



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update – June 2021

Summary

In June 2021, there has been a number of political developments surrounding the thematic issues highlighted within the [Women's Policy Group \(WPG\) Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#). This summary reflects Bills and oral questions answered by both the Stormont and Westminster Executives.

The issue of **women's economic justice** featured prominently at Stormont and Westminster with the introduction of legislation in relation to childcare, maternity protections, and increasing rights of parents to take absence in tragic circumstances such as miscarriages and bereavement.

The issue of **violence against women and girls** featured prominently in upcoming legislation in both Stormont and Westminster. Naomi Long's Protection from Stalking Bill progressed to Committee stage this month as she fielded questions in relation to how gender will be understood within upcoming Hate Crime Legislation. In Westminster, a number of interesting Private Member's Bills such as an "Unsolicited Explicit Images and Deepfake Pornography Bill" and the "Intimate Images (Offences) Bill" have been introduced to combat sexual harassment blindspots in the online space.

The issue of **reproductive health** and **access to abortion** featured prominently this month in Clare Bailey's questions to the Health Minister Robin Swann, and non-Executive Bills proposed by Clare Bailey and Paul Givan.

Courtney Girvin (WRDA volunteer)

Stormont

Bills – June 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 threatening or abusive behaviour, and from stalking.</p> <p>The new legislation will have greater and more appropriate penalties and protections from stalking behaviour compared to current harassment legislation. The introduction of stalking protection orders (SPOs) will enable the police to intervene prior to any conviction to address stalking behaviours before they become entrenched or escalate in severity and protect victims when there is an immediate risk of harm.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into three parts. Part 1 creates a new specific offence of stalking, and creates the offence of threatening and abusive behaviour, which can be triggered by a single incident. Part 2 provides for the introduction of SPOs. Part 3 deals with the interpretation, commencement, and short title of the Bill.</p>	<p>Stalking is an inherently gendered crime, with women representing a disproportionate number of victims. Stalking commonly happens within a context of domestic abuse and is linked to elements of coercive control.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here.</p>
Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill	Diane Dodds (contemporary) Minister for Economy	Second Stage	<p>A Bill to make provision about leave and pay for employees who have lost their children.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into two main sections. Firstly, parental bereavement leave, which will curate the right of parent's who have lost their child to be absent from</p>	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Parental Bereavement Bill.</p>

			<p>work, regardless of how long they have worked for their employer.</p> <p>Secondly, parental bereavement pay, in which those eligible will receive a fixed or earnings-related weekly rate of pay.</p>	<p>Parental leave is recommended as a day one employment right within the FRP.</p> <p>Link to full information on the Bill here</p>
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Non-Executive Bills

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	Comments	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Safe Access Zones Bill (Public Health and Well Being Bill)	Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast)	Bill with NI Speaker’s Office – ready to begin its legislative journey	This Bill aims to provide safe access to healthcare facilities including buffer zones around reproductive healthcare facilities.	This would enhance the ability of women and others to access healthcare services without fear of harassment and intimidation.
Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill	Paul Givan (DUP – Lagan Valley)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill attempting to restrict access to abortion by amending the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 to remove the ground for abortion in cases of severe non-fatal fetal disability.</p> <p>There has been no public consultation for this Bill, and it should be noted that the Northern Ireland Office conducted a</p>	This would infringe upon the bodily autonomy of women and others, and violates the reproductive justice principle of the right to not have a child.

			public consultation when developing abortion law reform which resulted in the current 2020 legislation.	Link to information on the Bill to here
Climate Change Bill	Clare Bailey MLA, (Green Party NI – South Belfast)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill attempting to mitigate the effects of climate change in Northern Ireland. The Bill seeks to establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for NI, establish an NI Climate Commissioner and resultant Climate Office, achieve a climate sustainable economy by 2045, and guarantee existing climate and environmental protections.</p> <p>This Bill would declare a climate emergency until the threshold of the global temperature as defined by the Paris Agreement has been met.</p>	<p>The move to a “Green Economy” and more environmentally sustainable job market is reflected within the FRP. The effects of climate change and its damaging effects are disproportionately gendered globally.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill to here</p>

Questions asked - tabled during June 2020

Issue	Date	Asked by:	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Sign Language Legislation	01/06/2021	Pamela Cameron (DUP – South Antrim) To Deputy First Minister Michelle O’Neill	<p>The Question: “Does the FM and DFM agree it is time to properly progress a sign language Act for Northern Ireland as part of New Decade, New Approach?”</p> <p>As we move out of the pandemic the Assembly must deliver its commitments. The DFM pointed to the usage of sign language during Covid-19 briefings and public announcements as a positive step in the right direction to</p>	The introduction of this policy enables greater participation and communication to the deaf community and seeks to reduce/eliminate structural violence caused by denial of access due to unsatisfactory or non-

			bridge the communication gap that the deaf community has faced in the past.	existent communication of public messaging. Link to full answer here
Housing Executive Waiting List: North Down	01/06/2021	Alan Chambers (UUP – North Down) To Minister of Communities Dierdre Hargey	The Question: “How many people in the North Down constituency are waiting on the Housing Executive list to be rehoused?” Total of 1890 applicants on the common waiting list for social housing in that constituency. The Minister recognises a shortage in social housing and has set out a long-term plan to increase the supply of affordable social housing and reduce housing stress. The Minister would also like to bring forth a consultation on the future of the Housing Executive’s house sales scheme (particularly right to buy) to protect the current supply; and look at other models of home ownership such as co-ownership.	A strong social housing system that meets the demands of those who need it is an essential aspect of fighting the decommodification of housing and removes significant rent pressures off those most vulnerable in society. Link to full answer here
Housing Executive: Intimidation Points	01/06/2021	Trevor Lunn (independent – Lagan Valley) To Minister of Communities Dierdre Hargey	The Question: “Is Base2 (a crisis intervention project which offers clarification, support and mediation services to individuals and families at risk of violence or exclusion from their community) still being used to assess housing applications?” There is engagement there and with the PSNI on ensuring the verification process is stringent; this process is currently ongoing.	The importance of recognising gendered/domestic violence as important in assessing housing needs. Linked to decommodifying housing and ensuring quick access to alternative accommodation particularly in cases of

			<p>The Minister raises issues outside paramilitary intimidation such as gendered and domestic violence, which if the point system would be removed people could be left at a disadvantage.</p>	<p>domestic violence, sexual violence, homophobia, and transphobia.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p> <p>Link to more information on Base2 here</p>
Creation of Jobs within the NI Civil Service	08/06/2021	<p>Daniel McCrossan (SDLP – West Tyrone)</p> <p>To Finance Minister Conor Murphy</p>	<p>The Question: “More information about the Connect2 hub in Omagh, and whether there has been any consideration for such a hub in the Strabane area.”</p> <p>There is scheduled engagement with the opening of said hub. The background to such an initiative is that people who live in border areas do not apply for such jobs as the prospect of driving five days a week into Belfast was off-putting. This gives people the opportunity to work for a number of days in a regional hub, and therefore makes the prospect of that type of career more attractive.</p> <p>The Minister asserts that a more flexible working approach will benefit women in those areas who would struggle with travelling into Belfast given the traditional responsibility of home and family placed upon women.</p>	<p>Recognition of historic underinvestment in rural communities and rural women in particular.</p> <p>Flexible working has been recommended by the FRP as particularly important for engaging women in general into the workforce.</p> <p>Recognition of double shift in which women balance paid work responsibility with unpaid caring responsibilities.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Pay Increase for Health and Social Care (HSC) Staff	08/06/2021	<p>Paula Bradshaw</p>	<p>The Question: “One reason for horrendous waiting lists is the number of vacancies. If staff were paid better this may not be such as</p>	<p>FRP emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing care work, as</p>

		(Alliance – South Belfast) To Finance Minister Conor Murphy	<p>issue. Unison is campaigning for all HSC staff to receive an immediate £2000 annual pay uplift. What conversations has the Minister had with the UK Treasury?”</p> <p>The Minister has had broad conversations with the British PM about providing necessary support to rebuild the health service. The Minister asserts the need for resources to support this rebuild and maintains this will include issues of wages and fair working hours for HSC staff.</p>	<p>careers such as carers and nurses remain dominated by women (and undervalued due to their feminine association).</p> <p>An immediate £2000 pay uplift showcases it is a valued career, which may help attract further recruitment.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Gender Pay Gap among Civil Servants	08/06/2021	Sinead McLaughlin (SDLP – Foyle) To Finance Minister Conor Murphy	<p>The Question: “We know that blended and flexible working is particularly welcome for those who have young families or caring responsibilities. What is the Minister doing to close the gender gap among civil servants?”</p> <p>The Minister mentioned the Connect2 hubs and the importance of removing the travel barrier to incentivise women to work within the Civil Service. The Minister also recognised the importance in diversifying our Civil Service workforce to include more women and other underrepresented groups.</p>	<p>The Minister has recognised certain barriers to rural women, however the FRP recommends the development of a women’s employment strategy to identify other labour market issues facing women.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
HSC Staff Recognition Payment	14/06/2021	Kellie Armstrong (Alliance – Strangford) To	<p>The Question: “When will HSC staff will see the special recognition payment in their pay packets or bank accounts?”</p>	<p>FRP emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing care work, as careers such as carers and</p>

		Health Minister Robin Swann	HSC staff should receive the payment in their bank accounts by July. The delay in receiving the payment was as a result of ensuring supporting measures so that the payment was not subject to tax or social benefits allowance.	nurses remain dominated by women. An immediate £2000 pay uplift showcases it is a valued career, which may help attract further recruitment. Link to full answer here
Abortion Services	14/06/2021	Clare Bailey (Green Party – South Belfast) To Health Minister Robin Swann	The Question: “Will the Minister commit to offering an apology to the 371 women who have been forced to travel to England for abortion services during the pandemic?” In regards delivering abortion, I am seeking consensus as required under the Ministerial code. He has asked his Executive partners for a decision on this issue as he wants to reduce the health risk of women who have to travel to England, or worse turn to unsafe and unregulated services.	Access to abortion services is an inherently gendered experience. As Sinead McLaughlin asserted last month to expect women and others to travel during a pandemic to receive routine healthcare is fundamentally wrong and in contradiction to gender equality agendas and their individual human rights. Link to full answer here
Stanton Healthcare Belfast	14/06/2021	Clare Bailey (Green Party – South Belfast) To	The Question: “After receiving a written response stating that Stanton Healthcare in Belfast is not regulated, do you not think it is dangerous if it is not regulated and we do not know what is being offered? (Currently its website states its services	It is important to ensure that healthcare providers are regulated to ensure that women and others can make informed

		Health Minister Robin Swann	<p>include counselling, pregnancy testing, STI testing, post-abortion care, and other related services)</p> <p>The Minister states he takes his guidance from the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority which is their regulatory and quality inspectorate. The Minister commits to speaking to the RQIA to reassess whether Stanton Health is within the remit of inspection.</p>	<p>decisions in safe environments.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Funding for Rural Roads	15/06/2021	<p>Rosemary Barton (UUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p> <p>To Minister of Infrastructure Nichola Mallon</p>	<p>The Question: “What extra finance can be made available for increasing problems associated with the maintenance of rural roads?”</p> <p>There has been historical underinvestment in the maintenance of our roads network with many rural roads in need of repair.</p> <p>£10 million out of the £12 million allocated as part of the road’s recovery fund is directed towards rural roads. This will be increased to £15 million in the 2021-2022 budget. This will improve connectivity and benefit rural communities.</p>	<p>Recognition of the barriers to participation and opportunity to rural communities and rural women as a result of historic underinvestment and infrastructure. This is a positive step towards greater connectivity.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Gillen Review: RSE Recommendations	21/06/21	<p>Sinead McLaughlin (SDLP – Foyle)</p> <p>To Justice Minister Naomi Long</p>	<p>The Question: “Could the Minister provide an update for standardised RSE in schools as recommended in the Gillen Review.”</p> <p>While the Minister has overall responsibility for the implementation of recommendations made within the Gillen Review it is a transformational programme which cuts across multiple Departments; the responsibility for RSE reform lies with the Education Department.</p>	<p>The Gillen Review investigated the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>RSE has been identified as a key factor in addressing violence against women</p>

			<p>A working group has now been established and the Justice Department has organised a series of workshops to engage relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>and other issues of gender inequality. As a mechanism to enhance long-term change on these issues RSE must be standardized and in line with CEDAW recommendations.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Hate Crime Legislation	21/06/21	<p>Steve Aiken (UUP – South Antrim) To Justice Minister Naomi Long</p>	<p>The Question: “Can the Minister outline the action she is taking to advance Hate Crime Legislation?”</p> <p>The Minister is awaiting the final report of the Marrinan Review which will set out her intentions moving forward. The Minister commits to drafting the Bill during the summer period, with the draft Bill entering during the next mandate.</p> <p>The Minister also discussed debates for public consultation such as whether gender should be a category of hate crime, or should misogyny be a specific category separate from transphobia?</p>	<p>The FRP recommends that gender-based violence, threats and abuse are included as a protected characteristic in any upcoming Hate Crime Legislation Review in Northern Ireland; and that gender is a protected characteristic by treating misogyny as a standalone hate crime.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Discretionary Support Scheme	22/06/21	<p>Philip McGuigan (Sinn Fein – North Antrim) To</p>	<p>The Question: “Will the Minister provide an update on her plans to extend the benefit mitigation package in light of the budget settlement?”</p>	<p>Importance of mitigation payments continuing to fight against accruing debt and financial difficulty as a protective measure.</p>

		Minister of Communities Dierdre Hargey	Yes, there is money in the budget to extend mitigations. The paper the Minister submitted to the Executive also discuss closing loopholes associated with the benefit cap and the bedroom tax for those who have fallen through them.	FRP emphasizes the importance of extending such measures to prevent against a 'cliff-edge' for when people must deal with the backlog of debt. Link to full answer here
Conversion Therapy Ban	22/06/21	Colin McGrath (SDLP – South Down) To Minister of Communities Dierdre Hargey	The Question: “Will the Minister provide an update on the work she has done to ban conversion therapy?” The Minister has started discussions with the Bill Office to start drafting legislation. There is recognition of the potential to re-traumatise individuals and therefore the Minister is working with the Department of Health to ensure appropriate support services are available.	This is a gendered offence, in which people were targeted as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important to support victims/survivors and future generations deserve to be free from the repetition of similar gendered violence. Link to full answer here
Childcare Strategy Update	29/06/21	Pat Catney (SDLP – Lagan Valley) To Education Minister Michelle McIlveen	The Question: “Can the Minister provide an update on the Childcare Strategy?” Unfortunately work had to be paused so as Dept officials focused their efforts on providing financial support for the childcare sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.	The FRP is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce a fully costed Childcare Strategy, underpinned by legislation, that meets the needs of children, parents, childcare providers and

			The work to develop the strategy will include the production of an up-to-date assessment of the state of the sector following the pandemic; re-engaging with key stakeholders on the objectives, priorities and key deliverables; feasibility testing, costing and prioritising options; and a public consultation.	benefits the local economy. Link to full answer here
Holiday Hunger and Free School Meals	29/06/21	Rachel Woods (Green Party – North Down) To Education Minister Michelle Mcllveen	The Question: “Will the Minister continue to support free school meals continuing indefinitely during holiday periods?” A payment scheme for the next period has been approved and signed off recently. That will again be £13.50 per child per week and will be made available on 30 June for nine weeks to all families entitled to free school meals, at a cost of about £12 million.	The FRP recommends that direct payments in lieu of school meals should continue throughout the summer months and until such times as all children are fully back to school to combat economic insecurity and hardship. Link to full answer here

[Westminster](#)

[Bills January 2021](#)

Issue	Date	Sponsored by	Stage	Notes	Links to Feminist Recovery Plan
Police, Crime and	30/06/21	Robert Buckley,	Report Stage (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	This is a very broad Bill covering a range of topics including gender

sentencing Bill		Ministry for Justice		<p>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.</p> <p>This has been controversial as it is viewed as an attack on the right to protest.</p> <p>Debates have 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>and sexual based violence. However, the right to protest has also been essential in furthering women's legislation.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill	30/06/21	Brandon Lewis, Ministry for Northern Ireland Office	Committee Stage (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to make provision about Ministerial appointments, extraordinary Assembly elections, the Ministerial Code of Conduct and petitions of concern in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>This Bill will deliver aspects of the New Decade, New Approach Agreement which was agreed by the five main NI political parties in January 2020. The Bill is concerned with the sustainability and transparency of the Northern Ireland institutions.</p>	<p>These new provisions reform the Petition of Concern mechanism in order to reduce its use (and return it to its intended purpose which was to ensure that all sections of the community are protected).</p>

				Some key changes include requiring petitioners to come from more than one Northern Irish political party and updating the code of conduct for Northern Ireland Ministers.	Previously the Petition of Concern has been abused and used to block socially progressive legislation such as equal marriage. Such reforms go some ways in ensuring one party cannot override the democratic process. Read full details of the Bill here .
Childcare Bill	18/06/21	Matt Rodda (Labour – Reading East)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to enable provision to be made for appeals relating to free childcare for young children of working parents to be settled by agreement; to make further provision designed to increase efficiency in the administration of free childcare schemes; to make provision about the promotion of free childcare, including to disadvantaged groups.	Childcare is recognised as an important aspect when the economic justice pillar of the FRP. Social expectations in which women are the predominate carers of children place barriers on their ability to access and progress within the workforce. Read full details of the Bill here .
Conversion Therapy	22/06/21	Wera Hobhouse	Second Reading	A Bill to prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity conversion therapy.	This is a gendered offence, in which people

(Prohibition) Bill		(Liberal Democrat – Bath)	(House of Commons)	There is little detail about this Bill currently given its early stages, however, it will be interesting to keep an eye given similar legislation is in conversation in the Northern Ireland Executive.	were targeted as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important to support victims/survivors and future generations deserve to be free from the repetition of similar gendered violence. Read full details of the Bill here
Miscarriage Leave Bill	23/06/21	Angela Crawley (SNP)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to make provision for paid leave for people who have experienced a miscarriage. There is little detail on the Bill in its current stages; however given the introductions of a Parental Bereavement Bill within Stormont this will be worth keeping an eye on.	The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Miscarriage Leave Bill. Read full details of the Bill here
Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill	24/06/21	Maria Miller (Conservative – Basingstoke)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to prohibit redundancy during pregnancy and maternity leave, including up to six months after the end of pregnancy or leave; except in specified circumstances.	The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will

					undoubtedly be affected by the Bill. Read full details of the Bill here
Unsolicited Explicit Images and Deepfake Pornography Bill	22/06/21	Angela Richardson (Conservative – Guildford)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to create the offences of sending unsolicited explicit digital images and of producing digitally-altered images or videos in which an individual is depicted pornographically without their consent. There is currently no legislation regarding cyberflashing.	Cyberflashing (unsolicited explicit images) is a gendered act which targets women. Many affected have reported feeling unsafe and vulnerable in their own homes as a result of increased access in the online space. 41% of all millennial women have been sent an unsolicited photo of a man's genitals. Read full details of the Bill here
Intimate Images (Offences) Bill	24/06/21	Maria Miller (Conservative – Basingstoke)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to create offences relating to the taking, making and sharing of intimate images without consent.	This is a gendered form of harassment. This Private Member's Bill is linked with the above Private Member's Bill in

					<p>relation to explicit images.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
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