



Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas

Response to: Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework

**Issued by: Northern Ireland Executive
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**Foyle Women's
Information
Network**



Women's Regional Consortium: Working to Support Women in Rural Communities and Disadvantaged Urban Areas

1. Introduction

1.1 This response has been undertaken collaboratively by the members of the Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas (hereafter, either the Women's Regional Consortium or simply the Consortium), which is funded by the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

1.2 The Women's Regional Consortium consists of seven established women's sector organisations that are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.¹ The seven groups are as follows:

- ♀ Training for Women Network (TWN) – Project lead
- ♀ Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
- ♀ Women's Support Network (WSN)
- ♀ Northern Ireland's Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
- ♀ Women's TEC
- ♀ Women's Centre Derry
- ♀ Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN)

¹ Sections 1.2-1.3 represent the official description of the Consortium's work, as agreed and authored by its seven partner organisation

1.3 The Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas, including all groups, centres and organisations delivering essential frontline services, advice and support. The Consortium ensures that there is a continuous two-way flow of information between government and the sector. It also ensures that organisations/centres and groups are made aware of consultations, government planning and policy implementation. In turn, the Consortium ascertains the views, needs and aspirations of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and takes these views forward to influence policy development and future government planning, which ultimately results in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities.

1.4 The Women's Regional Consortium appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework. Throughout this response the Consortium has sought to ensure the voices of women are represented. We believe that it is essential for policy makers and Government to listen to the voices of the people who live here and for whom issues such as the Programme for Government have such importance. We have included throughout this response some of what local women have said in relation to the issues which are important to them and which detail their lived experience.

1.5 We wish to endorse the responses made by the Women's Policy Group (WPG) and the Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (NIWBG) both of which groups the Women's Regional Consortium is represented on. We fully endorse their responses and urge the Northern Ireland Executive to take their evidence fully into consideration. We make particular reference to the comprehensive Feminist Recovery Plan² in the WPG's response and to the need for gender budgeting and the calls for a Caring Economy in the NIWBG response. We also wish to endorse the response made by the Cliff Edge Coalition NI of which the Women's Regional Consortium is a member.

² Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, Women's Policy Group NI, July 2020
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WPG-NI-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-2020-.pdf>

We reference the importance of the mitigations package under **We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives.**

2.0 Consultation Questions

Section 1: About you

1. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? *

☐ Individual

☒ On behalf of an organisation

If responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us your organisation's name:

The Women's Regional Consortium

2. Please provide your contact details below:

Name*: Siobhán Harding
Address: 109-113 Royal Avenue, Belfast, BT1 1FF
Email address*: policy@wsn.org.uk
Phone number: 07764 224 360

3. Which of the following best describes the sector you work in?

This will assist us in monitoring the range of respondents the consultation has reached.

- ☐ Central government
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ Statutory body (for example, health, education, transport, housing etc.)
- ☐ Private sector
- ☒ Charity / Community / Voluntary
- ☐ Other (please specify):

4. May we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation? *

This may be to follow up any specific points we need to clarify.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

5. May we contact you in future about the Programme for Government? *

For example, to provide you with a link to the results of this consultation, to inform you of further consultations or provide updated information on the Programme for Government.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

6. To support transparency in our decision making process, all responses to this consultation will be made public (subject to our Moderation Policy). This will include the name of the responding organisation (if applicable). However, names of individuals will only be published if you give consent below. Please note we will not publish your contact details. *

- ☒ Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response
- ☐ No, please remove my name before publishing my response

Section 2: Outcomes Framework

Our children and young people have the best start in life

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

Yes, we believe that it is vitally important to give children and young people the best start in life. It is important that children are given the love, care, safety, nutrition, wellbeing, education and development they need so that they can realise their full potential. There must be a recognition of the importance of influencing outcomes from the earliest point in a child's life and how investing in children in their early years will result in better outcomes in the longer term. This reinforces the importance of early intervention and prevention to maximise the potential for positive opportunities for children to get the best start in life. It is important to get things right at the very start so that the adverse and costly impacts of issues such as poverty and deprivation do not get the chance to take hold. This Outcome must include a plan for children aged 0-3 as well as children of school age.

Within this Outcome there is a need to address the needs of children whose lives and opportunities have been constrained by poverty, disadvantage and inequality. Work to fight against poverty and the detrimental impacts it has on families and children must form a part of this work. This must also include work to tackle women's poverty which is so closely linked to children's poverty. Progress on women's poverty cannot be achieved without attention to the gender inequalities which contribute not only to women's poverty but to the poverty of their children – see our comments under **We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives.**

It must be noted that Northern Ireland is currently without a Childcare Strategy. A draft Childcare Strategy was consulted on in 2015 but we are still without a Strategy and progress on a new Strategy remains disappointingly slow. One of the main aims of the draft Childcare Strategy was: *“Child Development: to give all our children the best start in life, preparing them for lifelong wellbeing and achievement, thereby creating the basis for a better, more prosperous future.”*³ There is an urgent need for Northern Ireland to have a fully funded Childcare Strategy in place which would support the development of children enabling them to have the best start in life.

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Access to Education**
- **Capability and Resilience**
- **Care**
- **Early Years**
- **Skills and Attainment**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

As previously stated we would like to see **Early Years** include a plan for children aged 0-3 year olds as well as children of school age.

We are pleased to see an acknowledgement under **Early Years** of the need to address “child poverty with appropriate welfare and support”. We believe that this should feature across the key priority areas as poverty has such adverse impacts on children’s life chances across all these areas.

³ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/childcare-strategy>

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

The environment is central to the way we live our lives, acting as not only our home but providing everything that keeps us alive from the food we eat, the water we drink to the air we breathe. It is therefore crucial that we care for the environment and use the resources it provides in a sustainable way to safeguard it for future generations. If we fail to protect the natural environment then many of the other Outcomes in this Framework may not be achievable.

A Feminist Green Economy

The climate emergency has led to calls for a 'Green Economy' and proposals for a 'Green New Deal' which would shift the focus from economic growth towards reducing inequality, tackling the climate emergency and protecting the natural environment. The International Labour Organization (ILO)⁴ has argued that without consistent gender mainstreaming, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable arguing that *“gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable.”*

The green economy and the creation of 'green jobs' offers the potential to pay higher wages and offers career paths to workers with the necessary skills and education. However, due to pre-existing gender inequalities there is concern that the green economy may not necessarily guarantee equal access to these green and decent jobs for women. Many of these jobs are expected to be concentrated in parts of the economy which are traditionally male dominated and women's access may be further limited due to a lack of the necessary training and experience.

There is therefore a need to acknowledge existing gender imbalances to ensure that women and men can equally benefit from the opportunities the green economy can provide. A failure to do so will result in the continuation of existing gender inequalities and prevent the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁵

The ILO recommends that *“all measures must be taken to ensure that pre-existing gender inequalities are not transferred to the emerging green economy and the opportunities for women in the changing labour market must be identified and grasped. Women and men must be encouraged and given the necessary support to enable equal access and benefit from green jobs.”*⁶

⁴ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015 [wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcms/360572.pdf)

⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

⁶ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015 [wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcms/360572.pdf)

A Caring Economy

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy have proposed the creation of a 'Caring Economy'⁷ based on gender equality, wellbeing and sustainability as a way to build back better after the Covid19 pandemic. This call to action highlights that central to feminist ecological economics is the principle that gender equality must not be achieved at the expense of ecological degradation, and at the same time, environmental sustainability must not be achieved by exploiting feminised labour, particularly unpaid care.

A Caring Economy would prioritise care for each other and for the environment in which we live. *"A caring economy simultaneously ensures achievement of gender equality, sustainability and wellbeing. While these three objectives can, to some extent, be achieved separately, a caring economy allows them to be achieved together. For example, investment in paid care services improves wellbeing through ensuring that people's care needs are met; it improves gender equality because it raises the overall employment rate and reduces the gender employment gap (which are particularly crucial as we seek to counter the looming jobs crisis), and it is sustainable because care jobs are green."*

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) highlights that the narrow definition of green jobs as those in construction and technology can obscure the fact that the care industry is already a low carbon and high recompense sector. WBG research⁸ found that a 2% GDP investment in care (for example, social care, childcare, parental leave and care leave) creates double the number of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction. Investment in free, universal childcare especially returns almost all of its initial investment. Eurostat data suggests that the care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of Greenhouse Gas emissions) than the construction industry and that the education industry is 62%

⁷ Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action, Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, Women's Budget Group, October 2020

<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf>

⁸ Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries, International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016

[Investing in the Care Economy - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://ituc-csi.org/investing-in-the-care-economy)

less polluting than the construction industry.⁹ This makes investment in this type of social infrastructure economically, environmentally and equality sound.

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Natural Environment**
- **Green Economy**
- **Built Environment**
- **Housing**
- **Active and Sustainable Transport**
- **Waste Management**
- **Water and Wastewater Management**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We believe that the Gender Equality Strategy should be included in the list of Strategies listed to help deliver these Key Priority Areas given the gender equality issues detailed above.

We would like to see the Department for Communities added to the Government departments under the **Green Economy** due to its remit for gender equality and in the provision of training and support for jobseekers.

⁹ WBG calculations from Eurostat data
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

Within the **Green Economy** we believe that there should be an acknowledgement that the opportunities within the Green Economy must be for everyone.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

A decade of welfare reform/austerity measures which have impacted more on women, the predicted worsening of existing inequalities as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and the likely adverse impacts of Brexit particularly in Northern Ireland gives rise for concern about a deterioration in gender equality for women. These are important considerations within this Outcome and within the Programme for Government.

Gender Neutrality

A gender-neutral approach to policy and decision making has been the standard across Government and this has not served women well as it fails to take account of the different experiences of men and women as a result of existing gender inequalities. A failure to account for these gender dynamics means that the design of policies and budgets can aggravate existing gender inequality and may not benefit women and men equally.

The CEDAW Committee has also cautioned on the dangers of gender neutrality. CEDAW calls for substantive equality¹⁰ to go beyond paying lip service to gender mainstreaming and demonstrate the meaningful integration of an equalities perspective into all systems and policies. It states that a purely formal approach is not sufficient to achieve women's equality with men and requires that women are given an equal start and empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. *"It is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is identical to that of men. Rather, biological as well as socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men must be taken into account."*¹¹ The issue of gender neutrality is a significant barrier to women's equality and this issue must be recognised within the Programme for Government.

Gendered social norms restrict and limit women's roles in the economy, thereby contributing to women's economic disadvantage relative to men.¹² Women are more likely to be in receipt of social security benefits, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work and also more likely to be providing care either for children or other family members which limits their ability to carry out paid work. This contributes to keeping women's incomes generally lower over their lifetimes and

¹⁰ General Recommendations Adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirtieth session (2004), General Recommendation No 25
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CEDAW_GEC_37_33_E.pdf

¹¹ Ibid, paragraph 8

¹² Violence against Women and Girls and women's economic inequality, Eva Neitzert, March 2020
<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Violence-and-womens-economic-equality.pdf>

therefore means they are more likely to be dependent on men or the state through social security benefits.

Any decision-making, policies and budgets must recognise the different circumstances with which women and men experience systems and economies. In practice men and women are rarely in similar circumstances due to the existing gender inequalities and gendered social norms described above. Women do not live single issue lives and some women can experience even greater inequalities including disabled women, trans women and BAME women.

Social Security

We also believe an important element in creating an equal and inclusive society is the existence of a properly supportive social security system. The social security system must provide a safety net for people and provide a decent income that allows them to live their lives with dignity thereby ensuring that everyone is valued and treated with respect. It is vital in tackling disadvantage and ensuring social inclusion. We refer you to our answer to Outcome *“We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives”* for further expansion in this area.

“In the NI Assembly they are gender neutralising everything. They don’t want to address women’s issues, they don’t want to open doors for women, they don’t see across the different types of women. They want to remove women from things – if they do something for women then they have to do it for men. They don’t see the impact of Universal Credit, Covid, etc on women.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Women, the elderly and disabled are consistently at the bottom of the pile in terms of their importance and value.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Women are the biggest percentage of people here but unfortunately we are not given priority.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“We have to keep knocking on doors and fighting for our rights. Women bear the brunt of a lot of issues. In families it is women who are fighting for rights.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“We should all go on strike! We saw what happened with Covid in the emergency responses women were always sidelined. There is a need to value what women do. Women are always the add on at the end and it’s totally frustrating.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Caring work is not valued in society and is the bedrock of everything. The value of care and all the stuff normally done within the home. This is at the root of everything and why women can’t participate properly. There is a circular relationship between not valuing care work and undervaluing women. It is undervalued because it is something that women do – there is underlying misogyny.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage**
- **Rights and Equality**
- **Legacy**
- **Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We are pleased to that *“tackling the issues that lead to inequality and disadvantage in terms of welfare and poverty”* is included under **Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage**.

We would also like to see a reference to the importance of the social security system and work against poverty under **Rights and Equality**. This is important to ensuring

that people feel included and are not deterred from seeking their rights and equality due to issues of poverty and disadvantage.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

The ability to enjoy a long, healthy, active life is strongly linked to deprivation. There is substantial evidence on the damaging impacts of inequalities including most recently in the Marmot Review.¹³ This Review reported on how *“health is closely linked to the*

¹³ Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On, Executive Summary, Institute of Health Equity, February 2020

conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and inequities in power, money and resources – the social determinants of health.” It found stalling life expectancy since the last Review and found that “Life expectancy follows the social gradient – the more deprived the area the shorter the life expectancy. This gradient has become steeper; inequalities in life expectancy have increased. Among women in the most deprived 10 percent of areas, life expectancy fell between 2010-12 and 2016-18.” The Review also acknowledged that austerity and welfare reform cuts have been “regressive and inequitable” and that they “have harmed health and contributed to widening health inequalities in the short term and are likely to continue to do so over the longer term.”

Despite the fact that women live longer than men they face more health issues throughout their lives. In addition, there is often a lack of understanding of the specific health issues experienced by women including but not limited to issues around the menopause, eating disorders, fertility treatment, endometriosis, perinatal mental health, etc.

As previously stated the impact of austerity and welfare reform policies and the likely impacts of recession following the Covid19 pandemic will hit women harder. This has had and will continue to have impacts on women’s health and wellbeing. See our comments under **We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives** for further information on the impact of welfare reform and austerity on women.

Mental Health

Figures from the Department of Health¹⁴ show that women are more likely than men to experience mental health problems. 20% of women scored a high GHQ12 score (indicating a possible psychiatric disorder) compared to 16% of men with those in the most deprived areas more likely to record a high score compared to those in the least

https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

¹⁴ Health Survey Northern Ireland 2018/19, Department of Health, January 2020

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-survey-northern-ireland-first-results-201819>

deprived areas. Women are more likely to suffer from depression than men¹⁵ with 22% of men and 28% of men over 65 suffering from depression.¹⁶

There are also likely to be particular mental health issues for the LGBTQ+ communities due to the discrimination and marginalisation they often face which undoubtedly impacts negatively on their mental health.

Abortion

Abortion has recently been decriminalised in Northern Ireland in line with CEDAW recommendations. CEDAW also recommended that women should be provided with access to high quality abortion and post-abortion care in all public health facilities.¹⁷ Despite the introduction of the new legal framework for abortion in Northern Ireland over a year ago abortion services are still not being funded and commissioned. This has left women and girls, who are legally entitled to access these services, facing no choice but to risk travelling to Great Britain during the pandemic to access care or seek to terminate their own pregnancies without medical supervision.

Rural Needs

There are also likely to be issues around access to health services for those living in rural areas. Centralisation of healthcare services which is the focus of plans to transform health care in Northern Ireland are likely to have greater negative impacts for rural dwellers particularly in the context of inadequate public transport links and the need for greater development of community based services.

¹⁵ Mental Health in Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, January 2017

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2016-2021/2017/health/0817.pdf>

¹⁶ Mental Health Strategy 2021 – 2031, Consultation Draft, Department of Health, December 2020 [doh-mhs-draft-2021-2031.pdf \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/doh-mhs-draft-2021-2031.pdf)

¹⁷ Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, March 2018, Para 86 [CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/pdf/cedaw-c-op-8-GBR-1.pdf)

Care

There are significant health issues for those providing care and figures show that 64% of carers are women and 36% are men in Northern Ireland.¹⁸ Caring can be difficult and can put stress on a carer's health and wellbeing. Carers Week research¹⁹ found that 6 out of 10 people (61%) said their physical health has worsened as a result of caring, while 7 out of 10 (72%) said they have experienced mental ill health. Carers providing 50 hours or more of care per week are more than twice as likely to be in bad health than non-carers.

The Covid19 pandemic has also had an impact on the health of carers. Almost two thirds of carers (64%) say that their mental health has worsened as a result of the pandemic. 65% of women said their mental health had suffered compared to 58% of men. 58% of carers say their physical health has worsened as a result of the pandemic. This was slightly lower for men (54%) compared with (58%) of women, but carers who were struggling financially had seen a higher impact on their physical health with 70% having seen it worsen as a result of the pandemic.²⁰

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Access to Health**
- **Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage**
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing**
- **Older People**
- **Physical Health and Wellbeing**

¹⁸ <https://www.carersuk.org/northernireland/news-ni/facts-and-figures>

¹⁹ Supporting Carers to be Healthy and Connected, Research Summary for Carers Week 2018, Carers UK, June 2018

https://www.carersweek.org/images/Resources/CW18_Research_Report.pdf

²⁰ Caring behind closed doors: six months on, Carers UK, October 2020
[Caring behind closed doors Oct20.pdf](#)

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We suggest the Department for Communities is added to the Government departments under **Mental Health and Wellbeing** due to its remit for the Social Inclusion Strategies.

We also suggest that given there are gender and LGBTQ+ issues around aspects of healthcare as outlined above that both the Gender Equality and LGBTQ+ Strategies should be added to the list of Strategies that could help to deliver these key priority areas.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

Everyone can reach their potential

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

☐ **I don't know**

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

We believe it is vitally important that everyone in Northern Ireland is able to reach their potential. This makes for happier and healthier citizens as well as the potential benefits to the local economy. A society can only achieve its full potential when all members of that society have equality of opportunity so that all its people, including men and women, are treated equally. That is why gender equality is such a vital issue.

Women's socio-economic status and concentration in lower paid, part-time and insecure work as well as the fact that women are more likely to claim social security benefits keeps their incomes lower over their lifetimes and makes them more vulnerable to poverty and financial hardship. Poverty limits people from reaching their full potential and has negative impacts for them, their families and communities. Living in poverty can affect educational attainment, happiness and wellbeing and life chances. Women's poverty is especially harmful because of the strong links between female poverty and child poverty.

Women & Work

Women are significantly more likely to work part-time than men with 79% of part-time employees being women. This has a significant impact on women's income as women often struggle to increase their hours of work due to caring responsibilities. Providing care limits both the number of hours a person can work and the distance they travel for work and this can leave many women locked in poverty especially when jobs are low paid.

The region with the highest proportion of jobs paid below the Living Wage in April 2020 was Northern Ireland (25.3%). Women are significantly more affected by low pay than men with more women earning less than the Living Wage in the UK (23.8% compared to 16.6%). Part-time jobs (35.9% or 2.8 million jobs) were much more likely to be paid below the Living Wage in April 2020 than full-time jobs (14%).²¹

Women are also more likely to be employed on a zero-hours contract than men with 3.6% of women employed on these contracts compared to 2.8% of men across the UK.²² Single parents are twice as likely to have a zero-hours contract as other family types.²³ This puts them at greater risk of job insecurity particularly as a result of the Covid19 pandemic.

Women make up half of the working age population however nearly a third of working age women are 'economically inactive'. The Northern Ireland economic inactivity rate has increased to 27% and it is consistently above the UK average (now at 20.7%). The female economic inactivity rate is 30.9% compared to 23% for men.²⁴ In looking at the detail of economic inactivity it shows that more than a third of women who were unavailable for work gave the reason for inactivity as family/home commitments (61,000 or 34%) and this was the least likely reason for male inactivity (at 8,000 or 6%).²⁵ This is an important consideration for women in terms of the impact of caring responsibilities on their lives and the supports they may need to access training, education or work if that is their wish.

²¹ Employee jobs paid below the Living Wage: 2020, Living Wage Foundation, November 2020
<https://www.livingwage.org.uk/employee-jobs-paid-below-living-wage-2020>

²² People in employment on zero hours contracts, Office for National Statistics, August 2020
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/emp17peopleinemploymentonzerohourscontracts>

²³ Caring without sharing, Gingerbread, November 2020
<https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gingerbread-Caringwithoutsharing-v3.pdf>

²⁴ Northern Ireland Labour Market Report, NISRA, January 2021
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/labour-market-report-january-2021.pdf>

²⁵ Women in Northern Ireland 2020, NISRA, June 2020
https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Women%20in%20NI%202020_0.pdf

Childcare

The availability of high quality, affordable childcare makes it easier for women to access paid employment and helps to raise women's earnings. The lack of affordable childcare becomes a real barrier to women's employment and an independent income leaving them more vulnerable to poverty. For lone parents childcare costs are likely to be a major barrier. Conditionality for benefits means that many lone parents are required to seek paid work when their children are younger. High childcare costs make it extremely difficult for them to earn enough to cover their expenses, with lone parents spending a significant amount of monthly income on childcare costs. Government funded childcare provision is fundamental to facilitating women's participation and ability to access paid work, education and training and in achieving progress towards gender equality. We explore the issue of childcare more under **Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral.**

Care

Women are more likely to provide care than men. By the time they are aged 46, half of women have been a carer. Men have the same 50:50 chance by age 57 – eleven years later.²⁶

The Women and Equalities Committee said in 2016 about the causes of the gender pay gap: *"a large part of the gender pay gap is down to women's concentration in part-time work. Many women are trapped in low paid, part-time work that doesn't make use of their skills. This is partly due to women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid caring, but also because many of the sectors women work in, like retail and care, offer predominantly low-paid, part-time work."*²⁷

These findings show that caring is a feature of many women's lives and typically happens at a younger age for women than men. This means that women are more

²⁶ Will I care? The likelihood of being a carer in adult life, CarersUK, November 2019
http://www.carersuk.org/images/News_campaigns/CarersRightsDay_Nov19_FINAL.pdf

²⁷ Gender Pay Gap, Second Report of Session 2015-16, House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (HC 584), March 2016
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/584/584.pdf>

likely to find themselves in a caring role at an age when they would be expected to be in paid work. Women are more likely than men to be forced out of the labour market by caring responsibilities. Caring affects their participation in the workforce and ultimately reduces their earnings over their lifetime. This has clear implications for gender equality and the ability of women to reach their potential.

The issue of unpaid care has been brought into sharper focus as a result of the Covid19 pandemic. New figures released by Carers UK for Carers Week 2020 show an estimated 4.5 million people in the UK have become unpaid carers as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.²⁸ These figures show that of all unpaid carers, 58% are women and 42% are men.

“The value of care, care work and all the stuff normally done within the home. It is at the root of everything and why women can’t participate properly. Caring work is not valued in society and is the bedrock of everything. There is a circular relationship between not valuing care work and undervaluing women. It is undervalued because it is something that women do – there is underlying misogyny.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“We should all go on strike! We saw what happened with Covid in the emergency responses women were always sidelined. There is a need to value what women do. Women are always the add on at the end and it’s totally frustrating.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Caring mostly falls to women, it’s a big issue for women.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“It is just expected that a daughter will take on a caring role.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

²⁸ Carers Week 2020 Research Report: The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, Carers UK, June 2020
https://www.carersuk.org/images/CarersWeek2020/CW_2020_Research_Report_WEB.pdf

“There is still the assumption that it is women who will provide care. If there is care needed it is assumed that women will provide it whether for parents, children or grandchildren. Women are expected to care yet there are not the services there to support them.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Care always falls to the mother. I had a job share when I had my son but when he was 6 I had to take a career break as he had that many doctor’s appointments. I ended up giving up the job and haven’t worked since. It all does fall to the mother.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

Community based education and training

The right to education is an important means to achieve gender equality and in enabling people to achieve their full potential. It is important that education and training is provided over the course of a lifetime and adapts to changing life circumstances. Community based education and training is vitally important to women in disadvantaged and rural areas reflecting their individual needs. It is a fundamental building block in supporting women to rebuild their confidence and their capability to enter the workplace and is a means to maintaining overall wellbeing. Community based education and training is generally delivered based on local community needs and takes account of the complexity of women’s lives and the barriers they face such as education, course fees and the academic environment.

Women’s exclusion from participation may be significantly impacted by educational disadvantage which can profoundly restrict a person’s life prospects and wellbeing. Community-based women’s education and training has emerged and evolved in response to this educational disadvantage with the express aim of accommodating unmet learner need. Improved employment prospects for mothers through education and training can translate as improved outcomes for children and the reverse is also true restricting wellbeing for the mother and also the wider family.

Effective policy responses to addressing women’s disadvantage can rely on the integrated availability at community level of appropriate childcare and learning

pathways to potential employment such as that provided by the WCCF model as outlined below.

The Women's Regional Consortium believes that investing in community-based training and education and integrated childcare is an important factor in enabling women in low income households to access the training and education they need to make the move into work. This must be an important consideration within the Programme for Government in that it helps deliver on a number of key priorities including gender equality, employment support, anti-poverty and child poverty work.

“Education for women has been cut in the last 10 years and reduced away to nearly nothing. Things need to be resourced.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF)

The Women's Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF) enables Women's Centres to provide childcare places that are 100% supported for the most disadvantaged children and families. These sessional places (77,000 two-hour sessions) ensure that disadvantaged children have an opportunity to experience a childcare setting, to socialise, interact, play and learn in a supported environment.

Parents who avail of WCCF supported childcare also access a wide range of programmes available in their communities such as parenting skills, back to work programmes, advice services and health programmes. Therefore, WCCF enables the most excluded in disadvantaged communities to access support and engage in community development activities.

For some women (including ethnic minorities and lone parents) the prospect of increased economic participation can depend on the availability of appropriate integrated childcare and access to education/training opportunities at community level. A lack of appropriate integrated childcare and community education acts as a fundamental barrier to the engagement of socioeconomically disadvantaged women

in education and training and in employment. This is the kind of integrated provision that is provided by WCCF and which is so vital to these women.

“I can only do a course if it has childcare available.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Capability and Resilience**
- **Better Jobs**
- **Skills and Attainment**
- **Sports, Arts and Culture**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We suggest the Department for Communities is added to the Government departments under **Skills and Attainment** due to its remit for providing employment support, gender equality and childcare through the WCCF.

We suggest that the provision of childcare to support women living in disadvantaged and rural areas of Northern Ireland to access training, education and employment is an important part of the **Skills and Attainment** Key Priority Area.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

It is of course important that we have a globally competitive economy which is regionally balanced and carbon-neutral. The importance of having a globally competitive economy involves the creation of jobs and opportunities for work. It is important that these jobs are good quality jobs providing good conditions of employment as well as a decent income for workers. Creating low quality jobs which are low paid, exploit workers or which are in polluting industries may result in a more competitive economy but in the long-term are less sustainable, bad for workers, local communities and the environment.

Low Pay

As previously outlined under **Everyone can reach their potential** Northern Ireland is the region with the highest proportion of jobs paid below the Living Wage (25.3%).

Research from the Nevin Economic Research Institute²⁹ found that in 2020, one in four jobs in Northern Ireland were paid below the Real Living Wage equating to around 240,000 jobs. Younger workers, part-time workers and women are more likely to be low paid. Improving women's ability to work through the provision of low-paid jobs is not a solution to economic inactivity, women's employment or gender equality.

A Caring Economy

As previously outlined under **We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment** The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy have proposed the creation of a 'Caring Economy'³⁰ based on gender equality, wellbeing and sustainability as a way to build back better after the Covid19 pandemic. A Caring Economy would prioritise care for each other and for the environment in which we live. Women's Budget Group research³¹ found that a 2% GDP investment in care (for example, social care, childcare, parental leave and care leave) creates double the number of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction. Investment in free, universal childcare especially returns almost all of its initial investment. Eurostat data suggests that the care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of Greenhouse Gas emissions) than the construction industry and that the education industry is 62% less polluting than the construction industry.³² This makes investment in this type of social infrastructure economically, environmentally and equality sound.

Childcare

The Women's Regional Consortium is strongly of the view that it is impossible to have a globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral economy without

²⁹ <https://www.nerininstitute.net/blog/low-pay-northern-ireland-update>

³⁰ Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action, Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, Women's Budget Group, October 2020
<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf>

³¹ Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries, International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016
[Investing in the Care Economy - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://ituc-csi.org/investing-in-the-care-economy)

³² WBG calculations from Eurostat data
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

investment in childcare. Research shows that 40% of families in Northern Ireland (around 350,000 workers) have dependent children³³ therefore access to childcare must be a major consideration in the operation of a competitive economy. The availability of accessible, affordable childcare is a key consideration for women's participation in the economy and for women's access to education and training. Despite the importance of childcare to women's economic participation and the running of the economy it was extremely concerning to note that childcare was completely absent from the Northern Ireland Executive's Roadmap to Recovery. Neither did childcare feature in the UK or Ireland's recovery roadmaps. The lack of priority given to childcare has made the need for a Childcare Strategy and funded childcare provision more important than ever.

Childcare is a vital part of our economic infrastructure and it is therefore essential that it is a key component in any pathway to recovery and properly supported both now and into the future. We are in agreement with our campaign partners in Childcare for All that *"the childcare needs of everyone in the Northern Ireland workforce must be at the forefront of planning to ensure parents and providers are not facing unnecessary risks or barriers to work."*³⁴

If the pandemic has taught us anything it is the importance of childcare to the running of the economy and this must become a higher priority for policymakers. Childcare plays a crucial role in getting people into employment and in helping to tackle disadvantage and gender inequality. The Women's Regional Consortium believes that childcare must be given a strong focus within the Programme for Government in order to help with many of the issues outlined including increasing unemployment levels, high levels of economic inactivity for women and an economic downturn.

The costs of childcare do little to encourage economic participation and in many cases deter people, particularly women, from work. This is detrimental not only to the women

³³ Employment and access to childcare during the Covid-19 crisis, Nevin Economic Research Institute, May 2020

<https://www.nerinstitute.net/research/employment-and-access-childcare-during-covid-19-crisis>

³⁴ Childcare for All Campaign – COVID-19 Statement, May 2020

<https://www.childcareforallni.com/post/childcare-for-all-campaign-covid-19-statement>

themselves but also to the wider economy which loses out on their valuable skills and experience. Childcare is the biggest monthly bill faced by 33% of families in Northern Ireland costing more than their mortgage or rent payments and for 60% of parents their childcare bill is their largest or second largest monthly outgoing.³⁵ The World Economic Forum found that UK parents pay the highest childcare costs in Europe and the second highest in the world.³⁶

Differing childcare support in Northern Ireland from GB means that parents in Northern Ireland are under greater financial pressure with regards to childcare costs. Families in Northern Ireland do not have access to the 30-hours free childcare per week available to eligible families in England with a three or four-year old child.

Research by Employers for Childcare³⁷ in Northern Ireland shows that families in Northern Ireland can expect to pay a greater proportion of their household income on childcare than households across the UK as a whole with the average cost of a full-time childcare place equating to 35% of the median household income before housing costs. This is amongst the highest in the OECD countries.

The CEDAW Committee has also raised the issue of childcare costs specifically in Northern Ireland noting its concern *“that childcare costs remain excessive, particularly in Northern Ireland, which constitutes an obstacle for women to enter and progress in the workplace.”*³⁸ The Committee recommended that Government should ensure the availability of affordable and accessible childcare particularly in Northern Ireland.³⁹

³⁵ Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2020, Employers for Childcare, November 2020
<https://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/northern-ireland-childcare-survey-2020/>

³⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/these-countries-have-the-most-expensive-childcare/>

³⁷ Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2020, Employers for Childcare, November 2020
<https://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/northern-ireland-childcare-survey-2020/>

³⁸ Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, March 2019, para 45
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8&Lang=En

³⁹ Ibid, para 46

“There are a lot of impacts for lone parents – it is no joke for them. There are no crèche facilities/childcare in this area. Women can’t afford the childcare that does exist.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“I am a lone parent, there is a lack of suitable jobs in the area, expensive childcare and I have mental health issues. I would struggle financially if working full-time with childcare costs, rent and regular expenses so it isn’t really a viable option.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“I can’t afford childcare as I don’t get any support with it. I am lucky I have family to look after my kids. Without them I would need to leave work. My salary is not enough to pay the mortgage and childcare without some help.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“I have two children under four. The cost of childcare is extortionate. It is our biggest outgoing. Despite help from grandparents we struggle to make these payments.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Childcare is one of the key things for women. It is one of the biggest barriers women face to taking part socially, politically and economically.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Competing Globally**
- **Green Economy**
- **Growth**
- **Food, Farming and Fishing**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Innovation**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We would like to see the Department for Communities added to the Government departments under the **Green Economy** due to its remit for gender equality and in the provision of training and support for jobseekers to be able to access jobs within the green economy.

Within the **Green Economy** we believe that there should be an acknowledgement that the opportunities within the Green Economy must be for everyone.

We suggest that given the importance of childcare that a Childcare Strategy should be added to the list of Strategies that could help to deliver these key priority areas.

We also suggest that the Gender Equality Strategy should be added to the list of Strategies given the issues experienced by women in the economy in relation to low pay, childcare and economic inactivity.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We believe that childcare must be represented as a Key Priority Area given its centrality to the operation of the economy and a key part of Northern Ireland's economic infrastructure.

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

Domestic Violence

We would refer the Northern Ireland Executive to our colleagues in Women's Aid Northern Ireland for further information in relation to Domestic Violence but we wish to raise a number of issues in relation to this subject.

Domestic violence is at its highest level since records began in Northern Ireland with a significant increase in reports of domestic abuse during the first Covid19 lockdown. Latest statistics⁴⁰ show that in the 12 months from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020 there were 31,848 domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Northern Ireland, an increase of 134 (0.4%) on the previous 12 months and one of the highest 12-month periods recorded since the start of the data series in 2004/05. The number of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police reached 19,000 an increase of 951 (5.3%) on the previous 12 months and the highest 12-month period recorded since

⁴⁰ Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland Update to 31 December 2020, NISRA & PSNI, February 2021
<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2020-21/q3/domestic-abuse-bulletin-dec-20.pdf>

2004/05. Domestic abuse crimes have risen to 19.7% of all police recorded crime in the 12 months to 31st December 2020, compared with 16.9% during the previous 12 months. This is the highest proportion of overall police recorded crime since the current domestic abuse data series began in 2004/05.

In 2017 Northern Ireland had the joint highest femicide rate in Europe⁴¹ and in the first three months of lockdown more women had been murdered by their partners than in all of 2019. Domestic violence disproportionately impacts women. Statistics from the PSNI in 2019 show that out of all reported domestic abuse crimes, 69% of victims were women, 31% of victims were men and 86% of perpetrators were men.

Northern Ireland, unlike every other part of the United Kingdom, does not have a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. This means that in Northern Ireland women and girls are being let down by the lack of a VAWG Strategy to tackle gender-based violence simply because of their postcode. In England, Scotland & Wales these specific strategies mean that there is a meaningful focus from regional governments on the need to stop gender-based violence against women & girls in their nations. Our colleagues in Womens Aid NI are currently petitioning the Northern Ireland Assembly on this issue.⁴² Having a VAWG Strategy would fulfil government obligations under the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence.

It is essential that additional recognition and support is given to those groups who are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence including women and girls, LGBT+ people, disabled people, rural women and migrants.

⁴¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-49586759>

⁴² <https://www.womensaidni.org/sign-our-petition-to-the-northern-ireland-assembly-and-help-make-a-difference-to-the-lives-of-women-girls/>

Women & Peacebuilding

*“Sustainable and durable peace requires the participation of women and girls, as well as the integration of gender perspectives in all reconstruction processes.”*⁴³ Research across the world has shown the importance of women’s involvement in peace and reconciliation work. Women’s perspectives must be reflected in the establishment and governance of all the legacy institutions. *“All key peacebuilding and reconstruction strategies - including shared learning with other societies in conflict - should be informed by women’s perspectives.”*⁴⁴

To date, the UK government has not followed the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee from 2008 to fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN SCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security in Northern Ireland.⁴⁵ UN SCR 1325 demands recognition of the role of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution and calls on the international community to take specific steps to enhance the meaningful participation of women in these processes, as well as to protect women in situations of conflict and post conflict transition. Actions to increase women’s participation in both formal political decision-making and in the informal sphere of policy influence is essential if women are to be seen as more than either victims, carers or passive observers.⁴⁶

Research by Dr Claire Pierson highlights the importance of making gender more central to the analysis of conflict and peacebuilding.⁴⁷ *“Women continue to be left at the margins of processes to discuss and resolve ongoing contentious and conflict-*

⁴³ Women, Peace and Security, Study submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), p111, United Nations, 2002, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>

⁴⁴ Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Women’s Sector, Claire Pierson and Katy Radford, Institute for Conflict Research, July 2016

<https://www.community-relations.org.uk/sites/crc/files/media-files/9999%20ICR%20Peacebuilding.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.un-documents.net/sr1325.htm>

⁴⁶ Women, Peace and Security: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, Strategic Guide and Toolkit, Bronagh Hinds, Debbie Donnelly, June 2014

https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Toolkit_Booklet.pdf

⁴⁷ One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back: Women’s Rights 20 Years after the Good Friday Agreement, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 71, Issue 2, Claire Pierson, April 2018

<https://academic.oup.com/pa/article-abstract/71/2/461/4100565>

*related issues. Such silencing of gendered experience leaves out integral issues and perspectives on both the future of Northern Ireland and legacies of the past.*⁴⁸

Women in Northern Ireland have not been given the opportunity to participate equally in the peacebuilding process which impacts negatively on their social and economic development particularly for those already experiencing disadvantage. It is vitally important that women are at the decision-making tables and actively involved in peacebuilding processes if a sustainable peace is to be achieved.

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Access to Justice**
- **Address Harm and Vulnerability**
- **Early Intervention and Rehabilitation**
- **Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We suggest that under **Address Harm and Vulnerability** there should be an addition to include victims of gender-based crime due to the extent of this issue in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Department for Communities should be added to the list of Departments under this Priority Area due to its remit for social inclusion strategies particularly the Gender Equality and LGBTQ+ Strategies.

⁴⁸ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-marginalisation-of-womens-rights-in-northern-ireland-20-years-after-the-good-friday-agreement/>

We agree with our colleagues in the Equality Coalition that there should be some additions to the Key Priority Area **Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity**. It does address tackling sectarianism but does not reference other forms of racism or prejudice faced by other Section 75 groups including BAME people, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, misogynistic abuse, etc.

We also suggest that the Gender Equality, Disability, LGBTQ+, and Race Equality Strategies are added to the list of strategies that could help to deliver these key priority areas.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

We believe that it is vitally important to have a caring society and particularly one that supports people through difficult times and provides some protection against financial hardship and poverty. However, the impact of a decade of welfare reform and austerity policies has led to questions about the effectiveness of the current welfare system to act as a safety net against poverty.

Women, Poverty, Austerity and Welfare Reform

Poverty is an issue which impacts on the lives of many women in Northern Ireland and is harmful not only to the women themselves but to their children, families and wider communities. Women are generally more likely than men to live in poverty across their lifetimes. Lone parents (in Northern Ireland 91% of lone parents are women⁴⁹) are even more vulnerable to poverty. In Northern Ireland 37% of single parents are living in poverty.⁵⁰ Women often bear the brunt of poverty in the home managing household budgets to shield their children from its worst effects. This means that women end up acting as the ‘shock absorbers’ of poverty going without food, clothes or warmth in order to meet the needs of other family members when money is tight.⁵¹

“As long as my two kids are fed and watered I don’t care if I eat.”

(Quote taken from Women’s Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Austerity/Welfare Reform on Women, March 2019)

As previously stated, women are more likely to be in receipt of social security benefits, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work and also more likely to be providing care which limits their ability to carry out paid work. This contributes to keeping women’s incomes generally lower over their lifetimes and

⁴⁹ Census 2011 – Key Statistics for Gender, Research and Information Service Research Paper, Ronan Savage and Dr Raymond Russell, Northern Ireland Assembly, 5 September 2014
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/general/3415.pdf>

⁵⁰ Households Below Average Income: Northern Ireland 2018/19, DfC & NISRA
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/hbai-2018-19.pdf>

⁵¹ A Female Face, Fabian Society Blog by Mary-Ann Stephenson, Women’s Budget Group, February 2019
<https://fabians.org.uk/a-female-face/>

therefore puts them at greater risk of poverty. These existing gender inequalities are also likely to be further worsened due to the Covid19 pandemic.

“At the end of the day women and mothers are left with the burden of these issues (referring to low-incomes and poverty). They worry about these things.”

(Quote taken from Women’s Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Austerity/Welfare Reform on Women, March 2019)

The social security system has a vital role to play in easing the impact of poverty on people and families. As the Covid19 pandemic has shown, people need to be able to rely on the social security system when times get tough and they are hit by unexpected costs or lost earnings. A decade of austerity and welfare reform policies have disproportionately impacted on women. Research by the House of Commons Library shows that 86% of the savings to the Treasury through tax and benefit changes since 2010 will have come from women. It shows that, by 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts, compared with 86% for women.⁵² These welfare reform and austerity measures have tended to limit the ability of the system to protect against poverty.⁵³

Locally, an analysis of the impact of the reforms by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)⁵⁴ showed that across most income levels the overall cash impact of the reforms is more negative for women than for men. This is particularly the case for lone parents (who are mostly women) who lose £2,250 on average, equivalent to almost 10% of their net income.

⁵² Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes, Richard Cracknell, Richard Keen, Commons Briefing Papers SN06758, December 2017

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>

⁵³ Protecting dignity, fighting poverty and promoting social inclusion in devolved social security, Dr Mark Simpson, Ulster University, June 2018

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series_7/simpson060618.pdf

⁵⁴ Cumulative impact assessment of tax and social security reforms in Northern Ireland, NIHRC, November 2019

https://www.nihrc.org/uploads/publications/Final_CIA_report_Oct_2019.pdf

“I don’t know how anyone does it as a single parent. The cost of milk, nappies. There is a ripple effect on children.”

(Quote taken from Women’s Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Austerity/Welfare Reform on Women, March 2019)

Research by the Women’s Regional Consortium on the impact of austerity⁵⁵ and on the impact of Universal Credit⁵⁶ on women shows the extent to which changes to the social security system have worsened women’s ability to provide for their children and families and made them more vulnerable to financial hardship and poverty. Gendered policies such as the two-child limit and Benefit Cap as well as the introduction of Universal Credit which has been described as discriminatory by design have caused many women to struggle to afford the basics and to feed and provide for their children and families.

“It’s degrading – how can I provide for my family? Kids ask can we get this, can we get that and I have to say no all the time.”

(Quote taken from Women’s Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Austerity/Welfare Reform on Women, March 2019)

Concerns about austerity measures have been raised internationally by the CEDAW Committee. Following its recent examination of the UK, the CEDAW Committee raised concerns about the impact of austerity measures on women stating its concern about the *“disproportionately negative impact of austerity measures on women, who constitute the vast majority of single parents and are more likely to be engaged in informal, temporary or precarious employment.”*⁵⁷ The Committee recommended that the UK government *“undertake a comprehensive assessment on the impact of austerity measures on the rights of women and adopt measures to mitigate and remedy the negative consequences without delay.”*⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Impact of Ongoing Austerity: Women’s Perspectives, Women’s Regional Consortium, March 2019 <http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/Impact%20of%20Ongoing%20Austerity%20Women%27s%20Perspectives.pdf>

⁵⁶ The Impact of Universal Credit on Women, Women’s Regional Consortium, September 2020 <http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Impact%20of%20Universal%20Credit%20on%20WomenRevised.pdf>

⁵⁷ Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, March 2019 (para 17) https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8%20&Lang=En

⁵⁸ Ibid, para 18

Addressing women's disadvantage in the economy requires action to ensure that women are able to be economically independent not only through paid work but also including through a properly supportive social security system which provides a safety net when women are not able to work. It is important that the Programme for Government recognises the contextual factors which increase women's vulnerability to poverty. These include high rates of female economic inactivity, no childcare strategy, high number of women with adult care responsibilities, a weak labour market, high number of women working part-time and in precarious jobs and wages lower than the UK average.⁵⁹

“The benefits system forces women with children to go out to work. But there is a lack of jobs available and the jobs that are available are often the lowest paid which means that women can’t afford childcare or you end up paying to work.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“It would be better if there was a decent amount of benefits to let women stay at home and look after their kids if they want to not this constant pressure to work.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“The social security system does not allow people to live lives with dignity.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“The benefits system doesn’t help people to go out and seek work. The jobs women do are often the lowest paid. If they leave benefits for low paid work they just end up getting further into the poverty trap.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Even before Covid there were lots of people reliant on foodbanks because of Universal Credit, the 5-week wait, 2 child limit, etc. These things only push people into poverty. UC is not fair to people it just penalizes people. I feel there are not the right benefits in place.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

⁵⁹ Shadow report for the examination of the UK by the Committee on the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women, NIWEP, January 2019

Welfare Reform Mitigations

In Northern Ireland a package of mitigation measures was agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive to protect some claimants from the harshest impacts of welfare reform.⁶⁰ This included important mitigation payments around the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax as well as providing some help around Universal Credit.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement⁶¹ committed to both extending existing mitigations in Northern Ireland beyond March 2020 when they were due to run out and to carry out a review of the mitigation measures. The Cliff Edge Coalition⁶² have been campaigning not only for the extension of the existing mitigations (and the closing of loopholes in the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax mitigations which mean that some claimants are not protected) but for their strengthening to include new challenges such as Universal Credit and the two-child limit.⁶³

We believe these mitigations are vital protections for the people of Northern Ireland especially for the many women who have been so adversely affected by welfare reform policies. They are even more vital in the context of the pandemic which is also hitting women so hard (see Section 3). Strengthening the existing mitigations to provide protections around the two-child limit, the Universal Credit five-week wait and the private rented sector is necessary to protect people, including many women, from the devastating impact of Covid19 and the resulting economic crisis which will follow.

We are firmly of the belief that strengthening the mitigations is essential to provide protections from poverty and financial hardship. It is also likely to provide greater

⁶⁰ Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report, Professor Eileen Evason, January 2016
<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/welfare-reform-mitigations-working-group-report.pdf>

⁶¹ New Decade, New Approach, January 2020
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf

⁶² The Cliff Edge NI Coalition is a group of over 100 organisations from across Northern Ireland who came together to express concerns about the end of welfare reform mitigations in March 2020. The Women's Support Network is a member of the Coalition's Working Group and the Women's Regional Consortium is a Coalition member.

⁶³ Cliff Edge Briefing Paper, September 2020
<https://lawcentreni.s3.amazonaws.com/Cliff-Edge-Coalition-Briefing-Dec-2019v2.pdf>

protections for women. There are a number of reasons for this namely that women are more likely to claim social security benefits, welfare reform has impacted more on women and Covid19 has increased the numbers of people relying on social security benefits many of whom will be women. Investing in the benefits system to help protect people from poverty and to help them get through this crisis is a sensible approach and is a sign of a caring society.

“I just think it is a shambles the way Universal Credit is structured. I only get money for two of my children and nothing for the baby. The only money I get for the baby is Child Benefit.”

“It would really help if you got a payment in the initial wait that you didn’t have to pay back. It would help you not get into any more debt.”

“If I had known about the Contingency Fund that would have really helped. Now they are taking £75/month off me and I’m really struggling and getting into more debt.”

(Quotes taken from Women’s Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Universal Credit on Women, September 2020)

Poverty among Marginalised Groups

Disabled people are at a higher risk of poverty as they are more likely to face higher barriers to employment, lower pay if they are in work and higher living costs. In Northern Ireland 22% of those living in families where someone is disabled are living in poverty compared to 19% of families where no-one is disabled. Disabled people have been disproportionately impacted by austerity cuts since 2010 with disabled women set to lose 13% of their annual income by 2021 as a result. Disabled single mothers will have lost 21% of their income by 2021 and 32% if their child is also disabled.⁶⁴

Black and minority ethnic (BAME) households in the UK are over twice as likely to live in poverty as their white counterparts. Research by the Social Metrics Commission showed that nearly half (46%) of all people living in families where the household head is Black/African/Caribbean/Black British were in poverty compared

⁶⁴ Women’s Budget Group (2018), ‘Disabled Women and Austerity’, (available online): <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-women-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

to just under one in five (19%) of those living in families where the head of the household is white. People in BAME families are also between two and three times more likely to be in persistent poverty than people in white families.⁶⁵

People who are subject to immigration control will have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) and will not be able to access social security benefits including Child Benefit, Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. Research has shown that women, pregnant women, disabled people and children are more likely to be impacted by the negative effects of NRPF with single mothers appearing to fare the worst.⁶⁶ This leaves many women without the safety net of social welfare and often pushes these families into destitution.

A Caring Economy

Throughout this response we have referenced the need for a Caring Economy as called for by the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy. This is an economy which values care, both paid and unpaid, as the activities which nurture us all and an economy which ensures that no-one faces discrimination, violence or poverty and in which no-one is left behind or pushed behind.⁶⁷ For more information see details under **We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment.**

Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness

Recent research on loneliness in Northern Ireland⁶⁸ found that 1 in 3 people are more often lonely here. Chronic loneliness affects 1 in 20 people and 88% of people in Northern Ireland say that loneliness has become a bigger problem since the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic. 71% of people in Northern Ireland want the Northern Ireland Assembly to do more to tackle the issue of loneliness. The research highlights that

⁶⁵ Measuring Poverty 2020, Social Metrics Commission, July 2020
<https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Measuring-Poverty-2020-Web.pdf>

⁶⁶ Access Denied: The cost of the 'no recourse to public funds' policy, The Unity Project, June 2019
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590060b0893fc01f949b1c8a/t/5d021ada54e8ee00013fe5b9/1560419116745/Access+Denied+-+V12+%281%29.pdf>

⁶⁷ <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/creating-a-caring-economy-a-call-to-action-2/>

⁶⁸ Loneliness in Northern Ireland: A call to action, Campaign to End Loneliness, December 2020
<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-in-Northern-Ireland-A-Call-to-action.pdf>

being chronically, or always, lonely is dangerous for health and wellbeing, putting people at higher risk of heart disease, dementia and mental ill-health. The research recommends a bespoke and fully resourced Loneliness Strategy for Northern Ireland. This would be a cross-departmental strategy for loneliness across all ages, embedded in the Programme for Government with committed resources and a clear timeframe for development and delivery. Our colleagues in NIRWN have highlighted that loneliness and isolation are big issues for rural people.

We also refer to our comments under **We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives** in relation to Mental Health and Care as these are important elements in a caring society.

We agree with an issue raised by our colleagues in the Equality Coalition. They highlighted that in 2016 there was an outcome on connecting people and opportunities through infrastructure. However, in the proposed Outcomes Framework the development of digital and physical infrastructure only appears under **Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral** to provide opportunities to grow business in all areas. The Equality Coalition have stated that this is also important for broader social goals. We agree that the development of digital and physical infrastructure is important for many broader social goals including helping to tackle loneliness and isolation and in ensuring access to digital services including the many government services which have increasingly gone online. The development of both physical and digital infrastructure is also important for people who live in rural areas.

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- Disability
- Housing
- Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Older People

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We suggest adding the Gender Equality and Race Equality Strategies as well as the Tackling Rural Poverty and Isolation Framework to the list of strategies that could help deliver the Key Priority Areas.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

People want to live, work and visit here

1. Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

We refer to our previous comments under **Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral** particularly in relation to the need to create good quality jobs that provide decent pay and conditions for workers. This is a particular issue for women who are often concentrated in low paid, part-time and insecure work. We wish to stress that growth in the economy and being competitive should not be at any cost and must not exploit workers particularly the most low paid or be damaging to the environment.

This must include support for physical and digital infrastructure which is so important to keeping people connected and working to prevent loneliness and isolation especially for those living in rural areas.

We reiterate our belief that a Caring Economy would help to achieve many of the Key Priority Areas under this Outcome. A Caring Economy values care, both paid and unpaid and ensures that no-one faces discrimination, violence or poverty and that no-one is left behind. This type of approach to our economy would ensure that Northern Ireland is a place where people want to live, work and visit. We refer to our previous comments about a Caring Economy under **We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment.**

2. Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed below) that have been included under this Outcome?

The Key Priority Areas under this Outcome are:

- **Competing Globally**
- **Better Jobs**
- **Growth**
- **Housing**
- **Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity**
- **Sports, Arts and Culture**
- **Planning**

More information on these Key Priority Areas can be found in the Consultation Document.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

We agree with our colleagues in the Equality Coalition that there should be some additions to the Key Priority Area **Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity**. It does address tackling sectarianism but does not reference other forms of racism or prejudice faced by other Section 75 groups including BAME people, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, misogynistic abuse, etc.

We also suggest that the Gender Equality, Disability, LGBTQ+, and Race Equality Strategies are added to the list of strategies that could help to deliver these Key Priority Areas.

3. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

If yes, please add any further details below:

4. Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please add any further details below:

Section 3: Additional information

1. Do you have any further comments relevant to this consultation?

While we welcome the ability to respond to the Programme for Government's Outcomes Framework and acknowledge the importance of taking an outcomes-based approach to the PfG, it is not a PfG, and has no actions or funding committed to achieve these Outcomes. We agree with the concerns raised by the Equality Coalition that *"despite a draft PfG having been already negotiated in the January 2020 New Decade New Approach (NDNA) deal (containing important equality and rights commitments) no PfG has been adopted."*

We also wish to support the Equality Coalition's concerns that while the draft PfG Outcomes Framework document does list Strategies (including the Social Inclusion Strategies) as actions that could help deliver the priority areas of each outcome there is no commitment to adopt and implement these Strategies.

In the absence of a PfG which includes policies, programmes and actions with associated funding there are no specific commitments to achieve these high level Outcomes. These Outcomes must be supported by a commitment to action otherwise it is impossible to assess if they have been met.

The Consultation Process

The consultation on the Programme for Government is very important for everyone who lives in Northern Ireland as it is likely to have a considerable impact on their lives. It is vital therefore that there is a genuine consultation process and that engagement with this process is as wide as possible so that the resulting Programme for Government can adequately meet the needs of the citizens who live here.

While we welcome having the opportunity to respond to this important consultation we still have concerns about the consultation process in terms of the short turnaround for responses with consultees only being given eight weeks to respond. This was a short deadline for an issue of such importance and such a short deadline goes against existing good practice on consultations: *“When government consults it must build a realistic timeframe for the consultation, allowing plenty of time for each stage of the process.”*⁶⁹

The Covid19 pandemic has had a huge impact on all our lives and on our ability to work and communicate with each other. We acknowledge that the pandemic has also had an impact on government and the work of the departments. For the community and voluntary sector the impacts of lockdown have meant that the ability to carry out normal ways of working have also been severely curtailed. This has been particularly challenging for carrying out research work and in trying to effectively gather the views of people in relation to consultation exercises.

The consultation also came at a time when the women’s sector and indeed the wider voluntary and community sector has come under significant pressure with the sheer volume of consultations ongoing. Many of these consultations are also significant in terms of their importance and many have particular implications for the women’s sector so have required an investment of time and resources to produce detailed responses.

⁶⁹ nidirect <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/public-consultations>

Despite the fact that there is a challenging work environment the timeframe for responses did not make any allowances for this therefore putting significant pressure on an already over-worked and under-resourced voluntary and community sector. We would suggest that given the nature and importance of this Consultation and a range of external factors such as Covid19 restrictions on carrying out research and an already busy consultation environment that the deadline should have been longer to enable genuine and meaningful consultation.

We would refer the Northern Ireland Executive to the guidance on consulting with women produced by Women's Regional Consortium members WRDA.⁷⁰ This guidance contains five top tips based on the many years of experience that women's groups have in promoting women's participation in public policy making. These include the need to work together with the women's community and voluntary sector, making time for accessible face to face engagement, keeping language accessible and relevant, listening to the stories from women and making women visible in the product as well as the process.

Rural Needs

In June 2017 the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 was introduced and placed a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. The Act was introduced to ensure that consideration of the needs of people in rural areas becomes more firmly embedded within public authorities in Northern Ireland.

We are disappointed to note that the Programme for Government Outcomes Framework has not included a Rural Needs assessment. This is supposed to be carried out at the early stages of policy development. The Women's Regional Consortium would have liked to have seen a rural needs assessment carried out

⁷⁰ Women at the Heart of Public Consultation, A guide for Public Authorities and Women's Organisations, WRDA, November 2017
https://wrda.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/WRDA_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf

particularly given the fact that Northern Ireland has a significant rural population with 36% of the population living in rural areas.⁷¹

Those who live in rural areas across Northern Ireland have specific needs and experiences which must be reflected across many of the Programme for Government Outcomes and it is vitally important that their needs are addressed given the importance of rural living in Northern Ireland.

The Impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on Women

The ongoing Covid19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges across the world. The crisis affects men and women differently and in many cases deepens the inequalities that women already experience. The EU's annual report on gender equality, published in March 2021, found that the pandemic *"has exacerbated existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life"*. The report claimed that it could *"take years, or even decades"* to overcome these setbacks.⁷²

Women are more likely to bear the brunt of this crisis for a number of reasons:

- Women are more likely to be low paid and in insecure employment. Women were the majority of low paid earners (69%) the majority of those in part-time employment (74%), involuntary part-time employment (57%), temporary employment (54%), zero-hours contracts (54%) and part-time self-employment (59%).⁷³
- Female employees were more likely than male employees to be working in jobs paying the National Minimum Wage. Low paid women were more likely than low paid men to remain stuck in low paid jobs;⁷⁴

⁷¹ Mid-Year Population Estimates – Urban/Rural Change, NISRA
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/mid-year-estimates-population-change>

⁷²

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2021_en.pdf

⁷³ Submission to the Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry: Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, Women's Budget Group, June 2020

<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WBG-Gender-economic-impact-submission.pdf>

⁷⁴ Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, Women & Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, February 2021

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmwomeq/385/38502.htm>

- Women are twice as likely to be key workers as men, 65% of key workers are female compared to 47% of the whole working population;⁷⁵
 - In Northern Ireland women make up 79% of health and social care staff.⁷⁶
 - Many of the workers in health and social care sectors are low paid. 98% of the 1 million high exposure key workers being paid less than 60% of median average wages are women.⁷⁷
 - Employed women were a third more likely than employed men to work in shutdown sectors over the first national lockdown with one in six (17%) of female employees in such sectors compared to one in seven (13%) of male employees⁷⁸ making them at particular risk of job loss.
 - HMRC statistics show that across the UK more women than men were furloughed with 1.92 million females furloughed at 30 November 2020 compared with 1.79 million men.⁷⁹
 - On average, women carried out 60% more unpaid work than men reducing the time available for paid work meaning that they earn less, own less and are more likely to be living in poverty.⁸⁰
 - Women are less likely to be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) because they are overrepresented in low paid work and on zero hours contracts.
- Women's Budget Group calculations find that 15.5% of women and 10.6% of

⁷⁵ Risky business, Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers, Resolution Foundation Briefing, April 2020

<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf>

⁷⁶ Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power in 2020, Northern Ireland Assembly Briefing Paper, January 2020

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2020/assembly_exec_review/0120.pdf

⁷⁷ Low-paid women in UK at 'high risk of coronavirus exposure', The Guardian, March 2020
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/29/low-paid-women-in-uk-at-high-risk-of-coronavirus-exposure>

⁷⁸ Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note BN278, April 2020

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN278-Sector-Shutdowns.pdf>

⁷⁹ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: January 2021, HMRC

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-january-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-january-2021>

⁸⁰ Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work', Office for National Statistics, November 2016
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

men do not earn enough to qualify for SSP.⁸¹ This points to a disproportionate financial impact of self-isolation on women.

Youth unemployment is another area of major concern as research shows that more than one in 10 people aged 16 – 25 have lost their job and just under 6 in 10 have seen their earnings fall since the Covid19 pandemic began.⁸² This research found that young workers were twice as likely to have lost their jobs compared to older employees and that employment and earnings losses are more pronounced for women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a poor family. A report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the lockdown hit young people the hardest.⁸³ It states that on the eve of the crisis the sectors that are shut down as a result of social distancing measures employed nearly a third (30%) of all employees under the age 25 (25% of young men and 36% of young women). It is clear therefore that young women will be more impacted by youth unemployment as a result of the Covid19 pandemic.

In July 2020 the Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland published a comprehensive Feminist Recovery Plan⁸⁴ highlighting many of these issues and calling on decision-makers across the UK to take action to ensure a gender-sensitive response in the transition from crisis response to recovery. This plan provided clear evidence for how to prioritise actions coming out of the pandemic. Despite this call there has been little progress in alleviating the impact of the pandemic on women.

A Women and Equalities Committee report⁸⁵ into the gendered economic impact of the Coronavirus crisis has highlighted how existing gendered inequalities in the

⁸¹ Submission to the Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry: Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, Women's Budget Group, June 2020
<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WBG-Gender-economic-impact-submission.pdf>

⁸² Generation COVID and Social Mobility: Evidence and Policy, Centre for Economic Performance, October 2020 <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-011.pdf>

⁸³ Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note BN278, April 2020
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN278-Sector-Shutdowns.pdf>

⁸⁴ Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, Women's Policy Group NI, July 2020
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WPG-NI-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-2020-.pdf>

⁸⁵ Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, Women & Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, February 2021

economy have been ignored and sometimes exacerbated by the pandemic policy response. The Committee stated: *“We are concerned that the Government Equalities Office (GEO) did not anticipate how inequalities were likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic and ensure that it influenced the policy response, including in relation to employment, welfare, childcare and pregnancy and maternity. We have seen little evidence that the Government has conducted any robust or meaningful analysis of the gendered impact of its economic policies during the Coronavirus crisis.”*

Following the publication of this report a coalition of organisations including the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Amnesty International, Save the Children and the Fawcett Society have signed a letter to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) arguing that the government has failed in its duty to consider the impact of key policies on women and other groups protected under the Equality Act.⁸⁶ The letter states: *“This is a time of crisis for women. The coronavirus pandemic is having a significant and disproportionate impact on women’s health, jobs and livelihoods. The policy decisions taken by government and other key public bodies in response to coronavirus are worsening the impact of the pandemic and deepening inequalities faced by women. The consequences of these decisions will affect women for years to come.”*

It is clear that some groups are particularly affected by pandemic. The low paid, young and female workers stand out as the groups putting their lives at risk by continuing to work in close proximity to others, and most likely to be experiencing direct financial pain from the economic shut down.⁸⁷ This must therefore be a focus for the Programme for Government so that targeted actions are included to address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmwomeq/385/38502.htm>

⁸⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/15/ehrc-urged-to-investigate-ministers-for-equality-failures-in-covid-response>

⁸⁷ Risky business, Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers, Resolution Foundation Briefing, April 2020
<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf>

It is imperative that as society emerges from the Covid19 pandemic and resulting recession that women must not pay the price as they did for the previous financial crash. Women have already suffered immensely due to a decade of austerity policies and this must not be allowed to happen again. There is a real need in Government recovery planning for targeted support to ensure that those who have been impacted the most by this pandemic are given the help they need to prevent and reduce poverty.

“Women don’t have equal rights and Covid has highlighted a lot of that. Women are struggling with homeworking, looking after children and working at the same time. Men’s jobs are seen as more important.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“It’s a real hard time for everyone especially women.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“Caring mostly falls to women, it’s a big issue for women.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

“There is still the assumption that it is women who will provide care. If there is care needed it is assumed that women will provide it whether for parents, children or grandchildren. Women are expected to care yet there are not the services there to support them.”

(Participant at Consultation Event)

Housing Outcome

We agree with our colleagues in the Housing Sector about the importance of a specific housing outcome to be included in the PfG as set out in New Decade New Approach. We echo their calls for a specific housing outcome as good quality, affordable housing is fundamental to achieving an equal society where no one is excluded.