

Appendix One

GENDER ACTION PLAN 2024 – 2027 (Year 2) - DRAFT

Year 2 April 2025 to March 2026

Year 3 April 2026 to March 2027

Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic, and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination. Please see attached Appendix A. This is a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but inequalities have also been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 25 years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement's commitment to the 'full and equal participation of women in public life', statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will also benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues including lower life expectancy, bad health and lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COUNCIL to ensure that Belfast City Council organisational culture, policies and practices empower talent development at all levels, for elected members and officers alike, and remove any form of discrimination			
Action	Year	Who	Budget year 2
Fund and develop a programme of events for Women's Network Group	2, 3	WNG	£4,000
Hold annual IWD and IMD events/celebrations for staff	2, 3	HR WNG	£6,000
Prepare for NI Diversity Chartermark assessment with the goal of attaining Gold level accreditation	2	HR	£3,500
Ensure effective promotion of Belfast City Council as an employer that values and supports equality and diversity (interlink, external website, job information for potential applicants, media releases, City Matters, social media.)	Ongoing	HR P&E MarComms Staff networks	Staff resources
Retain Onus Domestic Violence Charter 'platinum level' status by continuing to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse issues, support staff	2,3	HR	£2,000

experiencing domestic violence and abuse and ensure employees know what support is available			
Increase awareness of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls through promotion of the Raise Your Voice campaign and in particular for male employees	2,3	Corporate HR	£3,000
Review and relaunch and recommunicate gender /family friendly policies.	2, 3	HR	Staff resources
Deliver activity to develop skills for working in a political environment - e.g., mock committee, CMT and DMT sessions, Managing in a Political Environment course	2, 3	HR Democratic Services	Staff resources
Clarify criteria and better promote women's development opportunities and programmes.	2, 3	Corporate HR	Staff Resources
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY with the purpose of increasing the representation of women in leadership positions throughout communities across Belfast by ensuring that processes are in place to increase women's involvement in decision making in communities			
Fund annual external IWD event.	Ongoing	CHR	£10,000
Hold a series of events for female elected members to promote work of WSG, GAP and engage with women in their constituencies.	2,3	HR Depts	£2,000
Work with TEO to deliver Strategic Framework to EVAWG	2,3	All depts	Staff resources
Hold an event for WSG/ WNG to engage with the Youth Council and to identify opportunities for future collaboration on gender issues	2,3	HR WSG CNS / YF	£1,000
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMY to ensure all council policies and strategies influence and facilitate the active and fair participation of both women and men in the economy			
Review frontline job opportunities including apprenticeships, and associated working arrangements and facilities, to make these opportunities more attractive to female applicants.	Ongoing	CNS HR Place and Economy MarComms	Staff resources / Employment Academies

Deliver targeted employability outreach to get more women into work by promoting Belfast City Council role models			
<p>Enterprise support for underrepresented groups – Belfast City Council offers a programme of support to enable underrepresented groups (including women) to overcome the barriers to starting a business or accessing employment opportunities.</p> <p>Working in partnership with a range of organisations across the city we will put in place targeted interventions to engage women in this support and engage female entrepreneurs in business start-up activity, helping them to develop ideas and create networks to support them to start a business.</p> <p>Through the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) we are working towards a target of 50% of female led organisations supported through the service. If successful, this will equate to 419 female start-ups and 190 growth potential female-led businesses supported in 25/26.</p>	2	Enterprise and Business Growth	£207,207 (indicative pro-rata spend based on female engagement through community outreach and mentoring)
<p>Employability support for underrepresented groups – Belfast City Council programme of support to enable underrepresented groups (including women) to overcome the barriers to accessing employment opportunities through the delivery of Employment and Upskilling Academies.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement with women-specific provision to encourage and actively support women into under-represented sectors through access to Employment Academies in fibre, tech, logistics/transport and construction as well as business services, health and social care and working with children. - Upskilling Academies for those in low paid employment in female-dominated sectors (education, health and social care, working with children sectors) which include Level 2 through to Level 5 qualifications to enable people to access better jobs within these sectors. - Active barrier-removal to participation on Employment Academies – such as embedding childcare provision, travel and subsistence expenses etc. 	2,3	Employability and Skills	£450,000 (indicative spend pro rata, based on female engagement in Employment Academies)

Develop understanding of gender budgeting and how it might be applied in BCC - for directors, finance officers and Belfast Agenda team	2	HR Finance CMT	£1000
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CITY			
to ensure that the needs of women across the city are identified and used to influence and impact upon the regeneration of the city including social infrastructure design and community facilities provision			
As part of the ongoing baseline audit of all council assets, determine if our assets meet the needs of all genders and that gender needs are considered as part of the development of any new council asset.	2, 3	Property and Projects Department C&NS Place & Economy Dept	Staff resources Potential cost if additional works required
Working in partnership Queen's University Belfast and other stakeholders, we will design and develop interventions that help to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in public spaces in Belfast and help change attitudes, behaviours and social and cultural norms. Included in this initiative is data collection on users, development of gender inclusive engagement practices and embedding co-design at the earliest stages. We will work together to host workshops with women girls and other stakeholders to 'sense check' the proposed policies and interventions and develop an action plan with stakeholders to end VAWG in public spaces in Belfast.	2	Property and Projects Department C&NS Place & Economy Dept	Externally funded project
Work with city partners to retain Onus Safe City status by funding training and awareness raising across the city.	2,3	HR CNS ONUS and other external partners	£3,000 + PCSP resource
Work with the TEO to implement The Period Products (Free Provision) Act 2022	2,3	Facilities	TEO funded
Enhance our engagement process to ensure that women and girls are given the opportunity to participate in the consultation on capital projects from the earliest stage to ensure better outcomes.	Ongoing	Property and Projects Department	Staff resources

Carry out research into developing a set of guidelines with women and girls in mind in relation to the design of capital projects.	2,3	Property and Projects Department	Staff resources
Total draft plan for Year 2			£35,500

Appendix A - Gender Inequality in N Ireland 2024

1. Women's Employment, Austerity, Poverty and the Gender Pay Gap

- In the most recent NISRA statistical bulletin, which covers 2020-21, statistics show that women are more than 2.5 times less likely to be **self-employed than men**. Women are also more likely to be **part-time workers** than men and this gap is particularly pronounced when they are parents, with 60% of mothers and 94% of fathers working full time. This is further reflected in the **relative earnings and career progression** of women; fewer women than men received earnings above the Real Living Wage (by 5 percentage points) and women also reported lower levels of opportunities for career progression (by 9pps).ⁱ This gap is due in part to women accounting for three quarters of all part-time workers, as part-time work tends to be low paid.ⁱⁱ
- A NISRA survey of employee earnings in Northern Ireland in 2022 reported that “The **gender pay gap** for all employees (regardless of working pattern) in NI is in favour of males. Median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for females (£12.82) was 4% below those for males (£13.99).ⁱⁱⁱ
- The majority of complaints of discrimination received by the Equality Commission NI relate to **sex discrimination**; with many relating to **pregnancy or maternity**. Complaints to the Commission of **sexual harassment in the workplace** have risen significantly from an average of 14% of complaints per year to 22% in 2022.^{iv}
- Women are 7 times as likely to be **economically inactive due to looking after the home or family**. This rises to 10 times more likely when comparing women and men in their 30s.^v 81% of carers in Northern Ireland are women.^{vi}
- Only **7%** of disabled people are in **employment** and **disabled** women earn **22.1% less** than able-bodied men, and 11.8% less than disabled men^{vii}. Covid significantly worsened this data, with a disproportionate number of disabled women being furloughed or laid off and **58% of disabled mothers reported struggling to make ends meet** (compared to 38% of non-disabled mothers).^{viii}
- Women have **70%** chance of providing **care** in their adult life; compared to 60% for men. By the time they are 46, **half of all women** have been a carer (11 years before men)^{ix x}

- In 2020 it was estimated that **austerity** since 2010 will have cost **women** a total of **£79bn**, against £13bn for men. It showed that, by 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts, compared with **86% for women**^{xi}. While these statistics have not yet been updated, they are indicative of the state of affairs before the impact of Covid and the cost of living crisis were factored in.
- The group with the highest poverty throughout and worst impacted by welfare reform and the Cost of Living Crisis have been **lone parents**^{xii} in Northern Ireland; of which **93% are women**^{xiii} an increase since 2020.
- Hunger and **foodbank** use disproportionately impacts women, as women are twice as likely to be food insecure as men and **lone parent households account for 18% of referrals to food banks**, as opposed to 8% of the population as a whole^{xiv}.
- **Disabled single mothers** are losing the most from these tax and benefit changes since 2010. By 2021, they had **lost 21%** of their net **income** if they did not have a disabled child and 32% if they did have a disabled child too. 1/3 of this loss is due to **Universal Credit**^{xv}.
- Women are more likely to need access to **Discretionary Support grants** and accounted for 67% of recipients; this is going to be harder to access due to budget cuts in the year 2023-24 and will have a knock-on effect on poverty.^{xvi}
- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK without a government-funded **Childcare** Provision. **Lone parents** and families with a **disabled child** are less likely to be able to afford formal childcare and face further barriers to employment.^{xvii}
- **Rural** women suffer further due to the centralisation of services and access poverty; only **1.3%** of government funding for women's groups goes towards rural women, a decrease of 10% from 2006.^{xviii}

2. Violence Against Women & Girls

- From Jan 2023 – Dec 2023 there were 33, 071^{xix} recorded **domestic abuse incidents** in Northern Ireland. This represents an increase on the previous 12 months of 0.4 % (or 144 incidents).
- From Jan 2023 – Dec 2023 there were 20, 691^{xx} recorded **domestic abuse crimes** recorded in Northern Ireland. This represents a decrease on the previous 12 months of 7.1 % (or 1,590 incidents).
- In 2022/2023 there were 8^{xxi} domestic abuse related homicides in Northern Ireland.
- In 2022/23 **crimes with a domestic abuse motivation** represented 20%^{xxii} of all recorded crime.

To contextualise these figures, statistical trends for domestic violence have been on an upwards trajectory since 2004. For example, domestic abuse crimes were more than two and a quarter times higher in 2022/23 than in 2004/05.

- From Jan 2023 – Dec 2023 there were 4,184^{xxiii} **recorded sexual offences** in Northern Ireland. Of this total number of sexual offences, 1,186^{xxiv} were **reports of rape**.
- From Jan 2023 – Dec 2023 there were 4,153 **recorded offences of stalking and harassment in Northern Ireland**. The new offences below above have contributed to a rise in stalking and harassment statistics.

- **New offences:** The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceeding Act (Northern Ireland 2001) was amended to **include coercive and controlling behaviour**, emotional and economic abuse. These offences are recorded as part of the stalking and harassment classification and recording began in Feb 2022. The Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 created offences to provide protection from stalking and threatening behaviour. These offences are recorded as part of the stalking and harassment classification and recording began in April 2022.

3. *Politics, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Decision-Making*

- In NI politics, women represent **45% of Lord Mayors^{xxv}** in the year 2023-24, **31% of Local Councillors^{xxvi}**, **37% of MLAs^{xxvii}** and just **22% of MPs**.
- In Public Appointments, the most recent statistics from 2022 show that women represent **23% of Chairs** and **38% of all Public Appointments** – a lower figure than when these statistics were last gathered.^{xxviii}
- Following the appointment of Lady Chief Justice Siobhán Keegan, women represent **100% of Lady Chief Justice** but **0% of Lord Justices of Appeal**, just **9% of High Court Judges** and **26% of County Court Judges**.^{xxix} Aside from the highest position being held by a woman, all of these statistics are remarkably lower than when this data was last gathered.
- In the PSNI, **zero women** hold the position of **Chief or Deputy Chief Constable** and only **20% are Assistant Chief Constables^{xxx}**. Women represent **32% of police officers** and **57% of all PSNI staff^{xxxi}**.
- In the Civil Service, although a woman is now the head of the NI Civil Service women represent **11% of Permanent Secretaries; 35% of Senior Civil Servants** and **50% of the total NICS workforce**.^{xxxii}
- In the Education Sector, women represent **25% of University Chancellors** or Pro/Deputy Vice Chancellors, **33.33% of FE College Principals** and **61% of School Principals**; despite **77% of all teachers** being women^{xxxiii}.
- In the Health and Social Care Sector, women make up **78% of all staff** as of 2023^{xxxiv} but just **40% of Trust Chairs** and **80% of Trust CEOs** which represents a considerable improvement on the last time this data was gathered.
- In Local Government, women are just **27% of Council CEOs** although, in the most recently available statistics, they represent **42% of the workforce^{xxxv}**.

4. *Equality*

Given the statistics outlined above, it is necessary that these hard-fought rights currently at risk are protected *and* enhanced. Some of the rights achieved through EU membership include **equality** between men and women^{xxxvi}, the right to **equal pay** for equal work^{xxxvii}, protection against **discrimination** on the ground of **pregnancy** and **maternity^{xxxix}**, creating measures to provide specific advantages to the **underrepresented gender^{xl}**, prohibition of discriminations on the **grounds of sex^{xli}** and the introduction of **paid holidays^{xlii}**.

Thankfully, **Article 2 of the Windsor Framework** is set up to ensure no diminution of rights, and a **Dedicated Mechanism Unit** has been set up jointly by the

Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission to monitor this. Despite this, the erosion and potential further erosion of rights across the UK does put rights at risk everywhere in the UK and the fears and **concerns of women in Northern Ireland around the outworkings of Brexit** are catalogued in a recent report by the Equality Commission^{xliii}.

Further rights at risk include:

- The **removal** of the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** from all applications in UK law and judiciary systems. Whilst the UK government would still be required to abide by the **European Convention of Human Rights** (ECHR), the removal of the EU Charter is deeply worrying as it has a much broader level of protection for human rights^{xliv}.
- Existing EU case law through the **Court of Justice of the European Union** can now be **overturned** in future cases in UK courts and a department from current jurisprudence may lead to a divergence on human rights standards on either side of the border in NI.
- The EU human rights framework is much more robust than the **UK Human Rights Act**, however, the **removal** of both the **Human Rights Act** and the **EU Charter** will make it much more difficult for people to access their rights through the courts, as the **ECHR** is nowhere near as broad or strong as a standalone human rights framework.
- The **Retained EU Law Bill** has already impacted the rights of many in Britain and there have been recent discussions by politicians including the Prime Minister about the possibility of leaving the **European Convention on Human Rights**. This would have a devastating impact on all citizens in the UK, not least because it is the basis upon which the **Belfast/Good Friday Agreement** is built.

In the context of the devolved NI Assembly which has not been operational during 5 of the last 7 years and which has still not adopted a Programme for Government for this term following its return, 'New Decade, New Approach'^{xlv} (NDNA) represents the most recent plan of action for the Assembly. In that document, there are zero references to women throughout the entire agreement. Further rights that need to be addressed through the Northern Ireland Assembly include:

- Further legislation to implement all Gillen Review recommendations;
- Tackling gender pay gaps and discrimination;
- Implementing the Social Inclusion Strategies that are currently in draft form, including the Gender Equality Strategy;
- Scrapping the Universal Credit Two-Child Limit;
- Addressing the historic underinvestment in rural women;
- Rectifying the under-representation of women in politics, public life and decision-making;
- Tackling the rise of misogyny as a hate crime, particularly towards trans women, BME women and disabled women;
- Improving RSE and tackling rape culture;
- Updating and unifying Equality Legislation;
- Fully supporting and financing perinatal mental health services and much more.

A full list of Women's Policy Group NI recommendations to each Government Department is [available on WRDA's website](#).

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- ⁱ NISRA, Women in Northern Ireland, 2022, <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/news/women-in-northern-ireland-2020-2021>
- ⁱⁱ TUC, Jobs & Recovery Monitor: Gender and Pay, 2023, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/jobs-and-recovery-monitor-gender-and-pay>
- ⁱⁱⁱ NISRA, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2023, <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/annual-survey-hours-and-earnings>
- ^{iv} Equality Commission NI, Making Women Welcome at Work, 2023, <https://www.equalityni.org/Footer-Links/News/Employers-Service-Providers/VFTC-%E2%80%93-Making-Women-Welcome-at-Work>
- ^v TUC, Jobs & Recovery Monitor, Gender & Pay, 2023 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/jobs-and-recovery-monitor-gender-and-pay>
- ^{vi} Carers NI, State of Caring 2023, <https://www.carersuk.org/media/yfwjwk5g/the-impact-of-caring-on-health-in-northern-ireland.pdf>
- ^{vii} UK Women's Budget Group, (2018), 'Disabled Women and Austerity', <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-women-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>
- ^{viii} UK Women's Budget Group (2021), Disabled Mother's 3 Times More Likely to have Lost Work During the Pandemic, <https://wbg.org.uk/media/disabled-mothers-three-times-more-likely-to-have-lost-work-during-the-pandemic/>
- ^{ix} Carers UK (2019), 'Will I care? The likelihood of being a carer in adult life': http://www.carersuk.org/images/News_campaigns/CarersRightsDay_Nov19_FINAL.pdf
- ^x Carers NI and Women's Regional Consortium, 2024, Career or Care? <https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Career-or-care-Women-unpaid-caring-and-employment-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf> p.7
- ^{xi} Keen, R., Cracknell, R. (2017), 'Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes', Commons Briefing Papers SN06758, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>
- ^{xii} UK Women's Budget Group, (2016), 'A cumulative gender impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies', https://wbg.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/11/De_HenauReed_WBG_GIAtaxben_briefing_2016_03_06.pdf
- ^{xiii} Women's Regional Consortium, Women & The Cost of Living Crisis, 2023, <https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Womens-Experiences-of-the-Cost-of-Living-Crisis-in-NI-2.pdf> p.30
- ^{xiv} The Trussel Trust, 2022, [https://www.trusselltrust.org/2021/05/13/people-forced-to-use-food-banks-at-the-start-of-the-pandemic-faced-extreme-poverty/#:~:text=And%20single%2Dparent%20families%20are,the%20general%20population%20\(8%25\).](https://www.trusselltrust.org/2021/05/13/people-forced-to-use-food-banks-at-the-start-of-the-pandemic-faced-extreme-poverty/#:~:text=And%20single%2Dparent%20families%20are,the%20general%20population%20(8%25).)
- ^{xv} UK Women's Budget Group, (2018), 'Disabled Women and Austerity', <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-women-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>
- ^{xvi} Department for Communities, Changes to the Discretionary Support Scheme, 2023 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/communities/dfc-changes-to-the-discretionary-support-scheme-eqia.pdf>
- ^{xvii} Employers for Childcare, Northern Ireland Childcare Survey, 2023, <https://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/northern-ireland-childcare-survey-2023/>

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- xviii NI Rural Women's Network, 15 Years of NIRWN, 2021, <https://www.nirwn.org/15yearsofnirwn/>
- xix Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2024) 'Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland' <https://www.psnr.police.uk/system/files/2024-02/1121995173/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2031st%20December%202023.pdf>
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- xxi Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2023) 'Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: 2004/05 to 2022/23' <https://www.psnr.police.uk/system/files/2023-11/1764853713/Domestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202022-23.pdf>
- xxii Ibid.
- xxiii Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2024) 'Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Update to 31st Dec 2023', p7 <https://www.psnr.police.uk/system/files/2024-01/1914095467/Police%20Recorded%20Crime%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2031st%20December%202023.pdf>
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- xxxi PSNI, Workplace Composition Statistics, 2024 <https://www.psnr.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/our-publication-scheme/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/workforce>
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- xxxiii Department of Education, Teacher Workforce Statistics Bulletin 2022/23 <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/DEStatistics/Teacher-Workforce-Statistics-Bulletin-202223.html>
- xxxiv Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Workforce Census 2023 <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hscwc-march-23.pdf>
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- xxxvi The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- xxxvii Article 119 Treaty establishing the European Economic Community
- xxxix Ibid2.
- xl Ibid24.
- xli Ibid 24 (Article 21)
- xlii According to the NIRWN, Rural Voices Report (2018, p.30): 'Many of the two million workers who had no paid holiday before the Working Time Directive, were part-time working women': <https://www.nirwn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NIRWN-Rural-Voices-Research-Report-March-2018.pdf>
- xliii Equality Commission NI, 2024 The Impact of Brexit on Women [https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/DMU/Brexit-Impact-on-Women\(Feb2024\).pdf](https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/DMU/Brexit-Impact-on-Women(Feb2024).pdf)

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^{xlv} NIA (2020), 'New Decade, New Approach', <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2020/01/new-decade-new-approach.pdf>

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