

**Submission to the Labour National Policy Forum Consultation:
Brexit**

WBG believes that Brexit will be damaging to the UK and that women will be negatively impacted as workers, consumers and users of public services.

We [support calls for a Citizens' Assembly](#) to come up with new proposals for a way forward on Brexit. This assembly should take evidence from women's civil society groups and consider the gender and other equality impact of different proposals. Following the Citizens' Assembly, it may be necessary to hold a second referendum. In such a referendum WBG would support remain..

1. How should Labour respond to the Prime Minister's deal in Parliament?

WBG is opposed to both the Government's proposed deal and a no deal Brexit.

Britain's exit from the European Union will have a negative impact on the UK economy, whatever the form of the final deal, with a 'hard' Brexit having the most [serious impact](#). IPPR analysis¹ of the Prime Minister's deal says ongoing uncertainty will result in economic downturn due to rising inflation, decreased investment and confidence. Women will be affected differently from men due to women's different positioning in the economy and labour market and, their greater responsibility for unpaid care work. The Prime Minister's deal will have an adverse effect on sectors where women are overrepresented including the public sector and textiles manufacturing.

If the current government responds to this downturn as the Coalition and Conservative Government did to the 2008 financial crisis this will have a serious impact on women. Women – particularly the poorest women, BAME women and disabled women – and violence against women and girls (VAWG) services cannot take any more cuts having borne the brunt of 86% of cuts since 2010. A spiralling economy is unlikely to provide the reinvestment needed to repair the damage done since 2010.

Of particular concern is the care sector where 1 in 8² people over 65 already have unmet needs. An impending end to Freedom of Movement has already seen thousands of nurses and carers from the European Economic Area return home. Alongside with debilitating budget cuts, the care sector faces a severe staff shortage and it is women's unpaid labour that will be forced to plug this gap.

In addition a poor trade deal with the EU would put the UK in a weaker position to resist pressure from countries which are likely to require greater access for their companies to

¹ IPPR (November 2018) 'The Brexit Withdrawal Agreement: a first analysis' (<https://bit.ly/2Tk9Lds>)

² Age UK (9 July 2018) 'New analysis shows number of older people with unmet care needs soars to record high' (<https://bit.ly/2TXWTto>)

tender to deliver public services in the UK as the price of a trade deal. Trade deals with non-EU countries could include provisions that would give overseas companies the power to sue the UK government if it took action that would damage the profitability of these companies such as increasing the National Living Wage or bringing services that have been privatised back 'in house'.

In contrast to this crisis the European Union is making plans to implement 5 days of statutory paid carers leave in 2019³. Being a member of the European Union has undoubtedly benefited women. It is the European Union that has encouraged the United Kingdom to implement:

- equal pay for work of equal value,
- part time working rights for parents,
- shared parental leave,
- paid holidays and,
- the rights to equal treatment and anti-discrimination.

In fact, by leaving the European Union we are losing the only standalone clause that legislates against anti-discrimination in the workplace, enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Today, European Courts provide supranational protection to defend and uphold these important rights.

There is concern that the negotiated Withdrawal Agreement and legally non-binding Political Declaration do not once mention women or gender equality and therefore do not contain sufficient guarantee that the Equalities Act will be protected in post-Brexit Britain. A no deal scenario would be even worse with the economic impact drastically increased and, the possibility of a 'race to the bottom' to secure global trade deals at the expense of workers and women.

2. What steps can the Party take to continue to follow and build on the Brexit motion passed at Labour Conference?

We applaud the emphasis placed on workers' rights in two of Labour six tests. However, we continue to think that protection of these rights will be harder to achieve outside the European Union. The evidence available currently leads us to think that staying in the EU would be the best option to protect the rights of both women and men as workers, consumers and users of public services.

Brexit has also highlighted the continued exclusion of women from decision making processes. Women's voices were largely absent from media debates in the run up to the referendum.⁴ The UK's Brexit negotiating team has been dominated by white men⁵ and the political and media debates have paid little attention to the significant gender impact of Brexit or the impact on other equality groups.

³ European Commission (2019) 'Work Life Balance' (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>)

⁴<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/05/25/stop-relegating-womens-views-on-brexit-to-the-gender-silo/>

⁵https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/brexit-david-davis-women-gender_uk_5947b8c5e4b0f15cd5bca4aa

There is an urgent need to extend the negotiation period and to develop deliberative mechanisms to involve a wider range of voices, and in particular the voices of women and other marginalised groups.

We [support calls for a Citizens' Assembly](#) to come up with new proposals for a way forward. This assembly should take evidence from women's civil society groups and consider the gender and other equality impact of different proposals.

Following the Citizens' Assembly, it may be necessary to hold a second referendum. WBG believes that this process of deliberation, followed by provision for a referendum should form the basis of the Labour manifesto for the European Elections.

How can we ensure a strong future relationship with Europe that protects jobs, rights and the economy?

Although the Women's Budget Group believes British women are better off in the Union, we would also like to see improvement and reform at the European level to improve protection for human rights, including workers rights and for the environment. We suggest that the European Council should go further in collecting, keeping and publicising gender and other equality statistics relating to the outcomes of all EU projects and funding programmes. We urge Labour to encourage Europe to assess the gendered impact of all structural and social funded projects.