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## **Brexit risks “turning the clock back on gender equality”**

### **New report reveals damaging economic impact of Brexit on women**

The first independent report looking at the economic impact of Brexit on women has today been published by the Women’s Budget Group and the Fawcett Society. The report shows the economic impact of Brexit will hit women hard, leading to lost jobs, cuts to services and a squeeze on family budgets.

Economists predict UK GDP will be between 1.5% and 3.5% lower if we stay in the Single Market and Customs Union and up to 9.5% lower as a result of a no-deal ‘hard Brexit’. This new report examines for the first time what this fall in GDP will mean for women. It warns that:

- Sectors such as clothing and textiles which have a majority female workforce are particularly vulnerable to increased trade barriers.
- Despite promises of additional money for the NHS post-Brexit, a downturn in GDP is likely to result in further cuts to government spending on services. Women, who are more likely to work in the public sector and more likely to need public services, will be the worst affected.
- Increased tariffs and a fall in the value of the pound are likely to lead to increased food prices, which will hit the poorest families hardest. Women are more likely to be poor and more likely to manage budgets in poor households.
- A post-Brexit economic crisis could lead to the rolling back of workplace rights, including parental leave, equal treatment and rights for part time workers on which women rely in the name of increased ‘flexibility’ and ‘competitiveness’.

The report also warns that a poor deal with the EU would put the UK in a weaker position to resist pressure from other countries for trade deals that would damage women’s rights at work, adversely impact them as consumers or undermining the quality of public services including:

- Provisions in trade deals that give overseas companies the power to sue the UK government if it took action that would damage the profitability of those companies such as increasing the National Living Wage or bringing services that have been privatised back in house.
- Opening up of the NHS and other public services to overseas competition.
- Removal of consumer rights preventing the import of chlorine washed chicken or hormone fed beef.

Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director of the Women’s Budget Group said:

“There is little doubt that Brexit will have a damaging impact on the UK economy, with a ‘hard Brexit’, likely to be the most damaging. For many women, particularly the poorest, this could mean job losses, cuts to services, squeezed family budgets and reduced legal protections. Far from taking back control, a bad deal with the EU will make us vulnerable to demands from larger countries to reduce consumer rights and regulations protecting public services.”

Sam Smethers, CEO of the Fawcett Society said:

“This report clearly shows we risk turning the clock back on gender equality as a result of Brexit. In the context of any economic downturn the argument will be made that sacrificing employment

rights and protections is justifiable to make some workers more employable. Those vulnerable workers will overwhelmingly be women, so we cannot allow that to happen. That is why the Government must amend the EU Withdrawal Bill to protect these rights from being weakened post-Brexit.”

“It is the most disadvantaged women who are most at risk from Brexit. But will they be the ones the UK negotiating team are thinking about? I doubt it.”

- ENDS -

**For further information, interviews or images please contact**

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**Notes to editors:**

**Fawcett Society**

The [Fawcett Society](#) is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential; creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all.

We publish compelling research to educate, inform and lead the debate; we bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical solutions; we work with employers and in schools and we campaign with women and men to make change happen.

**Women's Budget Group**

The Women's Budget Group is at the forefront of scrutinising government policy from a gender perspective. We are a network of leading feminist economists, researchers, policy experts and campaigners committed to achieving a more gender equal future. We have worked towards this since 1989.

**Face Her Future**

In response to the UK's decision to leave the EU, the Fawcett Society launched the [#FaceHerFuture](#) campaign, which brought together over 20 women's, girl's, and equalities organisations, recognising the outcome of the referendum as a call to action to defend the rights of women and girls and an opportunity to set a positive agenda for progress.

The report published today is published separately by two #FaceHerFuture member organisations. Find out more about the project as a whole at <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/faceherfuture>