



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update –April 2021

## Summary

In April 2021, there have been a number of political developments surrounding three key themes as highlighted within the [Women's Policy Group COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#).

This summary reflects bills and oral questions answered by both the Stormont and Westminster Executives, alongside the inclusion of consultation responses from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) and briefing reports from WRDA in relation to carers, gender-based violence and sex work.

The issue of **domestic violence** and **sexual abuse** remain pertinent in Stormont legislation and oral questions this month. Progression of the Protection from Stalking Bill to Committee stage, and questions in relation to the hate crime review, domestic abuse legislation and violence perpetrated against women in temporary and emergency housing. Importance of relationship and sexual education (**RSE**) raised to the Minister of Education, particularly in relation the Children and Young People's Commissioner recommendation it be mandatory.

There is the opportunity for discussion in relation to **women's economic inequalities within the rural sector** with the upcoming launch of a public consultation on the Rural Policy Framework in NI. Oral questions in Westminster highlighted severe gender inequalities in relation to the **gender pensions pay gap**.

In terms of **health**, oral questions were raised in NI in relation to impact of income inequalities in contributing to health inequalities. **Reproductive justice** remained key this month as Claire Bailey seeks to ensure buffer zones to enable women and others to access reproductive healthcare. This is important given access to early medical abortion services have been suspended by the Western Trust this month.

## Stormont

### Bills- April 2021

| Issue                         | Proposed by                     | Stage           | Comments  | Links to the feminist recovery plan   |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|---|---|
| Protection from stalking bill | Naomi Long-Minister for Justice | Committee stage | <p>A Bill to provide protection from stalking, and from threatening or abusive behaviour, and for related purposes.</p> <p>The new legislation will be better focused on stalking behaviour and will have greater and more appropriate penalties and protections than are available under current harassment legislation.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into three parts. The first part creates a new specific offence of stalking. The Bill also creates the offence of threatening and abusive behaviour, which can be triggered by a single incident. The second part of the Bill provides for the introduction of stalking protection orders.</p> <p>Part 3 deals with the interpretation, commencement, and short title of the Bill.</p> | <p>Stalking is a gendered crime, with women representing a disproportionate number of victims. Stalking commonly happens within a context of domestic abuse and links to elements of coercive control.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill <a href="#">here</a>.</p> |

### Non-Executive Bills

| Issue                          | Proposed by      | Stage (as of 3 <sup>rd</sup> May) | Comments  | Link to Feminist Recovery Plan  |
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| Safe Access Zones Bill (Public | Clare Bailey MLA | Consultation carried forward      | This bill looks to provide safe access to healthcare facilities including buffer zones around reproductive healthcare facilities. | This would enhance the ability of women to access healthcare services |

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| Health and Well Being) Bill |  | from previous mandate. |  | without fear of intimidation. |
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Questions asked- tabled during April 2021.

| Issue   | Date    | Asked by:   | Notes  | Link to Feminist Recovery Plan  |
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| Rural Policy and impact on rural women                    | 13/4/21 | Cathal Boylan (Sinn Fein – Newry and Armagh)<br>To<br>Edwin Poots, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs | The Question:<br>“An update on the rural policy framework”<br><br>Significant stakeholder engagement to date, in light of the impact of Covid-19 they are reviewing the draft document so that it is flexible and adaptable to change.<br><br>Hope to launch Public Consultation later this spring which will be available for an 8 week online consultation period.                                       | This links to the issues facing rural women as highlighted by the Feminist Recovery Plan, including the underinvestment in women in rural areas.<br><br>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a>                        |
| Increased Social Housing and Decommodification of Housing | 13/4/21 | John O’Dowd (Sinn Fein – Upper Bann)<br>To<br>Deirdre Hargey, Minister for Communities                                    | The Question:<br>“What action the Housing Executive is going to take to address the growing waiting list for housing in north Lurgan”<br><br>The minister has a long-term plan to increase supply of affordable social housing to meet demand (costed and timetabled before the end of the Assembly Mandate). Shorter term new build program is designed to enhance investment and new social home starts. | Ensuring appropriate housing is available to those who need it. Important in removing significant rent pressures and ensuring housing is affordable. This is important as social housing is essential for families etc. |

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|   |         |   |  | Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a>  |
| Increased Social Housing and Decommodification of Housing                   | 13/4/21 | Kelly Armstong (Alliance – Strangford)<br>To<br>Deirdre Hargey,<br>Minister for Communities | The Question:<br>“[Will the Minister] Dedicate to providing shared housing where people from all cultures and backgrounds can live together and to ensuring that we stop enabling housing zones that exclude people based on religion, culture or race?”<br><br>Minister committed to suitable, affordable, and sustainable housing including shared housing.  | This recognises how the intersectionality of identity recognised and how that may impact housing needs. Importance of shared housing in building building a shared post-conflict society.<br><br>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a>               |
| Increased Social Housing and Decommodification of Housing / Sexual Violence | 13/4/21 | Mark Durkan (SDLP – Foyle)<br>To<br>Deirdre Hargey,<br>Minister for Communities             | The Question:<br>“policy and practice behind housing placements.... growing concerns about number of offences having been committed [in temporary and emergency housing], including a sexual attack on a girl last week by people from elsewhere who have been placed in housing in Derry.”<br><br>Minister recognises impact of Covid-19 in increasing homelessness. Minister commits to working with the Housing Executive, PSNI, other agencies and communities to ensure improved management and mitigation or risk associated with housing known offenders. | Women are particularly vulnerable to violence within the domestic sphere. There needs to be measures to ensuring safe housing is available and eliminating violence against women in all areas of life.<br><br>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a> |
| Mental Health   | 19/4/21 | Mark Durkan (SDLP – Foyle)<br>To<br>Arlene Foster,<br>First Minister                        | The Question:<br>“Executive Office plans to address mental health crisis exacerbated by Covid-19.”<br><br>First Minister commits to a holistic government approach to mental health, with primacy lying with the Health Minister.  | Feminist Covid Recovery Plan highlights importance of intersectionality in mental health impact, and tangible steps forward.  |

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|                                    |         |  | Raised the important of prevention, resilience, well-being and prevention.   | Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a>   |
| Relationships and Sexual Education | 19/4/21 | Nicola Brogan (Sinn Fein – West Tyrone)<br>To Peter Weir, Minister of Education                | <p>The Question:<br/>“Children and Young People’s Commissioner has recommended that relationship and sexuality education should become a mandatory part of the school curriculum, can the Minister outline if he plans to implement such recommendations?”</p> <p>Minister articulates this would require a legislative change which could not be implemented overnight. It is critical to look at the minimum standards of RSE currently taking place across schools. Referenced the importance of the Gillen Report and working with the Department of Justice in ensuring issues of domestic violence and consent are considered. Cautions against compulsory elements to ensure level of flexibility in what can be delivered quickly. Importance of not applying a one size fits all approach to RSE education.</p> | <p>RSE has been identified as key factor in addressing violence against women and other issues of gender inequality. As a mechanism to enhance long-term change on these issues RSE much be standardized and in line with CEDAW recommendations.</p> <p>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a></p> |
| Health Inequalities                | 26/4/21 | Colm Gildernew (Sinn Fein – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)<br>To Robin Swann, Minister for Health | <p>The Question:<br/>“To ask the Minister of Health to outline his approach to addressing health inequalities”</p> <p>The Minister recognises that inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Department of Health currently leads the Making Life Better strategic framework for public health; implementation of joint departmental working to tackle structural violence such as poverty which impact health inequalities. The Public Health Agency has</p>   | <p>Importance of intersectionality and different identities working to compound health inequalities, particularly in relation to women from low-income backgrounds and living in deprived areas.</p> <p>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a></p>   |

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|  |         |  | developed a short, medium and long-term plan for the recovery of health improvement services, the majority of which are focussed in the most deprived communities   |  |
| Domestic Violence and Assistance to Victims/Survivors Groups | 27/4/21 | Paul Frew (DUP – North Antrim)<br>To<br>Naomi Long, Minister for Justice | <p>The Question:<br/>“Given the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, how she plans to assist support groups for victims of domestic violence.”</p> <p>Victims of domestic abuse should not feel isolated during the current pandemic situation of living. The Minister emphasises the importance of the voluntary and community sector in continuing to provide services to victims and survivors throughout the pandemic. Issue of funding domestic and sexual abuse services is not one solely for the Department of Justice as it is a cross-cutting Executive issue.</p> <p>£7.5 million currently spent annually on domestic and sexual abuse services across all Executive government departments. Department of Justice has funded or partially funded initiatives such as the 24hr Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline; behavioural change programmes; domestic homicide reviews; independent sexual violence advisors; See the Signs multi-media awareness campaign; Policing and Community Partnerships.</p> <p>Development of new Domestic Abuse Legislation. Department of Justice working closely with community and voluntary sector to challenge and mitigate potential stigma and marginalization.</p> | <p>Domestic violence is an incredibly gendered crime and violence against women has become a pertinent issue during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery.</p> <p>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a></p> |

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| Hate Crime Review and Legislation | 27/4/21 | Liz Kimmons (Sinn Fein – Newry and Armagh)<br>To Naomi Long, Minister for Justice | <p>The Question:<br/>“Update on the Hate Crime Review”</p> <p>The Minister condemns a series of hate crimes against a Syrian family in Newry and upon Jewish graves in Belfast asserting that racism and intolerance are blights on our society. The Minister agrees with Judge Murrinan and his recommendations merit a stand alone Hate Crime Bill which will be introduced in the next mandate. This will enable public consultation. Non-legislative proposals include a sustainable hate crime advocacy service; creation of a Victims of Crime Commissioner with a focus on hate crime and domestic violence; working with UK government on online hate issues.</p> | <p>Hate Crime Legislation creates a space and opportunity for gender-based violence against women and the LGBTQ+ community to be recognised as protected characteristics.</p> <p>Collaboration with UK government in terms of online harm, ensures online abuse is recognised within NI Hate Crime Bill.</p> <p>Link to full answer <a href="#">here</a></p> |
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[Consultation responses from WRDA/WPG](#)

| Issue                                      | Notes  | <a href="#">Link to Feminist Recovery plan</a>   |
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| Response to work-life balance consultation | <p>The organisation doesn't have capacity to respond directly to the consultation survey. However, WPG have recently undertaken a significant amount of work in relation to women's, workers' rights, the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities and the need to address the increased pressures on women trying to manage throughout the pandemic. This is linked within the response letter.</p> <p>WPG also endorses ICTU's Consultation Response. Within the membership of the WPG includes a number of Trade Union organisations, as well as ICTU, who have been involved in</p> | <p>The feminist recovery plan reflects a number of recommendations aimed at maximising women's empowerment. This bill aims to embed economic</p> |



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|  | much of this work and are experts on issues relating to work-life balance and women's employment.  | rights within new legislation.<br><br>Link to the <a href="#">full response</a> .  |
| Protection from stalking bill joint submission | <p>This joint response uses evidence obtained for past submissions, particularly in relation to the correlation between domestic abuse, misogyny and stalking. The response provides evidence of the gendered nature of stalking at the outset of this response. The response also provides primary research to reflect the anonymous testimonies of those who have been victims of stalking in NI. The response highlights the opportunity this bill provides to better protect victims and centre the voices of victims and evidence from expert groups within legislation.</p> <p>The response highlights a number of key recommendations to support implementation of the bill including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring legislation that relates to areas of violence that disproportionately impacts women recognise the gendered nature of that crime and underlying, deep-rooted attitudes of misogyny in our society,</li> <li>• Ensuring that any new legislation is victim-led, with recognition of the intersectional needs of different groups and societal factors that put some victims at greater risk or create barriers to accessing justice.</li> <li>• Recognise gender as a protected characteristic, and specifically recognise misogyny and trans misogyny as a form of hate crime,</li> <li>• Implement all of the outstanding Gillen Review Recommendations,</li> <li>• Ensure that any new strategies or public awareness campaigns are developed in codesign with experts from both the women's and LGBTQ+ sectors.</li> </ul> | <p>Stalking is reflected as a highly gendered crime. By legislating for protections, women who are victims are better able to seek protection and justice.</p> <p>Link to <a href="#">full response</a>.</p> |

[Briefing documents produced by WRDA April 2021](#)

| Issue | Notes | Links to feminist recovery plan |
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| <p>Key briefing on Carers</p>                | <p>The briefing includes sections detailing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care work as being at the heart of the economy.</li> <li>• Economic justice pillar of the Feminist Recovery Plan including gender segregated markets &amp; care work and a feminist green economy.</li> <li>• Health pillar of the Feminist Recovery Plan with a focus on women with caring responsibilities and dependents</li> <li>• International Best practice highlighting the Purple Pact and economics that work for women.</li> </ul> <p>Recommendations are featured throughout the briefing including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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,</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> | <p>Women represent the majority of paid and unpaid carers. To increase economic provisions for carers would help achieve economic equality for women.</p> <p>Link to the full briefing <a href="#">here</a>.</p> |
| <p>Key briefing on Gender-based violence</p> | <p>The briefing includes sections on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues of violence against women</li> <li>• Domestic &amp; sexual violence</li> <li>• Rape myths &amp; culture</li> <li>• Women in media</li> <li>• Hate crimes &amp; online abuse</li> </ul> <p>Summary of recommendations from Raise your Voice and WPG including recommendations such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin a public awareness campaign as soon as possible on the importance of responsible reporting on sexual offences, including an awareness campaign targeted at formal education institutions.</li> </ul>  | <p>The feminist recovery highlights a number of issues related to women's risk of violence. This paper summarises these key themes and recommendations.</p> <p>Link to full briefing <a href="#">here</a>.</p>   |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A comprehensive, inclusive programme is developed on sex and relationships education, for all schools and third level institutions.</li> <li>• Ensure that effective measures are taken within the justice system to address high attrition and low conviction rates for sexual offences.</li> <li>• Ensure that Violence Against Women and Girls is being reported in a responsible manner across media platforms so as to discourage victim blaming and rape myths as laid out in article 17 of the Istanbul Convention.</li> <li>• Introduction of non-fatal and fatal strangulation legislation</li> </ul> |  |
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## Westminster

### Bills April 2021

| Issue                             | Date    | Sponsored by                         | Stage                               | Notes   | Links to Feminist Recovery Plan   |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Police, Crime and sentencing Bill | 30/4/21 | Robert Buckley, Ministry for justice | Committee stage in house of commons | A bill to make provision about the police and other emergency workers; to make provision about collaboration between authorities to prevent and reduce serious violence; to make provision about the powers of the police and other authorities for the purposes of preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting crime or investigating other matters; to make provision about the maintenance of public order; to make provision about sentencing, detention, release, management and rehabilitation of offenders; etc. | This is a very broad bill covering a range of topics including violence against women which links to the topics covered in the feminist recovery plan. However, the right to protest has also been essential in furthering women's legislation. |

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|  |  |  |  | <p>This bill has been controversial has it is seen as an attack on the right to protest as is reflected in the second stage debate.</p> <p>It's also been highlighted that the bill deals with duties to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence. Specifically, it places a legal duty on local authorities, police, criminal justice agencies, health authorities, fire and rescue services and others to collaborate through sharing data and intelligence with one another. The debate highlighted how important it is that the impact of violence by men against women, particularly domestic violence and sexual violence, controlling and coercive behaviour by men and the impact on the community are included in that strategy to reduce violence against women and girls.</p> | <p>Read full details of the Bill <a href="#">here</a>.</p> |
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### Questions asked tabled during April 2021

| Issue              | Date     | Proposed by  | Notes   | Link to Feminist Recovery Plan  |
|--------------------|----------|--|---|---|
| Gender pension gap | 19/04/21 | Patricia Gibson MP<br>North Ayrshire and Arran (SNP) | The debate highlighted:<br>The gender pension gap, which stands at 40.3%—more than double the gender pay gap of 17.3%. The government express justifications for women's state pension age being raised, but equalising state pension ages is very different from pension equality. | Women's economic equality is a core feature of the feminist recovery plan including work and pay inequality. The presence of a significant gender pension gap |

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|  |  |  | In all types of pension provision—whether state pensions, workplace pensions or private pensions—inherently discriminate against women. | provides further evidence as to women’s lifelong economic marginalisation.<br><br>Read the full debate <a href="#">here</a> . |
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