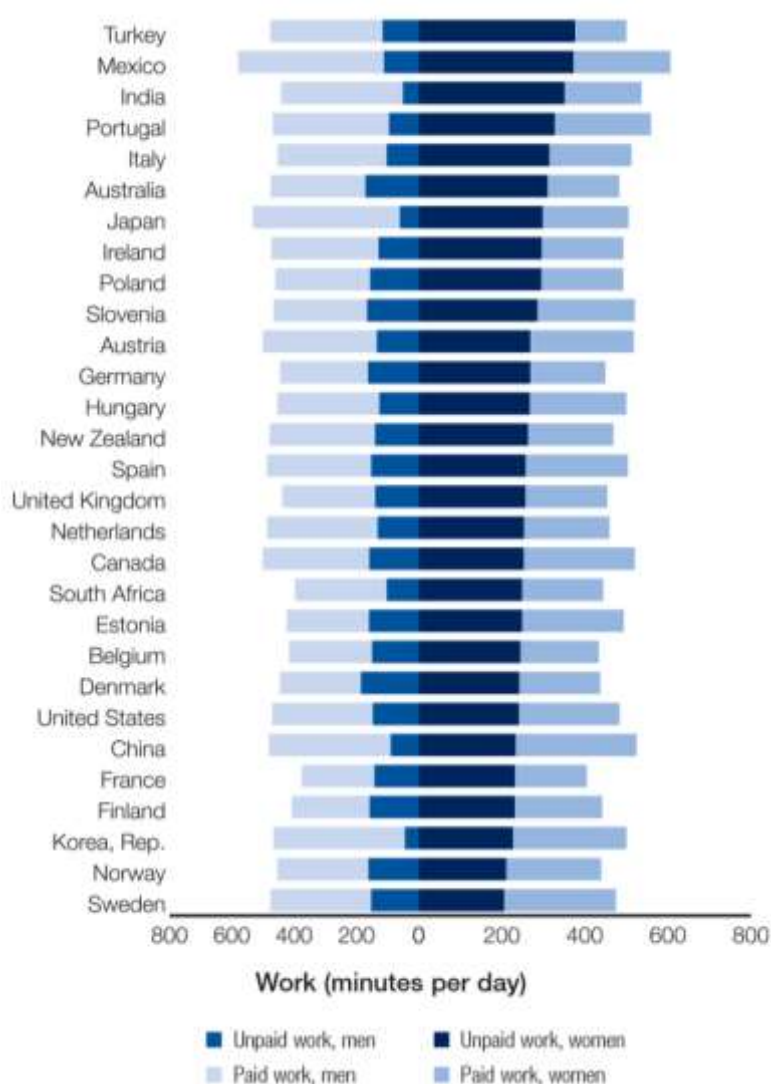
**Sources**

World Economic Forum and OECD, *Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB)*.

<sup>7</sup> World Economic Forum (2020) '[Mind the 100 Year Gap](#)', *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.14.

Figure 10: Paid and Unpaid work (minutes per day) for men and women, by country



Source: OECD Social Protection and Wellbeing Database<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the findings from the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2020 also highlight the strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its economic performance. When looking at the UK gender gap in figure 11 below, the gender gap is still extremely prevalent and likely to worsen due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

<sup>9</sup> Found in: Ceri Parker, (2017), '[It's official: women work nearly an hour longer than men every day](#)', World Economic Forum.



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>10</sup>

Figure 11: Global Gender Gap Index Rankings by region 2020

### Western Europe and North America

Country	Rank		Score
	Regional	Global	
Iceland	1	1	0.877
Norway	2	2	0.842
Finland	3	3	0.832
Sweden	4	4	0.820
Ireland	5	7	0.798
Spain	6	8	0.795
Germany	7	10	0.787
Denmark	8	14	0.782
France	9	15	0.781
Switzerland	10	18	0.779
Canada	11	19	0.772
United Kingdom	12	21	0.767
Belgium	13	27	0.750
Austria	14	34	0.744
Portugal	15	35	0.744
Netherlands	16	38	0.736
Luxembourg	17	51	0.725
United States	18	53	0.724
Italy	19	76	0.707
Greece	20	84	0.701
Malta	21	90	0.693
Cyprus	22	91	0.692

Source: World Economic Forum - Gender Gap Report 2020

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.33.

According to the World Economic Forum, gender segregated labour markets now only lowers innovation levels in professions which lack gender diversity, but also that this professional gender divergence has a compounding effect on gender pay gaps.<sup>11</sup> As the UK moves towards the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” the ramifications of this are set to

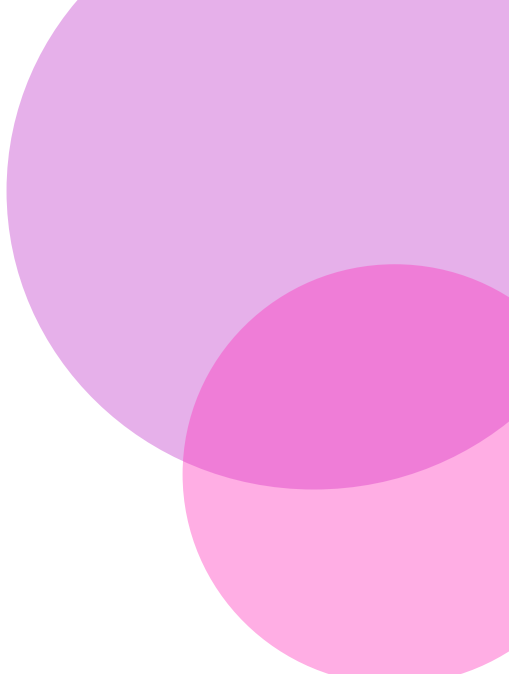
worsen if urgent action in tackling gender segregated labour markets is not taken. Figure 14 below further highlights the gender gaps in the UK in 2020. Clearly, economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment are areas of concern, where urgent action is needed to reduce gender gaps and segregation.

Figure 14: World Economic Forum Gender Gap UK Score Card



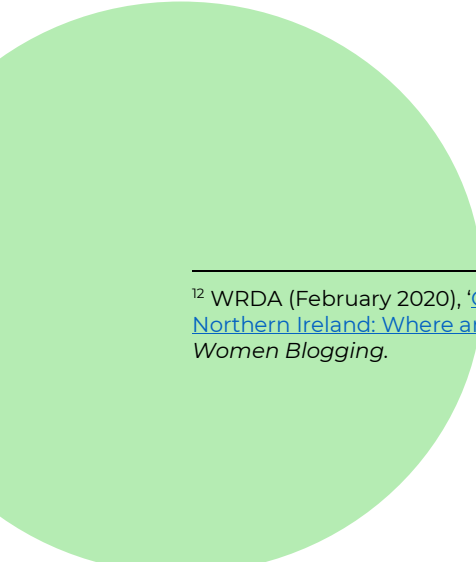
Source: World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report April 2020, p.357

<sup>11</sup> Ibid), p.42.



When looking specifically at Northern Ireland, gender segregation and the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities is prevalent. Women are more likely than men to be forced out of the labour market by unpaid, domestic work or caring responsibilities and 69% of carers are women. Women in NI also have a 70% chance of providing care in their adult life, compared to 60% for men and by the age of 46, half of all women have been a carer (11 years before men)<sup>12</sup>. Research from Carers NI shows that Northern Ireland's carers save the economy £4.6 billion per year<sup>13</sup>; whilst unpaid carers across all the UK provide social care worth £57 billion per year.<sup>14</sup>

What women have always known, and what has now been more unavoidable as the world tries to cope with the pandemic, 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 undervalued as contributors to economies.



---

<sup>12</sup> WRDA (February 2020), '[Gender Inequality in Northern Ireland: Where are we in 2020?](#)', *Bold Women Blogging*.

<sup>13</sup> Carers NI (2015), '[NI Carers save government £4.6 billion a year](#)'; see also: Carers NI (2017) '[State of Caring 2017](#)'.

<sup>14</sup> Office for National Statistics (2017), '[Unpaid carers provide social care worth £57 billion](#)'

Research on the rise of unpaid carers in the UK during COVID-19 highlights that the pandemic has led to an increase of 4.5 million people providing unpaid care; which is an almost 50% increase in the number of unpaid carers since the crisis began.<sup>15</sup> Many new unpaid carers are drawn from the working population, as 26% of all workers are now juggling work and unpaid care; an increase from one in six to one in four.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, this highlights where future carers may come from if there is not sufficient investment in carer and support and significant investment into the redistribution of care work, and supporting unpaid carers, is needed urgently. The losses of a failure to invest in care will not only be felt by carers and their families, but to the employers and Northern Ireland economy alike.

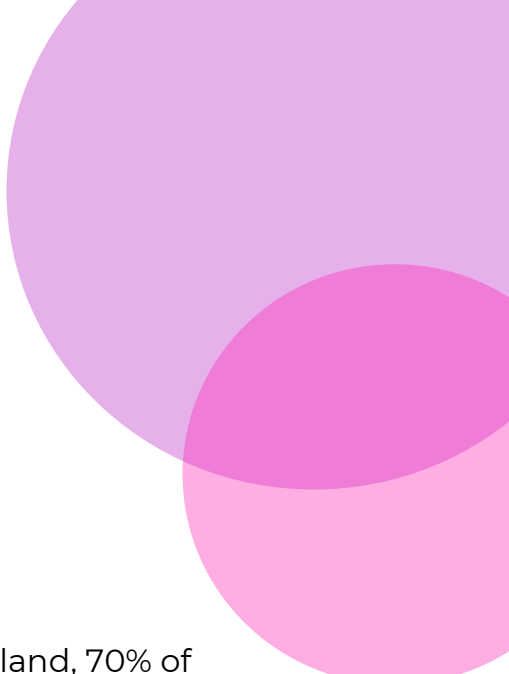
*This research also found that in Northern Ireland:<sup>17</sup>*

- 15% of respondents said they were already providing care before the COVID-19 outbreak (212,000 people) and a further 7% stated that they have started caring since the outbreak (98,000 people). Using population projections, it can be estimated that there are as many as 312,000 unpaid carers,
- 59% of respondents stated that unpaid caring responsibilities was having a detrimental impact on their ability to do paid work,
- 54% identified the financial impact of additional care costs as a key concern,
- 49% expressed high concern over not having anyone to talk to about the challenges of caring,
- 54% of respondents in NI stated that they are now more aware of the role of unpaid carers than before and 74% thought that carers were not well valued or valued at all,
- 72% of respondents in NI do not believe that unpaid carers have been supported by the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- 74% of NI respondents also believed that the government should increase support; for example, through increased financial support, investment in care and support services so unpaid carers can take a break and through further investment in social services.

<sup>15</sup> Carers Week (2020), '[Research Report: The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)', Making Caring Visible.

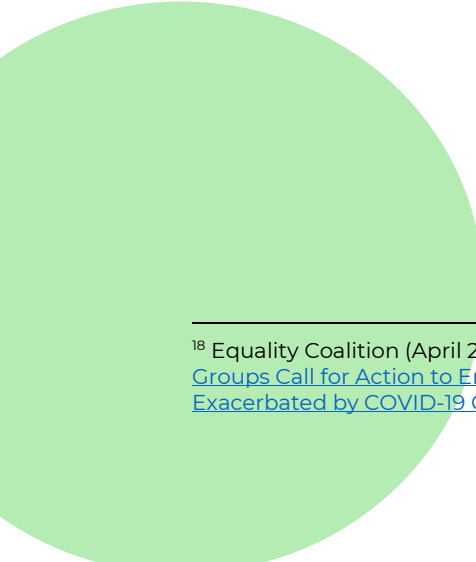
<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.27-28.



It is clear that both the UK government and the Northern Ireland Assembly need to urgently address unpaid caring responsibilities in any recovery planning and longer-term economic modelling. Given the disproportionate levels of unpaid caring responsibilities taken on by women, and the drastic impact this can have on women's participation in paid work and life time earnings, a gendered lens is needed in addressing the segregation of care work to prevent further embedding gender inequality. In analysing gender segregation in paid work, women also disproportionately work in care, cleaning, catering, retail, hospitality and clerical jobs with poor protections, including sick leave, which makes them particularly vulnerable.

In Northern Ireland, 70% of workers that are ineligible for Statutory Sick Pay and 82% of part-time workers are women, in large part due to their additional caring responsibilities such as those mentioned above. This is of particular concern, as women frontline care workers are at higher risk of infection, especially given the failures to ensure all frontline workers had access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), or PPE that adequately fits women due to their “universal” build<sup>18</sup>. Given the precarious nature of much of this work, particularly in the private sector or for those caring for people in other people's homes, women are more likely to be unable to take time off work or stay at home to care for themselves and others due to the lack of SSP, not having employment contracts or feeling more pressure to stay at work.



---

<sup>18</sup> Equality Coalition (April 2020), '[Civil Society Groups Call for Action to Ensure Inequalities are not Exacerbated by COVID-19 Crisis](#)'



The above trends are also evident in labour markets beyond those mentioned above as further evidence of gender segregation is present; with women underrepresented in higher-paying jobs in every sector in Northern Ireland. The below statistics from the NI Assembly Research and Information Service shine a light on the vast gender segregation and disparities across the public sector in January of 2020:<sup>19</sup>

- In Northern Ireland politics, women represent 37% of Lord Mayors, 26% of Local Councillors, 33% of MLAs and just 22% of MPs,
- In Public Appointments, women represent 28% of Chairs and 42% of all Public Appointments,
- Women represent 0% of Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justices of Appeal, just 25% of High Court Judges and 33% of County Court Judges,
- In the PSNI, zero women hold the position of Chief or Deputy Chief Constable and only 20% are Assistant Chief Constables. Women represent 30% of police officers and 58% of all PSNI staff,
- In the Civil Service, women represent 33% of Permanent Secretaries; 38% of Senior Civil Servants and 50% of the total NICS workforce,
- In the Education Sector, women represent 27% of University Chancellors or Pro/Deputy Vice Chancellors, 29% of FE College Principals and 60% of School Principals; despite 77% of all teachers being women,
- In the Health and Social Care Sector, women make up 79% of all staff but just 20% of Trust Chairs and 20% of Trust CEOs,
- In Local Government, women are 42% of all employees but just 27% of Council CEOs.

---

<sup>19</sup> NI Assembly Research and Information Service, (January 2020), [‘Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power in 2020’](#)

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 above recommendations to fund adequate investments and to oppose the implementation of further austerity.

### Key Recommendations:

- It is essential that home carers, as well as health and social care staff, have access to appropriate advice and where required to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), to protect themselves and society at large.
- Action must be taken to acknowledge the many women who work in precarious, low-paid jobs that are unable to stay at home due to employer reluctance to furlough these workers; particularly as many of these women do not have trade union representation nor can they benefit from collective bargaining.
- In addition to this, action needs to be taken to address how difficult it is for women to complete all aspects of work from home when trying to manage their workloads, childcare and providing education from home.
- Measures should be introduced to prevent employees from being penalised.
- Monitoring gender parity in the professions of the future provides a critical opportunity to guide the emerging labour market to more equitable outcomes in the future of work.
- Urgently increase the supply and visibility of women with disruptive technical skills.
- To ensure that the professions of the future can target gender parity within the coming decade, reskilling and upskilling efforts for women interested in expanding their skills range should be focused on those already in the labour market or looking to re-enter the labour market after a period of inactivity.
- Build on existing good practice evidenced in alteration of policy on Maternity Allowance for women furloughed due to COVID-19.

*(continued on next page)*

- Promote conciliation measures and actions finalised to increase equal opportunities in both education and work<sup>20</sup>. Family policies, social protection systems and measures finalised to reduce gender inequalities, encouraging high education and job opportunities for women are some measures that can be taken.
- Analyse the economic value of putting money into caring may help carers get back into paid employment and thus improve their health and financial wellbeing and consequently reducing pressure on the health and benefits systems in the long-run.
- For a better, more resilient economy, it is essential that we value and recognise care work. It needs to be a valued job that is paid well, attracts investment in education and training, provides opportunities for promotion and is seen as a valued career.
- Require all workplaces to record and publish gender segregation and gender pay gap data.
- 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>21</sup> This would particularly benefit women who provide higher levels of care.
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.

*The WPG also supports the below medium-term and longer-term recommendations from the UK Women's Budget Group<sup>22</sup>:*

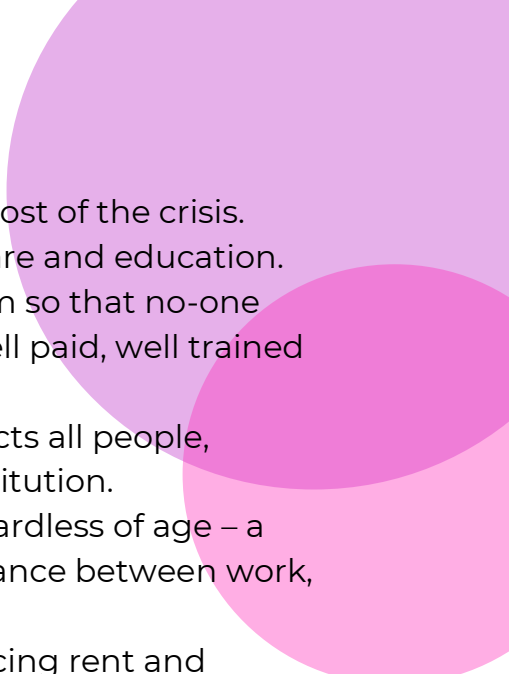
- Require employers to report the numbers of people made redundant with breakdowns by gender and other protected characteristics.
- Require the reinitiation (or implementation in the NI context) of gender pay gap reporting; including reporting on pay gaps during the COVID-19 lockdown.

*(continued on next page)*

<sup>20</sup> Rosalia Castellane et. al. (2019), '[Analyzing the gender gap in European labour markets at the NUTS-1 level](#)', *Cogent Social Sciences* Vol 5. 2019 Iss. 1).

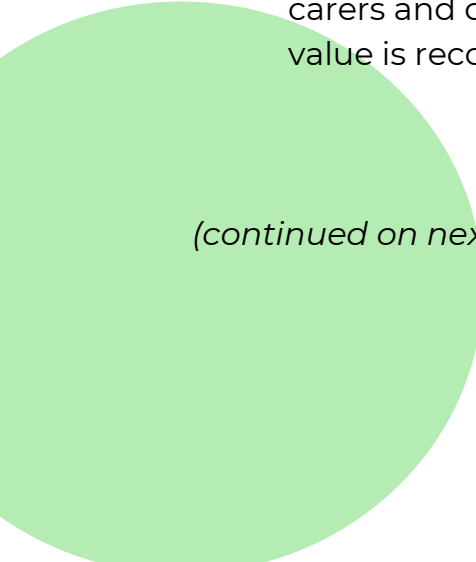
<sup>21</sup> Carers Week (2020), 'Carers Week 2020 Research Report: [The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)', *Making Caring Visible*.

<sup>22</sup> UKWBG (May 2020), '[Briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group: Easing Lockdown: Potential Problems for Women](#)'

- 
- Do not turn to austerity measures to pay for the cost of the crisis.
  - Invest in social infrastructure, including health, care and education.
  - Design a sustainable and stable social care system so that no-one has unmet needs, free to the point of use with well paid, well trained permanent staff and funded via general taxation.
  - Reform the social security system so that it protects all people, including migrants, against risk, poverty and destitution.
  - Rethink work so that jobs pay a decent wage regardless of age – a true living wage for all – and reflects a shared balance between work, care and leisure for all.
  - Take action to address the housing crisis by reducing rent and increasing housing support.
  - Sustainably funding the women's sector so that no woman is left in danger.
  - Introduce policies to encourage sharing of care and unpaid work between women and men.

***Recommendations from Carers Week Report which we endorse include:***

- There is a significant role for information and advice for carers, forward planning, but also better support so that people can rely on what they need.
- Whilst Governments in every nation across the UK have implemented measures to support carers, there is no doubt that there are gaps that need to be plugged to improve carers' lives in the short term. In the longer term, the Government needs to build a better future for carers that tackles the underlying issues that they face.
- Increase awareness of the role of caring and unpaid carers - the NI Assembly should promote awareness of the important role of unpaid carers and caring, and introduce more concrete support so that value is recognised practically.



*(continued on next page)*

- Fund and rebuild social care and health services - the NI Assembly needs to recognise the amount of pressure the system has been under during the coronavirus outbreak, and the funding shortages that were widely recognised for many years before the crisis.
- There needs to be a significant increase in funding levels to allow the social services and the NHS to rebuild after the crisis, alongside bringing forward plans for long-term reform of social care. Greater investment in care will lead to a healthier and happier population that is better able to balance important aspects of their lives, including personal relationships, work and family.
- End carers' financial hardship - Financial support for carers must be urgently improved, which would particularly benefit women who are more likely to be caring and providing higher levels of care. The UK Government and NI Assembly should immediately increase the basic level of Carer's Allowance, and a one-off coronavirus Supplement to those entitled to Carer's Allowance of £20 a week to match the rise in Universal Credit.
- Greater consistency is needed in connecting carers to support available to look after their own mental and physical health and wellbeing. Support for carers to take part in physical activity, for example, can be hugely beneficial in preventing them developing health problems in later life as well as reducing isolation.
- Support working carers more through employers and by Government - Employers, and the NI Assembly, should ensure that there are carer-friendly policies in place that enable working carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work. We fully support the Government's plans to introduce an entitlement to take care leave for working carers; our preference would be for this to be paid.
- Schools, colleges and universities should be encouraged to introduce policies and programmes that support carers and improve their experience of education.

***The WPG also supports UN recommendations to:***

- Introduce immediate support for at-risk workers, enterprises, jobs and incomes, to avoid closures, job losses and income decline.
- Place a greater focus on both health and economic activity after lockdowns ease, with workplaces that are safe, and rights for all.
- Third, mobilization now for a human-centred, green, sustainable and inclusive recovery that harnesses the potential of new technologies



to create decent jobs for all, and takes advantage of the creative and positive ways companies and workers have adapted to these times.

Finally, we recognise that some policy decisions are not possible through devolved institutions and when looking at the UK as a whole, the WPG would encourage gender-budgeting and progressive fiscal and monetary policy making from the UK government. In particular, the WPG would like to endorse calls from Tax Justice UK in agreeing common goals to build back a better world affected by coronavirus. These calls include drastic tax reform across the UK as Tax Justice UK have highlighted that:

*'The pandemic has reminded us just how valuable the contribution of carers, nurses and key workers is to a caring society. In the long term we need to be spending more money on health, care and other areas to ensure we have a resilient society and economy. However, this cannot happen without reform of the tax system.*

*The UK's approach to tax is dysfunctional: we don't raise enough money, avoidance is rife and wealth is under-taxed. Despite progress, estimates suggest that £35 billion to £90 billion of tax goes uncollected per year.*

*The government also spends over £164bn a year on tax reliefs - many of which are badly targeted and largely benefit the well off and big companies. The corporate tax rate has been slashed from 28% in 2010 to the current 19%. The UK also contributes through its reliefs and loopholes to a broken international tax system, which deprives other countries of revenue.*

*The Covid-19 crisis shows that the government has huge financial power, flexibility and choice over how to support public spending. Tax reform to support a fairer and greener future argues that as the immediate crisis fades there will be big political debates about how to build back better. A fair tax system should underpin more investment in high quality public services and we must be ready to challenge those who are already arguing for austerity 2.0.'*<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Tax Justice UK (June 2020), '[Progressive groups call for tax reform post-covid](#)'

***We support the following recommendations from Tax Justice UK<sup>24</sup>:***

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

---

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

## A Feminist Green Economy

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 U.K.'*<sup>25</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>26</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.

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.*

---

<sup>25</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>26</sup> Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (May 2020), ['What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like? - Summary Briefing'](#), UK WBG and WEN.

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>27</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.

In the context of Northern Ireland, previous pillars in this plan have addressed the need to de-commodify housing, reduce gender segregated labour markets, tackle professional clusters, redistribute disproportionate levels of care work women face and tackle rural access poverty.

---

<sup>27</sup> UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security.

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>28</sup>. Investment in free universal childcare especially, returns almost all of its initial investment”<sup>29</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>30</sup>. In addition to this, when relating the investment in social infrastructure to the environment, WBG and WEN reference Eurostat data which suggests:

*“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>31</sup>*

### **1. 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 compense sector that is increasingly neglected,

*(continued on next page)*

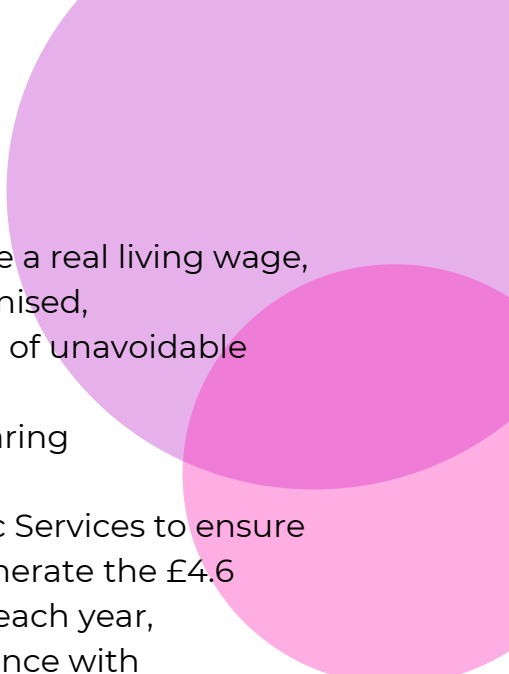
<sup>28</sup> ITUC (2016), ‘[Investing in a Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries](#)’, ITUC.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, (n83), p.1.

<sup>30</sup> Women’s Budget Group (February 2020), ‘[Budget Representation to HM Treasury: Invest in Social Infrastructure](#)’, UK Women’s Budget Group.

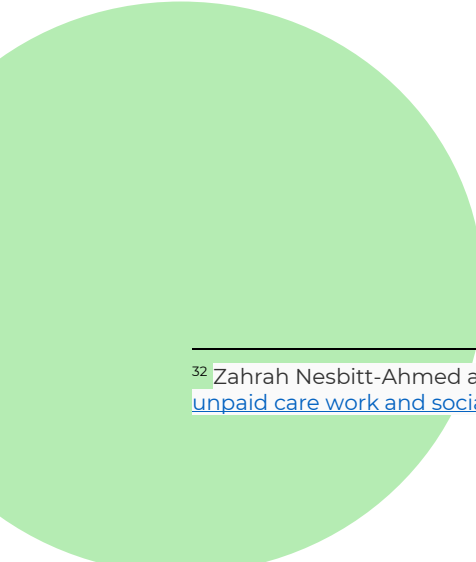
<sup>31</sup> WBG calculations from Eurostat data: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> found in ibid, (n83), p.1.



- 
- 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.

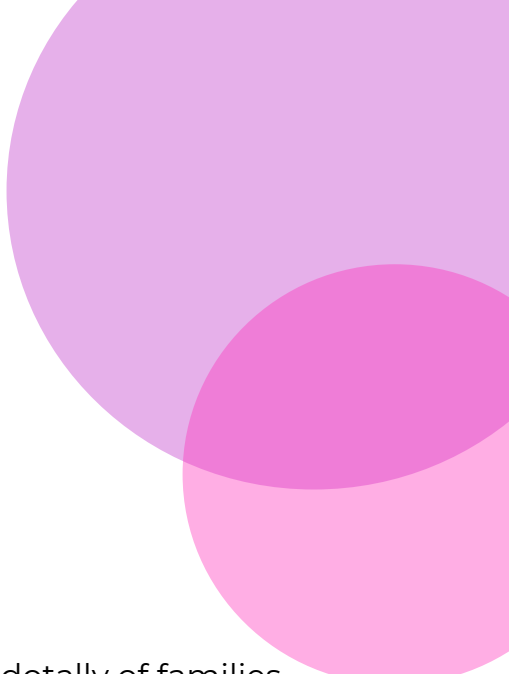
We know that women overwhelmingly make up those in precarious circumstances across the world. As highlighted by UNICEF:

*'Given the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on gendered and multidimensional poverty, social protection responses that do not address the fundamental drivers of gender inequality, including unpaid care and responsibilities, will entrench already existing gender inequalities. As COVID-19 amplifies these inequalities, now is a critical window of opportunity to build more effective social protection to endure through future pandemics.'*<sup>32</sup>



---

<sup>32</sup> Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed and Ramya Subrahmanian, (April 2020), '[Caring in the time of COVID-19: Gender, unpaid care work and social protection](#)', UNICEF.



Before the pandemic, women were already more vulnerable to poverty as they made up the majority of lone parents, those with precarious/low-paid jobs and those with caring responsibilities which limited their time for paid work. Job losses and the need to provide increasing levels of unpaid care as a result of the pandemic is likely to increase poverty and dependence on social security benefits especially for women.

Crucially, additional economic support is required for parents and carers who are isolating due to a family member showing symptoms or are looking after a child or relative with COVID-19, especially for single parents, the vast majority of whom in Northern Ireland (91%) are women.

We know anecdotally of families who have faced stark choices between losing employment or leaving young children at home alone, or presenting health risks to grandparents where no other care is available. The risks are increased for women who are key workers in low-income positions in care, cleaning and retail, or other essential positions such as teachers, as childcare for all key workers was not fully implemented and many parents were forced to risk being infected due to the nature of their work.

# Health Pillar



## Women with Caring Responsibilities and Dependents

With the rapid increase in the numbers of women with caring responsibilities across the UK due to COVID-19, urgent action is needed to address the mental health concerns of carers. As the majority of carers are also in paid employment, if action is not taken to support this group, it is likely to have long-term detrimental impacts on workforces. Some statistics on impact of increased caring responsibilities during COVID-19 from the Carers Week report includes:<sup>33</sup>

*The top three most frequently chosen challenges by all unpaid carers:*

- managing the stress and responsibility (71%)
- the negative impacts on their physical and mental health (70%)
- not being able to take time away from caring (66%).

*These results closely matched what the public, who had never been unpaid carers, thought the challenges that unpaid carers face were:*

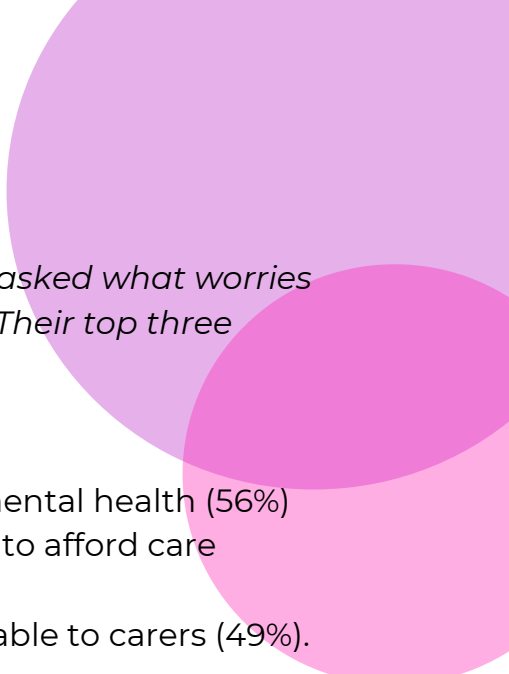
- not being able to take time away from caring (72%)
- managing the stress and responsibility (70%)
- the negative impacts on their physical and mental health (69%).

*There were other important challenges that were frequently chosen by unpaid carers:*

- the impact it has on other personal relationships (eg with family, friends, partners etc.) (63%)
- the negative impact it has on their ability to do paid work (55%)
- the financial impact of the additional care costs (eg specialist care equipment, home adaptations (53%)
- not having anyone to talk to about the challenges of caring (50%).

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, (n52), p.7.



*The general public, who don't have a caring role, were asked what worries they would have if they took on an unpaid caring role. Their top three worries were:*

- The negative impact on their own physical and mental health (56%)
- Not being able to cope financially, not being able to afford care services or equipment required (50%)
- Not knowing or understanding what help is available to carers (49%).

For too long, women and unpaid carers have provided social support that upholds the health and wellbeing of society whilst propping up the NI economy to the value of £4.6 billion per year. Earlier in this plan, statistics were given of the economic benefits of investing in care for both gender equality and in addressing climate change. The needs of carers' health should be a priority in any recovery planning in Northern Ireland.

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>34</sup> 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.



---

<sup>34</sup> WBG et. al. (2020), 'BAME women and COVID-19 - Research Evidence', (available online).



# International Best Practice



## The Purple Pact: Economics that Work for Women

The EWL proposals for COVID-19 recovery draw above all on [The Purple Pact](#)<sup>35</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.

The Purple Pact highlights key elements within existing economic models that work against gender equality and wellbeing for all. The key issues highlighted include:

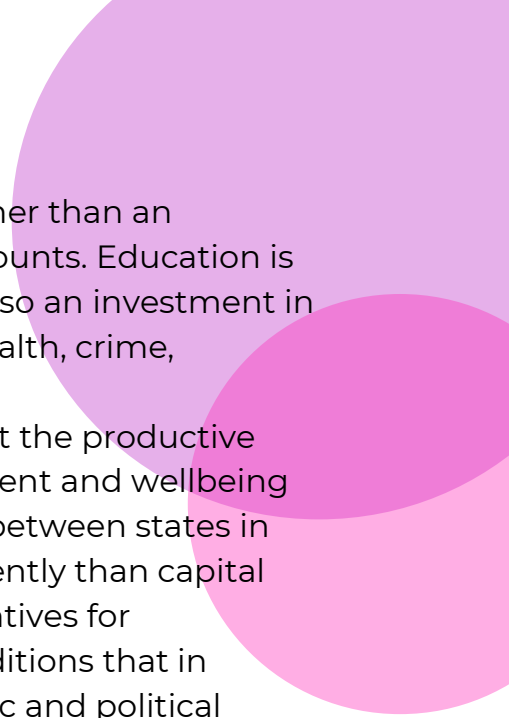
- GDP has limitations as a measure of economic well being, and critically does not include the value of unpaid care and voluntary work, which means that this is ignored in economic decision-making. Failure to address this, along with failure to address environmental degradation, sends harmful signals to public and private decision-makers and encourages unsustainable investment and consumption patterns.

*(continued on next page)*

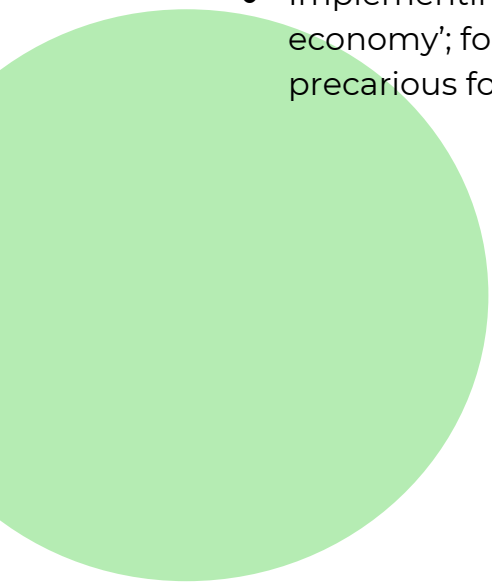
---

<sup>35</sup> European Women's Lobby (March 2020) The Purple Pact: A feminist approach to the economy.



- 
- 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.

**Key recommendations for action in The Purple Pact includes:**

- 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.
- 

# Consultation Survey Questions Responses

---

## Main Proposals - Statutory Duties

1. Do carers suffer financially, physically and emotionally as a result of their caring responsibilities?

**Yes. Please see evidence of this on pages 7-16 and 27-31.**

2. Do you believe that the position of Northern Ireland's carers could and should be improved by legislation?

**Yes. Please see key recommendations on pages 18-23, 25-27, and 34.**

3. Given the difference in legislation across the jurisdictions as outlined above, do you believe carers in Northern Ireland should receive the same entitlements as those in other UK jurisdictions / Do you believe it is acceptable that carers in Northern Ireland do not have the same entitlements as those in other UK jurisdictions?

**Carers in Northern Ireland should receive the same entitlements as those in other UK jurisdictions. It is not acceptable that carers in Northern Ireland do not have the same entitlements as those in other UK jurisdictions.**

4. Should carers in Northern Ireland have a statutory right to be identified as a carer?

**Yes.**

5. Should carers in Northern Ireland have a statutory right to a carer's assessment?

**Yes.**



6. Should carers in Northern Ireland have a statutory right to delivery of their post-assessment action plan?

**Yes.**

7. Should Health and Social Care Trusts have a duty to monitor and report to the Department of Health/Assembly on the number and extent of delivery on carer assessments annually?

**Yes.**

8. Should Health and Social Care Trusts have a duty to monitor and report to the Department of Health/Assembly on the unmet need that has arisen as a result of not being able to deliver on the action plan from a Carers Assessment?

**Yes.**

### Young Carers

1. Should the Department of Education and other educational bodies proactively seek to identify young carers?

**Yes.**

2. Should there be a statutory duty on educational bodies to support young and student carers?

**Yes.**

3. Should young carers be supported by their education provider so their studies are not impeded by their caring role?

**Yes.**



**NOTE** - In relation to the questions around financial support for young carers, the Women's Policy Group believes that young carers deserve some recognition for their roles, particularly as there is growing evidence of young girls taking on large amounts of unpaid domestic work and care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial support for young carers could and should be an option for how to recognise their roles. We recommend that Action for Children NI, NI Regional Young Carers and Carers NI are consulted on the best way to achieve this, as they are organisations with expertise in this area.

## Other measures

1. Should other mechanisms be used to support carers – such as raising the level of Carer's Allowance or making it easier to claim?

Yes. The level of Carer's Allowance should be raised and also made easier to claim. In addition to this, we would recommend considering a one-off Coronavirus supplement of £20 a week to match the rise in Universal Credit as suggested by Carers UK.<sup>36</sup> This would particularly benefit women who provide higher levels of care.

Furthermore, the NI Assembly, should ensure that there are carer-friendly policies in place that enable working carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work. We fully support the Government's plans to introduce an entitlement to take care leave for working carers; our preference would be for this to be paid.

---

<sup>36</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.



## Conclusion

---

This report has highlighted key evidence and made a number of recommendations in relation to the ongoing Carers' Act Private Member's Bill Consultation. These include increasing the level of Carer's Allowance and introducing measures to facilitate the full and equal participation of carers in the labour market.

The Women's Policy Group would like to see the recommendations raised in this report taken into consideration in the development of the Carers' Act Private Member's Bill and in the implementation of wider policy initiatives designed to strengthen and protect the rights and entitlements of carers in Northern Ireland.

Signed,

Women's Policy Group NI

*For questions or queries regarding this consultation response/endorsement, please contact:*

Rachel Powell,  
Women's Sector Lobbyist,  
[rachel.powell@wrda.net](mailto:rachel.powell@wrda.net).

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

