



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update – October 2021

Summary

This summary reflects Bills within both the Stormont Executive and Westminster Government and relevant questions tabled to Stormont Ministers during Departmental Question Times. 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 **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. The withdrawal of the Private Member's Childcare Bill in Westminster and failure to reinstate the £20 uplift to Universal and Working Tax Credits shows the increasing economic injustice for those most vulnerable within our societies. Trying to ensure mitigations for this lifeline featured prominently across multiple Departmental Question Times. This month the FRP was reference by three elected officials during a debate on cuts to the Universal Credit uplift payment. Paula Bradley encouraged all members to read the plan so they can get an insight into how hard it is for women and their families currently living in Northern Ireland. Likewise Rachel Woods emphasized that if the Stormont Executive wished to build back better post-Covid then where is their movement on implementing the FRP.

The issue of **violence against women and girls** featured prominently in legislation in both Stormont and Westminster. Naomi Long's Protection from Stalking Bill Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims Bill remain at Committee. The recent upsurge in spiking behaviours in our clubs and bars, using both tablets within drinks and forcible injections, illustrates how prevalence violence against women remains within our society. This illustrates the importance of recent Bills within the DOJ but also highlights they must complete their legislative journeys and more must be done to combat other violent behaviours largely targeted against women such as spiking.

The issue of **reproductive health** and **access to abortion** featured prominently this month in Stormont and within the local streets of Northern Ireland. The Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill which attempts to restrict abortion access and will force those who receive certain foetal diagnoses to travel for abortion healthcare or continue with their pregnancy progressed to consideration stage as a result of abstentions from both the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

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

Stormont

Executive Bills – October 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	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	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.	The FRP is pleased to see the implementation of the Gillen Review recommendations and believes they have the potential to transform the

			<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>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>experience of those reporting 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 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 parents who have lost their child to be absent from 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>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>

				Link to information on the Bill here
Climate Change (No.2) Bill	Edwin Poots, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Committee Stage	<p>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 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%. Whereas Bailey's Private Member's Bill aims for a net zero carbon target by 2045. The GPNI leader has offered to compromise and incorporate elements of both Bills together, but this is unlikely given the Minister's stance that the proposed targets within the Private Member's Bill would decimate tens of thousands of jobs in the agri-food sector.</p>	<p>The move to a "Green Economy" & an environmentally sustainable job market is reflected in the 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 here</p>
Private Tenancies Bill	Deirdre Hargey, Minister of Communities	Committee Stage	A Bill to amend the law relating to private tenancies. The private rented sector accounts for 17% of all housing stock in Northern Ireland and is now larger social housing sector. 48% of people living in private renting housing receive state financial support to help with housing costs. As this sector	The FRP asserts that private renting is one of the most accessible for young people, those with precarious working arrangements, and

			<p>has grown it is important to ensure it is appropriately regulated.</p> <p>Contents of the Bill includes notice given to tenants in relation to current and past matters; tenants to be provided with receipts for cash payments; limits placed on deposit amounts; restrictions on rent increases; and increased health and safety clauses related to fire, smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and electrical safety standards.</p>	<p>those escaping domestic abuse – yet it is the most expensive form of housing.</p> <p>The average weekly cost of private renting is £97 per week; this is not fit for purpose for many young women working is underpaid and undervalued occupations such as retail and caring.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>
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Non-Executive Bills – October 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	Comments	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill	Initially introduced by Paul Givan (First Minister – Lagan Valley) but sponsorship has been	Consideration Stage	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. 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>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>

	transferred to Christopher Stalford (DUP – South Belfast)		<p>New FM 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 month both Sinn Fein and the SDLP abstained on this Bill at Committee level enabling it to move to consideration stage. This Bill fails to comply with human right standards and would force those who receive certain foetal diagnoses to travel for abortion healthcare or continue with their pregnancy – removing their right to choose.</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>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>These goals are much more ambitious than the Executive Bill proposed by Edwin Poots.</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 disproportionately gendered globally.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill to here</p>

Safe Access Zones Bill (Public Health and Well Being Bill)	Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast)	Committee Stage	<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>The importance of such zones have become incredibly evident this month after a pro-choice campaigner in Edinburgh was hit by an anti-choicer protester's car outside of the Chalmers clinic in Edinburgh this month.</p>	<p>This would enhance the ability of women and others, including the medical professionals who work within these buildings, 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>
Period Products (Free Provision) Bill	Pat Catney (SDLP – Lagan Valley)	Second Reading	<p>A Bill to secure the provision throughout Northern Ireland of free period products; and for connected purposes.</p> <p>England, Scotland, and Wales each have varying schemes in place to provide sanitary products free of charge in schools and some other public buildings. Northern Ireland has been the only place in the United Kingdom where such products are not provided free of charge in schools.</p> <p>This Bill strives to place a duty on the Department of Health to ensure that period products are available free of charge on a universal basis in appropriate locations; and to create</p>	<p>The FRP has highlighted the importance of good, gendered governance elsewhere globally – highlighting policies related to free period products as an example of this.</p> <p>Furthermore WRDA and the Women's Policy Group have been vocal in their support of movement towards free</p>

			regulations which specify which public service bodies have said duty to ensure access to free period products.	period products in past consultations. Link to information on the Bill here
Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill	Rachel Woods (Green Party NI – North Down)	Second Reading	<p>A Bill to make provision for an entitlement to 10 days paid safe leave in each year for victims of domestic abuse; and for connected purposes. The Bill makes this a day one right to be guaranteed to all employees.</p> <p>Safe Leave can help mitigate some of the barriers that victims/survivors face when attempting to seek help and support. It can also help address some of the costs of domestic abuse for employers.</p>	<p>The FRP has highlighted the good practice of similar policies elsewhere globally such as in New Zealand.</p> <p>The FRP supports this legislation but would like to see up to 20 days paid safe leave as a day one right which should be available to take either as a block or more flexibly.</p> <p>Link to more information on the Bill here</p>

Questions asked- tabled during October 2021.

Issue	Date	Asked by:	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Domestic Violence and the LGBTQ+ Community	05/10/21	Sinead McLaughlin (SDLP – West Belfast) To	“Will the Minister support the introduction of a PSNI database for recording incidents of domestic violence against those in the LGBTQ+ community?”	The FRP is an intersectional document highlighting the importance of not only the LGBTQ+ community, but also issues of race and

		Naomi Long, Minister of Justice	<p>The Minister acknowledged that 25% of lesbian and bisexual women and 40% of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse – with non-reporting meaning these incidences may be much higher. However, the Minister recognised the benefits of better data collection she asserted that operational matters are the responsibility of the Chief Constable, but asserted she would have no objections to such a decision.</p>	<p>ability. Furthermore, the FRP recommends increased awareness of domestic violence within the context of LGBT+ people.</p> <p>The FRP supports more rigorous and innovative data collection, and the importance of aggregated statistics are welcomed by feminist researchers and activists as it helps highlight intersectional trends.</p> <p>Link to more information here</p>
PSNI: Sexual Misconduct Allegations	05/10/21	<p>Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit – West Belfast)</p> <p>To Naomi Long, Minister of Justice</p>	<p>“Can the Minister give her assessment of the deeply disturbing and concerning news that, in the past five years, at least 39 police officers have been the subject of internal investigations over allegations of sexual misconduct?”</p> <p>It is hugely important that the PSNI continues to challenge cultures of misogyny and sexism so that we can be confident and feel safe to go to the PSNI to report sexual and gender-based crimes.</p>	<p>A key aspect of the FRP is combatting violence against women in all its forms including violence perpetrated by those who abuse their positions of power.</p> <p>Link to more information here</p>

			The Minister hopes that training rolled out as a result of the new Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act will highlight some of the key behaviours of concern.	
Universal Credit: October Monitoring Round Bid	11/10/21	Mark Durkan (SDLP – Foyle) To Paul Givan, First Minister	<p>“Does the First Minister support the allocation of resources in the October monitoring round to reverse the cut to universal credit?”</p> <p>The Executive has taken action by joining their Welsh and Scottish counterparts in asking the UK Government reverse their decision which they have articulated to the Treasury. It will be challenging for the Executive to have a mechanism to pay the additional monies independently from the Treasury.</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>Link to more information here</p>
Universal Credit: Mitigation	18/10/21	Justin McNulty (SDLP – Newry and Armagh) To Conor Murphy, Minister of Finance	<p>“Has the Minister accepted a bid from his party colleague for £55 million to mitigate the cut to universal credit, given that he will know that more than 100,000 households across the North are being impacted on by the cut.”</p> <p>The Minister devolved into party politics related to welfare reform before asserting that it is a case of whether the Executive has the money to mitigate the decision of the British Government to cut the £20 uplift not just in this monitoring round but in setting the three year budget.</p>	<p>The FRP asserts that the British Government should not have cut the £20 uplift as this is a lifeline for many.</p> <p>The gendered dimensions of poverty and caring meant this was vital for many young women and</p>

				<p>families working within undervalued and underpaid occupations.</p> <p>Link to more information here</p>
HSC Staff Recognition Payment: Independent Sector	19/10/21	<p>Pádraig Delargy (Sinn Féin – Foyle)</p> <p>To Robin Swann, Minister for Health</p>	<p>“Can the Minister provide an update on the health and social care (HSC) staff recognition payment for those working in the independent sector?”</p> <p>The special recognition payment for Northern Ireland’s statutory sector employees commenced in July, however the independent sector is much larger and transient (people only work within the independent sector for a brief time) which has meant the development of an eligibility criteria has been difficult. Further, the Minister is conscious of suggestions made by trade unions and women’s organisations to ensure that the payment would not have an unintended knock-on effect that may disrupt benefit payments, recognising that the independent care industry is staffed by a low-paid female workforce.</p> <p>Despite these challenges the Minister has announced this work is almost complete and the recognition payments will be paid as soon as possible.</p>	<p>A key ethos of the FRP is the value of caring both paid and unpaid, and the importance of investing in a caring economy.</p> <p>In recognition that many women working within the caring industry are low-paid and incredibly undervalued despite the phenomenal and inspiring work many undertook during the pandemic; the FRP asserts that:</p> <p>Caring jobs must be better paid, attracts investment in education and training, provides opportunities for promotion and is viewed as a valued career choice.</p>

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Westminster

Bills - October 2021

Issue	Date	Sponsored by	Stage	Notes	Links to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill	08/10/21	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 community is included in that strategy to reduce violence against women and girls.</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>

Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill	03/11/21	Brandon Lewis, Ministry for Northern Ireland Office (House of Commons) Viscount Younger of Leckie, Conservative Hereditary Peer (House of Lords)	House of Commons passage completed; moved to Second Reading (House of Lords)	<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>
Bereavement Leave and Pay (Stillborn and Miscarried Babies) Bill	20/10/21	Sarah Owen (Labour)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to extend entitlement to parental bereavement leave and pay to parents of babies miscarried or stillborn during early pregnancy; and for connected purposes.</p> <p>The Miscarriage Association reports that about a quarter of a million people each year in the UK miscarry, and happens to 1 in 4 pregnancies. Many are forced to take sick pay or sick leave. Ms Owen stated that “we are not sick we are grieving.”</p>	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers.</p> <p>Parental leave is recommended as a day one employment right within the FRP.</p>

					Read full details of the Bill here.
Childcare Bill	29/10/21	Matt Rodda (Labour)	The Bill failed to pass at Second Reading and has since been withdrawn	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.	<p>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.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Conversion Therapy (Prohibition) Bill	22/06/21	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</p>

					Bill here.
Miscarriage Leave Bill	23/06/21	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 Bereavement Bill for those who have suffered a miscarriage.</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 Bill here.</p>
Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill	24/06/21	Maria Miller (Conservative)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	<p>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>	<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>