




Women's
Policy Group NI

Women's Manifesto

General Election 2024



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Contents

Introduction	1
Economic Pillar	2
A fair funding deal for Northern Ireland	2
Welfare Reform	3
Gender Budgeting	5
A Green Economy	6
Good Jobs, Workers Rights and a Strong Economy	8
Housing	10
Human Rights and Equality Pillar	11
Violence Against Women and Girls	14
Politics, Public Life and Peacebuilding	16
Health Pillar	17
Questions for Canvassers	19

Introduction

The Women’s Policy Group NI (WPG) is a group of policy experts and practitioners who advocate collectively for women and girls by promoting gender equality through an intersectional feminist lens. We challenge systemic injustice and discrimination affecting women and girls by informing society and influencing policy and law. Our work is informed by women and girls’ lived experiences and rooted in international human rights law.

For many election cycles, we have produced a Women’s Manifesto. The purpose of this is to collate the collective demands of our sector, and beyond, and to put them to all our prospective MPs, elected representatives, and their parties. It is non-party political in its approach and forms the basis of what we will lobby on in the upcoming mandate.

In this manifesto, there is a strong focus on the economy, with significant contributions on welfare reform, childcare, gender budgeting, housing, and the need to move towards a green economy with good jobs, where workers rights are protected. The reason for this is clear; the last five years have seen both Covid and the ‘cost of living crisis’ decimate women’s economic freedom, leaving many more struggling than before.

In Northern Ireland, the health service is struggling and violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to rise, meriting specific sections on these issues. As always, our priority is to ensure all our recommendations are human rights compliant and, where possible, they recommend actions at Westminster level that will benefit all women and girls in the UK.

Elaine Crory
Women’s Sector Lobbyist

Economic Pillar

A feminist analysis of the economy presents a radical challenge to settled economic doctrine; questioning concepts of value, competition, scarcity, labour and care. Understanding the gendered impacts of current economic structures highlights the detrimental nature of these orthodoxies on women, drawing out particular challenges such as labour-force participation, the value of reproductive and caretaking labour, the gender pay gap, and the feminisation of poverty. This approach provides a lens through which to develop economic policy which centres gender equality and creates the conditions for human flourishing.

A fair funding deal for Northern Ireland

To prevent a future of chronic underfunding, we demand that the UK Government puts a needs-based funding floor in place in Northern Ireland. We understand that this will not protect us from financial constraint during times of economic crisis, but it will ensure that the funding needed to maintain public services is delivered through the Block Grant. The Barnett Formula was never meant to be a permanent fixture to determine devolved spending and if reforms can be made to rightfully protect Wales from underfunding, those same reforms can be made for Northern Ireland.

We welcome the needs-based fiscal floor, set at 124, that was announced as part of the Fiscal Framework last month as it is a step towards stopping the underfunding experienced by Northern Ireland. Despite this, the 2024-2025 Budget remains incredibly strained and the previous years of chronic underfunding continue to add to this. Many public services in Northern Ireland are on the verge of decimation, and while the fiscal floor will slightly alleviate that pressure, we cannot fully address the budgetary issues that are a result of the underfunding with our current budget.

To help mitigate against the crises that have arisen from this, such as hospital waiting lists twice as long as the rest of the UK, we need a back-pay package to maintain public service delivery and ensure Northern Ireland does not continue to fall behind the rest of the UK in terms of service delivery, public sector pay, capital projects, etc.

Additionally, we welcome that, as part of the Fiscal Framework, the 124 figure can be revisited. While the 124 figure is an improvement from what we have received, there are arguments for higher levels of need in Northern Ireland. For example, when differences in policing are taken into account, the Fiscal Council determined that the level of need rises to 127. Others argue that due to the lack of raising powers afforded to Northern Ireland, our need sits at 130. We encourage further conversations around our level of need to ensure that we are fully out of the cycle of underfunding.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Call on Treasury for a back-pay package to mitigate against social and physical infrastructure damages due to multi-year structural underfunding.
- Call on the Secretary of State to designate some government departments at Westminster for the purposes of S75 - Dept for Levelling Up and HM Treasury

Welfare Reform

A social safety net which creates a universal, non-stigmatising, accessible provision for the most vulnerable in society is central to creating enhancing well-being. Care-work and reproductive labour must be properly valued and understood as foundational to our social structures. The feminisation of poverty, noted above, must be addressed through welfare reform, ensuring particularly that women and children are not allowed to fall into poverty and debt.

As of the 21st November 2023, the Government announced their new 'National Living Wage' rate for 2024 would increase to £11.44 an hour. This new rate came into effect on April 1st 2024. The 'National Living Wage' is £1,092 per year short of the Living Wage Foundation's real Living Wage (£12 per hour). The difference could pay for 18 weeks of food for a household, or 12 weeks of housing and energy costs.

Government should acknowledge and support the role of community-based women-only provision in addressing women's poverty and financial vulnerability in disadvantaged and rural areas. This should include a commitment to increase and provide longer term funding for grassroots women's organisations to enable them to continue and develop the vital services they provide to financially vulnerable women and their families in disadvantaged areas

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Scrap the two-child limit in Universal Credit and legacy benefits to protect children, women and families from financial hardship and poverty
- Scrap the Benefit Cap which has greater impacts for single parents and larger families
- Extend free school meals to all children
- Implement the Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit as recommended by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation & the Trussell Trust so that at a minimum, Universal Credit should protect people from going without the essentials
- End the Universal Credit five-week wait which starts people off on their Universal Credit journey in debt and which in Northern Ireland has been described as a 'driver' for illegal lending (including paramilitaries)
- Introduce a Child Payment (akin to the Scottish Child Payment) to help protect children from rising poverty levels
- Increase the level of Child Benefit to enable families to stay out of poverty and keeps pace with the cost of living
- Provide long-term funding and support for grassroots women's organisations, such as women's centres so they can continue supporting women in disadvantaged communities
- Increase the budget for crisis help for low-income families (such as Discretionary Support in NI or Household Support Fund in England & Wales) to help with the costs of essentials including food and utilities to acknowledge increases in the cost of living and to prevent financial hardship, debt, poverty and destitution

- Increase the value of Carer's Allowance and raise the earnings threshold to qualify for the benefit to lift unpaid carers out of poverty and recognise the value of this work and the amount of money unpaid carers are saving the Government
- Legislate for paid carer's leave from work that is separate to annual leave and a day one right to request flexible working for all unpaid carers
- Ban exploitative zero-hour contracts and increase the real living wage to improve the working conditions of people, particularly women and marginalised groups, who are over-represented in low-paid precarious work.
- Promote fair tax policies which close tax loopholes, redistribute wealth between women and men and hold transnational corporations to account for exploitation of people and harm to the Planet
- Introduce a real living wage

Childcare

Universal provision of affordable, high quality childcare is a public good and should be seen valued as a fundamental part of a functioning economy. Northern Ireland is currently without a comprehensive childcare strategy which has led to high costs and patchy provision across the region. Lack of childcare is a significant barrier to women's entry and retention in the paid workforce and disproportionately impacts women from minority ethnic backgrounds and areas of socio-economic deprivation.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Investing adequately, based on an informed assessment of realistic needs, to deliver a high-quality childcare infrastructure that is affordable for all to access, and providers to deliver,
- Fully implementing the CEDAW recommendations, noting the particular reference to Northern Ireland which calls on the Government to introduce a fully costed Childcare Strategy, underpinned by legislation, that meets the needs of children, parents, childcare providers and benefits the local economy,
- Ensure that childcare provision is available to all, including to those who are not in paid employment, those returning to training and education. Early years education must be available to all children regardless of socioeconomic status,
- Recognition of the importance of integrated childcare (such as that provided by the women's centres) which allows women to access the education/training/other supports they might need - recognition that childcare is not just for working,
- Ringfenced places within childcare for children for Special Educational Needs and care that meets their needs, with appropriate training for providers,

- Address the gender segregation of the childcare sector through the creation of sectoral agreements to provide a mechanism to introduce a skills and wage infrastructure that could improve job quality,
- Promoting family friendly policies and practices across all sectors to reduce barriers to women accessing and progressing in the workforce.

Gender Budgeting

Budgetary processes and government spending have social consequences and impact groups in society differently. As the Women's Policy Group, we are particularly concerned with the gendered impacts of budgets. Budgetary decisions are far from 'neutral' and have gendered consequences, intended or not. If these gendered consequences are not accounted for in the budgetary process, budgets are blind to the complexities between the experiences of women and men and reinforce systemic disadvantages faced by women and other groups.

Gender budgeting is a tool that can help decision makers ensure that the budget process actively takes these considerations into account and use budgets to address the systemic disadvantages that women currently face and promote gender equality. Gender budgeting requires decision makers to consider the gendered impacts of spending and revenue raising decisions and how to use these mechanisms to bring about gender equality. This analysis involves taking an intersectional approach by recognising that depending on race, religion, disability, age and other factors, women experience gender inequality in different ways and measures to tackle this inequality should account for these differences.

Gender budgeting is not about creating separate budgets for women or only looking at parts of the budget which have a social content or that are explicitly gender-related. It is also not about demanding increased spending for women. Rather, gender budgeting is about embedding a gender perspective into budget planning and analysing the impact budgets have on women/girls and men/boys. It is also key to introduce a gender perspective into the entire budget, including seemingly 'gender-neutral' budget lines, as well as reprioritising and refocusing spend and restructuring taxation with a view to promote equality. Gender budgeting is transformative, assists in transparency and accountability, and is of value in delivering economic benefits, equality and rights, and securing sustainable peace.

Researchers at Ulster University have published four ARK Working Papers on the transformative power of gender budgeting and gender-based analysis which can be accessed online. These papers include:

- Gender Budgeting Working Paper 1: What does the literature tell us? Lessons for Northern Ireland (NI).
- Gender Budgeting Working Paper 2: Case Study: Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.
- Gender Budgeting Working Paper 3: Gender Audit of the Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2016-21.

- Gender Budgeting Working Paper 4: Developing Gender Budgeting in Northern Ireland: Civil Society Training Pilot Evaluation Report.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Embed gender budgeting tools in the budgetary process,
- Advocate for better gender-based analysis in all areas of budgeting and policy making,
- Advocate for better collection of gender-disaggregated data and intersectional data,
- Commit to progressing work on the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 (gender equality) which involves using gender budgeting tools.

A Green Economy

Addressing the climate crisis requires an intersectional feminist analysis that sees the struggle for gender justice as intimately connected to the struggle for a sustainable, livable future. Failure to recognise and address gender inequality in the context of developing sustainable policy runs the risk of “replicating gender inequality in any future green economy”. One outworking of this approach entails the foregrounding of a class-sensitive, structural understanding of climate change when assessing measures to mitigate climate breakdown. Northern Ireland made history by embedding gender considerations into the wording of our Climate Change Act. It is crucial that the implementation of the Climate Change Act is done through a gendered lens.

Through increased investment in care jobs and the care sector, not only will women’s employment and economic opportunities increase, but children from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit from increasing qualities of childcare and education. It is also important that we improve provisions for shared parental leave, as this has positive implications for women’s ability to equally participate in the labour market. For example, since 2000, Iceland has had an equal parental leave quota for both parents regardless of their marital status or a child’s legal residency. Since 2021, each parent in Iceland gets 6 months and 6 weeks transferable parental leave. This leave includes payments that equate to 80% of their regular salary, up to a certain ceiling. Research shows that these parental leave policies have reduced women’s risk of disadvantage and poverty, which also has positive implications for children’s poverty, as women are more likely to be single parents and have care responsibilities.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

1. Investment in (social) infrastructure:

- Co-design social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account,

- Take the differing transport needs of women with caring responsibilities into account when creating transport plans; particularly given issues in Northern Ireland of inadequate rural public transport and the fact that women are more likely to rely on public transport,
- Protect the over-60s concessionary bus pass and other discounted travel schemes,
- Prioritise full service, walkable neighbourhoods in planning and development of urban and suburban areas to reduce the need to travel, increase access to services and strengthen community safety,
- Prioritise the implementation of connected, safe, inclusive cycling infrastructure designed to facilitate multi-modal transportation for care trips as well as the work commute,
- Commit to the development and delivery of school-streets in Northern Ireland.

2. Green Jobs:

- Provide subsidies and other incentives, including paid education leave, to support women, particularly low-income and BAME women, in accessing training and development programmes in high-skilled work in a new green economy,
- Provide subsidies and other incentives to those working in jobs at high risk of being replaced by automaton, particularly as women are at much higher risk of this,
- Encourage women and girls into male-dominated green sectors that are encouraged through a Green New Deal, developed building on comprehensive analysis of the economic and environmental impact of different sectors.

3. Sharing Care:

- Recognise the dual-benefit job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are already done in an unpaid capacity by majority women,
- Broaden definitions of 'green jobs' beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high compense sector that is increasingly neglected,
- Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland include a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised,
- Implement a 30-hour paid work week in recognition of unavoidable unpaid care,
- Establish a Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services to ensure minimum living standards and recognise and remunerate the £4.6 billion unpaid carers contribute to Northern Ireland each year,

- Balance recommendations for greater food self-reliance with recognition of the gendered, unpaid and low-paid labour involved in producing and providing food, particularly as Northern Ireland may be disproportionately impacted by different food standards to Great Britain post-Brexit,
- Support and develop sustainable small businesses that reduce domestic work through mass preparation and distribution of locally grown food,
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.

4. Democracy and Ownership:

- Promote economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through the Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government,
- Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing various genders, races and classes within civil society.

Good Jobs, Workers Rights and a Strong Economy

Northern Ireland has consistently had higher rates of economic inactivity than other regions in the UK even with its post-2010 improvement. The reasons for economic inactivity are many and varied and, for Northern Ireland, there are a number of contributing factors that are specific to the region. However, one of the many reasons for inactivity can be around discouraged workers. People may stay out of the labour market not because they cannot find work, but because the work that is to be found is inappropriate or of such low value that they simply do not enter into the labour force at all. Further to this, OECD research (2018) and NERI Research (2024) shows that it is not necessarily the case that any job is better than no job with poor job quality having a larger negative effect on health outcomes than unemployment.

Most recently, the Northern Ireland Minister for Economy in early 2024 set out his vision for the future of the Northern Ireland Economy. In doing so he set out to increase the proportion of working-age people in 'Good Jobs' as one of his four key priorities. Increasing the number of good jobs is one pillar of four set out in the economic vision, alongside improving productivity, increasing regional balance and helping decarbonisation.

The term Work-Life Balance is usually understood to mean how workers are able to combine their employment with their home life and caring responsibilities and can include legislative measures – such as rights to flexible working, family leave entitlements including parental leave, carers leave etc. and non-legislative measures which may include government and employer strategies and policies to encourage a culture of good work life balance. Good work life balance is universally regarded as positive for both the workforce and the economy as well as having far

reaching advantages for gender equality and the well-being of children and the wider community. There is also growing evidence that access to work life balance measures is becoming a more important consideration for those choosing employment, this is particularly true for younger workers.

The WPG welcomes the Department for the Economy's focus on developing a strong and inclusive economy with a focus on Good Jobs based on the Carnegie Framework of Job Quality. As part of this, the Department has adopted the Carnegie Job Quality Dimensions as a framework for benchmarking what a good job is.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Whilst employment rights are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, we would urge all candidates to promote a 'Good Jobs Agenda' at Westminster, particularly in relation to the following matters:
 - Collective and sectoral bargaining and the enabling conditions such as union ability to access the workplace to recruit, consult and represent workers;
 - Recognition of the union by employers to negotiate on all terms and conditions of employment;
 - Protections for workplace union representatives against harassment and detrimental treatment including dismissal;
 - The ability to collectively withdraw services for the purposes of negotiating terms and conditions, and in defence of their member's interests and the workplace organisation.

- Improving Job Security and Banning Zero Hour and low hour Contracts

- Ending Fire and rehire practices and bogus self-employment

- Strengthening work life balance rights for all workers, regardless of status

- A UK Government must prioritise work life balance measures, including strengthening rights to:
 - Flexible working,
 - paid parental leave,
 - maternity and paternity leave, and
 - paid carers leave.

- There should also be a fundamental review of the rates of remuneration for these types of leave.

Housing

The UK has obligations around the provision of safe, secure, housing to ensure human dignity and prevent inhuman or degrading treatment. Access to housing is also fundamental to human flourishing and is central to a feminist analysis of the economy which highlights the disproportionate impact of lack of housing on female-headed single parent households and women experiencing domestic abuse.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Implement a sizable programme of building social housing,
- Invest in housing associations and local councils as needed,
- Ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place to make social housing plans a priority and a reality; this includes investment in parks and amenities, water and sewerage systems, and more,
- Consider introducing rent controls in areas of high housing pressure,
- Provide support for private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance,
- Ring-fence social housing places for those individuals and families preparing to leave shelter accommodation after escaping domestic abuse.

Human Rights and Equality Pillar

We ask that all legislation, policy and decision making is compliant with international human rights obligations in NI under the:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD);
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- Council of Europe Treaties (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML),
- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM),
- European Social Charter (ESC).

This should include incorporation of human rights provisions in domestic legislation through the Bill of Rights and other specific instruments. These standards are not only binding on the UK, but create a mechanism for ensuring equality and human rights are at the core of all decision making.

The UK Government made commitments to protect equality and human rights post Brexit under Article 2 of the Windsor Framework. These commitments form part of an international agreement and are legally binding. This Article must be effectively embedded in all policy development and legislative processes. We must ensure that the Article 2 commitment on equality and human rights in Northern Ireland is upheld.

With regards to Article 2 ‘keeping pace’ commitments, it is imperative that the UK government transpose the provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive as soon as possible. This Directive came into force for EU Member States on 6th June 2023. This is a crucial step for eliminating gender-based discrimination in the workplace and tackling the gender pay gap. Unlike in Great Britain and Ireland, there is currently no legislation in Northern Ireland requiring gender pay reporting by certain employers, as Section 19 of the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (‘the Act’) was never brought into force, which would have provided for the introduction of a gender pay strategy and associated action plan, in tandem with Gender Pay Gap Reporting Regulations.

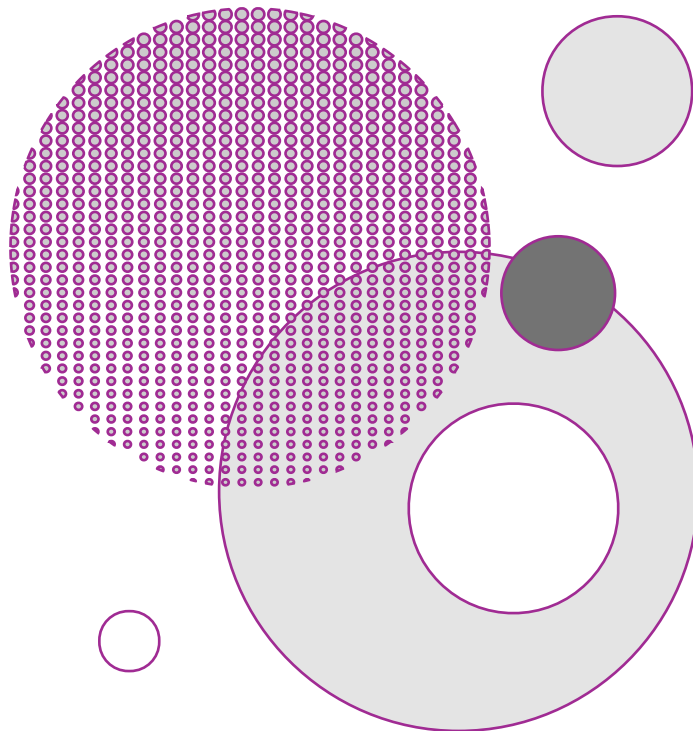
We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards

- Uphold Article 2 Commitments to protect equality and human rights post-Brexit,
- Transpose the provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive into domestic law,
- Compliance with ECHR Article 2 and 3 duties on dealing with the legacy of the past, including repealing the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation Act) 2022, returning to the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) and implementing it in a human rights

compliant manner, the completion of Legacy Inquests, and the use of effective remedies for Historical Institutional Abuse,

- Integrate the European Convention on Human Rights fully in UK legislation,
- Give the UN international human rights framework full effect in UK legislation,
 - Implementing UN recommendations to the UK in full through legislation and policy
 - Implementing and safeguarding the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, ethnic minorities and minoritised groups using an intersectional lens (noting that there are several forms of oppression in our society which can intersect with one another causing people to experience multiple forms of oppression at once)
- Implement the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in full within the UK as well as overseas,
- End the hostile environment in the UK towards migrants,
 - Fully removing information exchanges between public bodies, including those in Northern Ireland, and the Home Office
 - Closing the Larnac House detention centre and effectively supporting asylum seekers through the process in the community
 - Ensuring access to essential public services for asylum seekers and scrapping No Recourse to Public Funds provision
 - Fully remove information exchanges between public bodies (including those in Northern Ireland) and the Home Office
- Uphold international obligations with regard to international conflicts and respect jurisdiction of ICJ and other Human Rights bodies,
- Legislate for the NI Bill of Rights (BoR) as a key missing safeguard over the exercise of Executive and Legislative power in NI. We need a Bill of Rights inclusive of economic, social, and cultural rights, and of protections relating to the rights deficits resulting from Brexit,
- Complete incorporation of the ECHR,
- Incorporation of the rights contained within the EU Charter of Rights,
- Complete incorporation of the core international human rights standards in Northern Ireland legislation, implementing recommendations to the UK on core conventions,

- Give further effect to CEDAW, ICESCR, CRC, ICERD, ICCPR, CRPD and CAT through use of devolved powers,
- Integrate international human rights standards into policy development as core framework,
- Uphold and strengthen human rights protections for trans people in the UK who are currently facing heightened levels of transphobia and hate crime as a result of widespread misinformation campaigns,
- Immediately close the Larne Detention Centre,
- Scrap No Recourse to Public Funds,
- Designate the Home Office as a public authority for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998,
- Ban so-called conversion therapy and practices.



Violence Against Women and Girls

Men's violence against women and girls is a global human rights issue and a serious social challenge. Its roots are grounded in the existence and reproduction of patriarchal structures which perpetuate and normalise particular forms of gendered violence which impact all women, but which are further mediated by class, race, sexuality, gender identity and disability. Manifestations of VAWG are manifold, and range from sexual and domestic violence to forced marriage and FGM. These more overt and physical forms of violence are underpinned and sustained by a less overt acts such as hyper-sexualisation, public sexual harassment, sexist microaggressions and the rising tide of image based sexual abuse.

Feminist analysis of this reality argues that in order to interrupt, resist and transform these patterns a sustained, intersectional approach is needed which works across government departments to end violence against women and girls. Intersectional, feminist analysis of violence against women and girls reveals that women from ethnic minority backgrounds, women with precarious immigration status and women who experience social disadvantage are disproportionately impacted by gendered violence. Bespoke services must be provided to women in these groups as they often experience multiple deprivations and are less likely to report violence for fear of

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Education lies at the heart of prevention of violence against women and girls. In order to interrupt and resist normalised patterns of gendered violence, all children must receive standardised, age-appropriate, inclusive RSE. Particular focus on issues of consent, healthy relationships and breaking down gender stereotypes is crucial.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

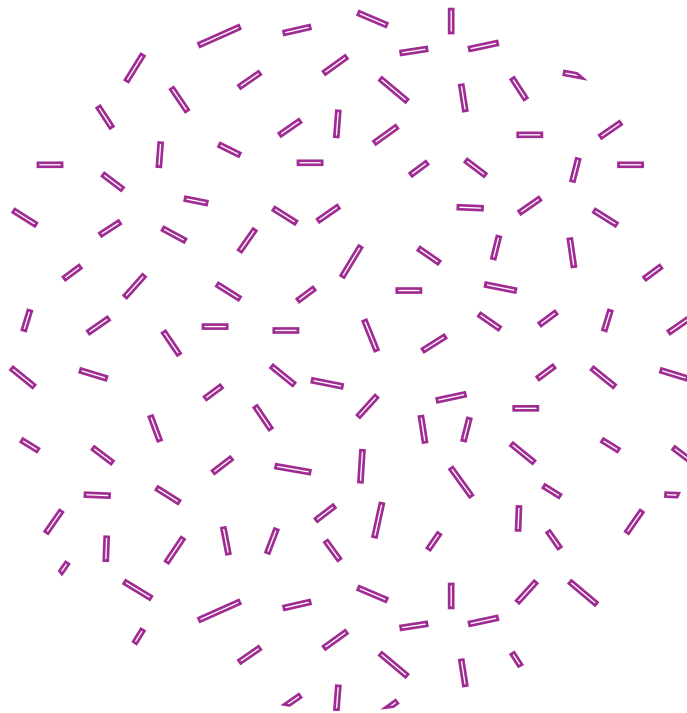
- Standardised RSE curricula for all areas of the UK, with age-appropriate, inclusive and scientifically accurate RSE for all stages of a child's education,
- An assessment of the materials used by educators contracted by schools to deliver RSE, ensuring it meets the above standards,
- A commitment to reassess the policy of allowing pupils' parents to opt them out of parts of the curriculum. Ideally, this would be preceded by research examining the extent of the opt out so far.

VAWG Service Provision & Legislation

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Adequate funding for VAWG strategies
- Adequate funding for charities that provide emergency accommodation

- Fund and provide routes out of emergency accommodation into social housing
- Reform rape laws to require a positive yes rather than the absence of a no
- Resourced “by and for” services within organisations run by and for marginalised women, including LGBTQIA+ women, ethnic minority women, and refugee and asylum seeker women
- Ensure Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is standardised, starts early, is relevant to pupils at each stage of their development and maturity and is taught by people who are trained and confident in talking about the course content, in line with CEDAW Recommendations.



Politics, Public Life and Peacebuilding

Women and men must be at least equally represented in decision making for a sustainable society. Women's specific needs and priorities must also be met to build a peaceful society. Both are essential to a modern society, where young people feel confident to build a future and people can trust they will be secure in their later years and are cornerstones of implementing the principles of the women, peace and security agenda.

It is crucial that under-represented groups have role models from within their communities represented in public life. This symbolism inspires confidence and motivation for others from those communities to pursue work in a similar field. For example, following the appointment of Lillian Seenoi-Barr as Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, the following comments were made in a BBC Radio Ulster news segment on 3rd June 2024:

"It means everything. It means difference, it means change, it means inclusion, it means diversity, it means acceptance. It is very emotional." - A nurse from an ethnic minority background in Derry.

"Imagining oneself in that position... it allows one to dream." - Cllr Uruemu Adejinmi, the first black female mayor in Ireland.

We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Equal representation of women in decision making, as elected representatives, community, public sector and business leaders, and representatives on public bodies, exploring the use of all women shortlists and/or quotas to expedite progress
- Recognising and addressing gendered impacts of conflict within the immigration and asylum system, in community development and in post-conflict recovery
 - This includes addressing criminal and paramilitary intimidation and exploitation of women with insecure immigration status and re-establishing formal mechanisms for women to engage with decision making
- Recognise and act concretely on implementation of specific measures to realise the full spirit and intention of UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW Recommendation No.30 to ensure women's effective participation and leadership in conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes in Northern Ireland.
- Address obstacles to participation including: intimidation and violence by paramilitary groups, online abuse of women political and public representatives; and intersectionalities which compound barriers to participation eg. specific issues impacting BME women, disabled women, rural women, LGBT+ women, younger women, lone parents and those with childcare responsibilities;

Health Pillar

A feminist approach to health care aims to correct the historical use of men as the medical standard in developing medical and pharmaceutical best practice. This has left areas of women's health care neglected and under researched, contributing to a disparity of care. Moreover, an intersectional approach is needed to address racialised and socio economic health inequalities.

Impact of NHS Underfunding

The NHS has been underfunded for a number of years and every year the shortfall worsens. This is leading to long waiting lists, with Northern Ireland's the longest of all regions in the UK. People are struggling to see a GP when they need one. Healthcare free at the point of use is a value that we ought to protect and preserve, and the NHS will not be able to be 'fixed' without proper investment.

Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare

Understandings of what constitutes sexual and reproductive healthcare for women must be broadened. Sexual and reproductive healthcare should be understood as extending across a woman's lifespan and is intrinsic to overall well-being. Research indicates that health needs around menstruation, endometriosis and menopause are often overlooked, causing suffering, distress and underpinning gender inequality. Efforts to politicise or marginalise this essential care should be resisted.

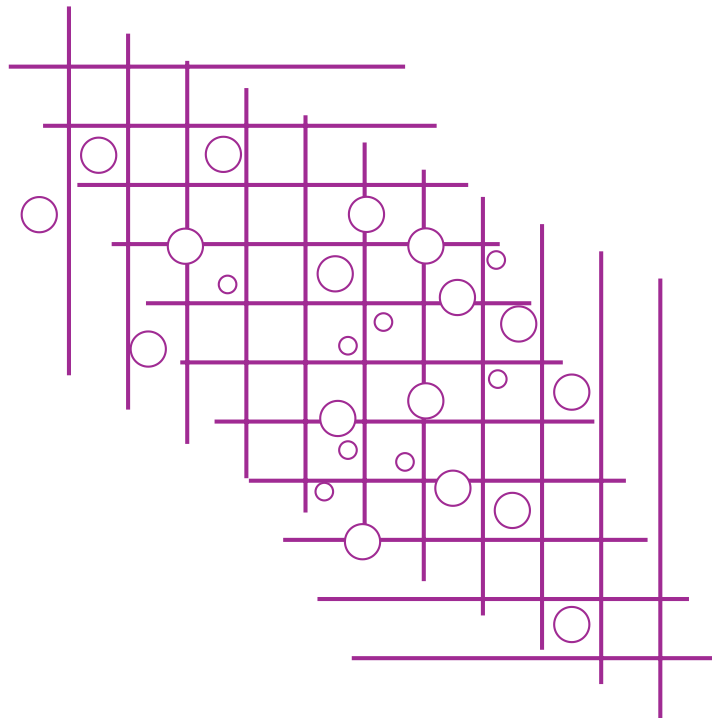
We call on MPs, candidates and their parties to commit to working towards:

- Ensure there is funded perinatal mental health provision including Mother and Baby Units
Set up a dedicated fund specifically for organisations who offer contraception and nondirective information on reproductive issues,
- Extend sexual and reproductive healthcare services to ensure equal access for all women including trans women, particularly those living in rural areas,
- Decriminalise abortion in every UK region in line with the CEDAW recommendations,
- Roll out a public information campaign on access to abortion services,
- Ensure there are free, safe, legal, stigma free and local abortion services accessible to all who want or need them, including follow up care and counselling if requested,
- Introduce telemedicine for early medical abortions where this is not already the case,
- Ensure the introduction of adequate safe access zones around abortion clinics where they do not apply already, and review the effectiveness of those currently in place, extending them if necessary,

- Ensure there is funded assisted fertility treatment for everyone who wants or needs it, including same sex couples and single women,
- Ensure guidance for same-sex couples accessing fertility treatment is clear and adhered to, in order to ensure that women have consistency across GPs and health trusts.

Healthy Start Scheme

- Awareness levels of the NHS Healthy Start Scheme are lowest in Northern Ireland. Government should introduce auto-enrolment for Healthy Start to ensure that eligible people do not miss out on this important help,
- Increase the rates of NHS Healthy Start so that it more adequately meets the costs of formula milk, fruit and vegetables,
- Work towards expanding the Healthy Start Scheme so that it includes more families, and gives more babies the best start in life.



Questions for Canvassers

If canvassers come to your door in the run up to the Election, we have some suggestions for you to raise with them

- Given the Good Friday Agreement guarantees the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into NI law, has the present government not shown contempt for the GFA by threatening to leave the ECHR, and will you fight to ensure that this does not happen?
- Given rising levels of child poverty in Northern Ireland, which is being contributed to by the two-child policy, what steps are you going to take to remove the two-child limit and reduce child poverty levels?
- Given the adoption of a Good Jobs agenda as well as commitment to a new deal for working people, what is your party doing to ensure that job quality in Northern Ireland is improved, benchmarked against the Job Quality Dimensions?
- What will your party do to ensure that the social inclusion strategies; Anti-Poverty, Gender Equality LGBTQIA+, and Disability Strategies are delivered within the current Assembly mandate?
- Do you support an outright ban on Conversion Practices?
- What will you do to reduce the levels of hate crime towards vulnerable and marginalised groups in our communities?
- What will you do to make sure your constituents, and the voices of people in Northern Ireland in general, can be heard and shape decisions at Westminster level?
- As an MP, what is you and your party's plan to prevent any further underfunding of Northern Ireland? How will you advocate for us with Treasury?
- What will you do to ensure adequate funding for VAWG services across the UK, and particularly in Northern Ireland?

**Women's
Policy Group NI**



STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Committee



wrda  Women's Resource &
Development Agency

WSN 
WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK