



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update – September 2021

Summary

This summary reflects Bills within both the Stormont Executive and Westminster Government, relevant questions tabled to Stormont Ministers during Departmental Question Times, and policy consultations of both the WPG & WRDA. This month 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](#).

The issue of **violence against women and girls** featured prominently in legislation in both Stormont and Westminster. Naomi Long's Protection from Stalking Bill remains at Committee stage alongside the introduction of a Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims Bill. In Westminster there has been no movement on the Private Member's Bills in relation to Intimate Images (Offences) Bill and Unsolicited Explicit Images and Deepfake Pornography Bill – however, they remain ones to watch. Questions were tabled during Question Time in relation to the forthcoming Violence Against Women Strategy.

The issue of **women's economic justice** remained prominent at Stormont and Westminster with legislation in relation to childcare, maternity protections, and increasing rights of parents to take absence in tragic circumstances such as miscarriages and bereavement. Further, the WPG & WRDA responses emphasise the importance of bringing a gendered lens to such economic policies and strategies to ensure that women benefit equally. The news from Westminster in relation to scrapping the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits was raised as a prominent issue of concern which will undoubtedly affect vulnerable women.

The issue of **reproductive health** and **access to abortion** featured prominently this month in Stormont and within the local streets of Northern Ireland. Clare Bailey's Non-Executive Bill is due to go to second reading this Tuesday and reproductive activists Alliance for Choice are encouraging people to write to their MLAs to ensure they support this Bill. Further, Alliance for Choice billboards which aimed to normalise abortion have been vandalised and taken down this month, just days after they were put up. Furthermore, a second legal challenge has been issued by anti-abortion campaigners against the government for issuing the direction on Stormont to impose a deadline to establish services. As we approach the second anniversary of decriminalisation of abortion it is clear the issue of abortion access remains hotly contested.

This update has been put together by Courtney Girvin (WRDA volunteer)

Stormont

Executive Bills – Sep 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage (as of date of writing)	Comments	Links to the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Protection from Stalking Bill	Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill to provide protection from threatening or abusive behaviours, and from stalking behaviours. This new legislation will have greater penalties and protections from stalking behaviour compared to current legislation.</p> <p>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, therefore, protecting victims when there is an immediate risk of harm. The Bill is divided into three parts. Part 1 creates the 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.</p> <p>Domestic homicide is linked to high-risk indicators such as coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking and domestic violence</p> <p>The FRP also notes NI specific considerations such as the link between paramilitarism and stalking behaviours.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>
Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill	Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill to make provision about and in connection with sexual offences; regulate particular matters relating to cases of trafficking or exploitation; and amend rules applying with respect to certain sexual or violent offences prevention orders.</p>	<p>The FRP is pleased to see the implementation of the Gillen Review recommendations and believes they have the potential to transform the experience of those reporting</p>

			<p>At its core this Bill has two key aims. Firstly, to enhance public safety by implementing elements of the Gillen review of serious sexual offence cases and from a review of the law on child sexual exploitation and sexual offences against children. Secondly, to improve services for victims of trafficking and exploitation.</p> <p>The Bill also creates new sexual offences and penalties such as behaviours of upskirting and downblousing.</p>	<p>their experience of rape and other sexual offences.</p> <p>This is vital given that recent research found that 97% of women have been sexually harassed and 96% failed to report as they believed it would not do anything.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>
Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill	Diane Dodds (previous), Minister for Economy – continued by Gordon Lions (current)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill to make provision about and in connection with sexual offences; regulate particular matters relating to cases of trafficking or exploitation; and amend rules applying with respect to certain sexual or violent offences prevention orders.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into four parts. Part 1 legislates for the sexual offences covered within this Bill and the right to anonymity and privacy for both victims and perpetrators. Part 2 details trafficking and slavery offences separately. Part 3 detail what offences qualify for sexual offences prevention orders. The final part deals with the interpretation, commencement, and short title of the Bill.</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>Parental leave is recommended as a day one employment right within the FRP.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>
Climate Change (No.2) Bill	Edwin Poots, Minister for Agriculture,	Committee Stage	A Bill to set targets for the years 2050, 2040 and 2030 for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; to provide for a system of carbon budgeting; to provide for reporting and statements against those targets and budgets; to confer	The move to a “Green Economy” & an environmentally sustainable job market is reflected in the

	Environment and Rural Affairs		<p>power to impose climate change reporting duties on public bodies; to provide for reports and advice from the Committee on Climate Change; and for connected purposes.</p> <p>The speaker noted the Private Member's Bill introduced by Clare Bailey and how "this is the first time that a Bill with provisions that are mutually inconsistent with an existing Bill (with the same topic) has been introduced to the Assembly."</p> <p>The Minister asserted that he will not agree to a net zero target and that achieving net zero emissions by 2050 is not possible and therefore the goal of this Bill is to reduce it by at least 82%.</p>	<p>FRP. Gender equality must be at the heart of plans to tackle the climate crisis which will require a transformation of civil society and the economy. A new Energy Strategy will set ambitious targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero-carbon society.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill to here</p>
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Non-Executive Bills – September 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage (as of date of writing)	Comments	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill	Paul Givan (First Minister – 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 public consultation when developing abortion law reform which resulted in the current 2020 legislation.</p> <p>Should be noted that new FM has last month stated he will challenge the Secretary of State Brandon Lewis in the courts over his direction that Stormont must commission full abortion services by next March.</p> <p>A second legal challenge has been issued by anti-abortion campaigners against the government for issuing the direction on Stormont to impose a deadline to establish services.</p>	<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.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> <p>Link to FM Paul Givan’s position on the issue here</p> <p>Link to Northern Ireland Abortion timeline here</p>
Climate Change Bill	Clare Bailey (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>The move to a “Green Economy” and a more environmentally sustainable job market is reflected in the FRP.</p> <p>The effects of climate change are</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>disproportionately gendered globally.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill to here</p>
<p>Safe Access Zones Bill (Public Health and Well Being Bill)</p>	<p>Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast)</p>	<p>Second Reading</p>	<p>This Bill requires the Department of Health to provide safe access to healthcare facilities including buffer zones/safe access zones around reproductive healthcare facilities.</p> <p>Such zones would mean anti-abortion protesting and harassment that would cause distress to those accessing healthcare would be unable to occur, and it would be a criminal offence to do so. The Bill also creates obligations on the Department of Health to liaise with police services to monitor and enforce safe access zones, alongside the requirement that the Department publish annual reporting in relation to effectiveness of the usage of safe access zones.</p>	<p>This would enhance the ability of women and others to access healthcare services such as abortion and accessing contraception without fear of harassment and intimidation.</p> <p>The FRP recognises the importance of enacting safe access and buffer zones.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>

Question Time - September 2021.

Issue	Date	Asked by:	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy	13/09/2021	Mr McAleer (Sinn Fein – West Tyrone) To Paul Girvan, First Minister	<p>The Question: “Will the First Minister commit to ensuring that the voices of those professional and support bodies that work with women will be involved in the design and development of the much-needed violence against women and girls strategy?”</p> <p>The First Minister asserted that it is vital all voices are heard including those with relevant knowledge who can assist in formulating the strategy. The First Minister gave no dates as to when we can see this strategy implemented</p>	<p>The FRP recommends that the a VAWG strategy should be fully funded and take a preventative approach. The best way to achieve this is via co-design with relevant organisations during the design – not a consultation at the end.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>
Welfare Reform Mitigations	13/09/2021	Ms Bradley (DUP – North Belfast) To Paul Girvan, First Minister	<p>The Question: “Will the First Minister press for legislation to extend welfare mitigations to be brought forward at the earliest opportunity?”</p> <p>There is support from all Ministers for mitigations to be extended. The First Minister’s party has committed themselves to being rolled over for the next three years.</p>	<p>The FRP asserts that welfare mitigations are vital particularly for women in Northern Ireland who have been adversely affected by welfare reform and the pandemic.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>

Review of the Provision of Services for Vulnerable Persons Detained in Prisons	13/09/2021	Mr McAleer (Sinn Fein – West Tyrone) To Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	<p>The Question: “Can the Minister give an update on the review of the provision of services for vulnerable persons detained in NI prisons?”</p> <p>A review of our supporting prisoners at risk procedures has resulted in the delivery of a new person-centred approach that aims to support someone through a period of crisis or distress, as well as addressing the root cause of the issue. Well-being hubs in each of our establishments provide a therapeutic environment for people in our care who need the support of the trust's mental health teams, and specific therapeutic spaces in each of our establishments provide multidisciplinary support to people at risk.</p>	<p>The FRP asserts that there is a gender equality issue in relation to the proportion of punishment towards vulnerable and marginalised groups of women as the vast majority of women in prison are remanded for issues related to mental health, homelessness, and addiction rather than severity of offences.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>
Domestic Abuse Offence Delay	13/09/2021	Ms Murphy (Sinn Fein – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) To Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	<p>The Question: “Why is the introduction of the new domestic abuse offence, provided for in the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act, is to be delayed from the end of 2021 until at least February 2022?”</p> <p>There are a number of reasons, but the majority of it is down to the complexities of the computer systems and the interchange of information that are required for those offences to take effect. Therefore, they have asked for additional time. However, they have reassured us that the revised time frame is more realistic.</p>	<p>Stalking is an inherently gendered crime, with women representing a disproportionate number of victims. It is important to get robust legislation as soon as possible</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>

Healthcare Facilities and Safe Access Zones	13/09/2021	Mr O'Dowd (Sinn Fein – Upper Bann) To Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	<p>The Question: “Has the Minister examined another legislative way to protect women accessing healthcare, given that he understands that it will not now be possible to legislate for exclusion zones around facilities where women are accessing healthcare such as abortion services.”</p> <p>Whether it is possible to bring it within the scope of the current legislation is a matter of discussion. However, I am aware that a private Member's Bill has been drafted and is ready to take this forward. The harassment of people entering medical facilities needs to end and that space is needed for people to access medical treatment and for staff to go to their place of work without interference.</p>	<p>The FRP recognises the importance of enacting safe access and buffer zones, and asserts that horrific experiences of people trying to access the care that is available needs to be ameliorated with the passing of the Private Members Bill on safe access zones.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>
Universal Credit/Working Tax Credit: Uplift Cut	20/10/2021	Ms Murphy (Sinn Fein – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) To Deirdre Hargey, Minister of Communities	<p>The Question: “What engagement has the Minister had with her Scottish and Welsh counterparts regarding the British Government’s intention to cut the £20 uplift to universal credit and working tax credit?”</p> <p>The Minister expressed to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions grave concern about and objection to the withdrawal of the £20 uplift in universal credit, particularly in the wake of the COVID pandemic. The response was that this was always a temporary measure.</p> <p>The Executive recently endorsed a letter calling for the uplift to remain in place, and her Scottish and Welsh counterparts also agree in regards the potential devastating impact.</p>	<p>The FRP asserts that the British Government should not cut the £20 uplift as this is a lifeline that goes some way to making Universal Credit liveable. Given the gendered dimensions of poverty and caring, the FRP asserts that this £20 uplift should be added to those on legacy benefits and Carer’s Allowance.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>

			As a result of the £20 uplift, £110 million goes into the pockets of people here on an annual basis.	
Scope of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill	20/09/2021	Mr Robinson (DUP – East Londonderry) To Gordon Lions, Minister of Economy	<p>The Question: “There has been some discussion about how the scope of the Bill should include parents of children over the age of 18 as well as miscarriage. Does the Minister think that that is achievable in the timescale, or will he pledge to investigate the issue more broadly?”</p> <p>Miscarriage is an important and sensitive issue. I believe that it needs full consideration and exploration to ensure that any policy that is developed not only is fit for purpose and offers the right level of support but builds the right framework for employees and employers. It is an important issue, as is the loss of a child over the age of 18. Although we have not consulted on that and would need to examine the potential costs of such an action, we would need to explore the matter fully.</p>	<p>Miscarriage is a highly gendered issue. States such as New Zealand have created policies in relation to bereavement leave to cover miscarriages and still birth. This illustrated the advances in gendered issues when a gendered approach is considered during policy making and decision making.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>
Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy	27/09/2021	Miss Woods (Green Party – North Down) To Conor Murphy, Minister of Finance	<p>The Question: “Can the Minister provide an update on the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) domestic abuse workplace policy?”</p> <p>A number of workplace policies are being reviewed by NICS HR, and that is one of them. Policies need to be kept continuously under review to make sure that we have the most appropriate, sensitive, and supportive policies for Civil Service staff in the time ahead.</p>	<p>Domestic Abuse is a gendered issue. New Zealand has created initiatives surrounding domestic abuse leave. This illustrates advances issues when a gendered approach is considered during policy making.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>

Endometriosis	28/09/2021	Mr McAleer (Sinn Féin – West Tyrone) To Robin Swann, Minister for Health	<p>The Question: “It takes eight years for endometriosis to be diagnosed. What steps are being taken to ensure that women who have endometriosis receive adequate care and support while they wait for a consultation with a specialist?”</p> <p>As patient demand for elective care services currently exceeds funded health service capacity for both new outpatient and inpatient day-case treatment across a range of specialties, including gynaecology, regrettably, it is inevitable that waiting times will increase, as has been seen over the past few years.</p>	<p>With only one specialist surgeon for endometriosis in NI, it is no surprise that so many women experience delays in surgery for debilitating pain. The FRP asserts this is an example of how women’s healthcare is underserved, women’s pain disbelieved, and women’s experiences ignored.</p> <p>More information on the Q&A here</p>
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[Consultations](#)

Issue	Women’s Policy Group response (WPG)	Link to Feminist Recovery plan
WRDA Response to Department of Health Integrated Care System NI Draft Framework	<p>An integrated care system model is defined as a collaborative partnership between organisations and individuals with a responsibility for planning, managing, and delivering sustainable care, services, and interventions to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the local population.</p> <p>WRDA believes that this is vital to address waiting list backlogs and reform current services. Collaborative partnership is a matter for relevant partners beyond those typically involved in health and social care, and there must be room for women’s sectors. WRDA agrees that collaboration and partnership can address health inequalities but is concerned that this model</p>	<p>Within the FRP, some of these inequalities are expanded upon with several evidence-led policy recommendations that are relevant to this ICS consultation such as: the impact of austerity on women’s health and well-</p>

	has failed to consider gendered health inequalities. Therefore, it is vital to recognise the expertise of women's organisation and invest in these partnerships; recognise the unequal distribution of care work between men and women; and recognise gendered inequalities in terms of health and recovery between men and women.	being; and the gendered inequalities in relation to caring responsibilities and the impact this has on women's health and well-being. More information here
WPG NI Response to Justice Committee Call for Evidence: Justice (Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Victims) Bill	<p>The issues covered in the bill at hand are extremely prevalent issues in our society, and the WPG welcome the introduction of the Justice (Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Victims) Bill. This goes some way in ensuring that protections for gendered crimes are finally catching up to other jurisdictions in the UK and Ireland.</p> <p>However, it important to recognise that gendered crimes such as those detailed within this Bill must be tackled with the understanding that they are enabled by underlying, deep-rooted attitudes of misogyny and a rape culture within our society. The WPG also emphasises the intersectional nature of sexual exploitation which place some groups in greater risk or victimisation and also increase barriers in regards access to justice.</p>	<p>The cultural pillar of the FRP emphasises the importance of tackling rape cultures and mythologies as enabling factors which contribute towards misogyny, gendered violence, and sexual violence such as the offences within this Bill.</p> <p>More information here</p>
WPG Response to Non-Fatal Strangulation: A Public Consultation	The WPG are eager to see a new offence of non-fatal strangulation introduced in Northern Ireland with the belief that such legislation will save lives. This crime is inherently gendered, as the overwhelming majority of victims are women. Therefore, it is important that the gendered dimensions are examined and that first responders are equipped to deal with said gendered dynamics. A stand-alone offence would be very welcome in terms of both addressing and acknowledging the seriousness of this crime and attempting to prevent any further escalation in individual cases by encouraging swift intervention.	<p>The FRP recommends the introduction of both non-fatal and fatal strangulation legislation.</p> <p>Non-fatal strangulation is a tool of coercive control, and/or as part of sexual violence and is often an</p>

		indicator of an escalation of abuse and homicide. More information here
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Westminster

Bills September 2021

Issue	Date	Sponsored by	Stage	Notes	Links to Feminist Recovery Plan
Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill	08/10/2021	Robert Buckley, Ministry for Justice (House of Commons) Baroness Williams of House Trafford, Conservative Life Peer (House of Lords)	House of Commons passage completed; moved to Committee Stage (House of Lords)	<p>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.</p> <p>This has been controversial as it is viewed as an attack on the right to protest.</p> <p>Debates have highlighted that the impact of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, sexual violence, controlling and coercive behaviour by men and their impact on the</p>	<p>This is a very broad Bill covering a range of topics including gender 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> <p>Summary of new clauses added to the Bill here</p>

				community is included in that strategy to reduce violence against women and girls.	
Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill	07/07/2021	Brandon Lewis, Ministry for Northern Ireland Office	Report 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>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.</p>	<p>These new provisions reform the Petition of Concern mechanism in order to reduce misuse</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Childcare Bill	18/06/2021	Matt Rodda (Labour)	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 (Prohibition) Bill	22/06/2021	Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity conversion therapy.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Miscarriage Leave Bill	23/06/2021	Angela Crawley (SNP)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to make provision for paid leave for people who have experienced a miscarriage.</p> <p>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 especially as one of the WPG recommendations is that paid leave entitlement should be included in the Parental</p>	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by this Bill.</p> <p>Read full details of the</p>

				Bereavement Bill for those who have suffered a miscarriage.	Bill here .
Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill	24/06/2021	Maria Miller (Conservative)	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.	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Bill.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>