

Towards an Economy which Works for Women

General Election 2019

*Recommendations to achieve a gender
equal economy in the general election
2019 - UK Women's Budget Group*
October 2019

This election is an opportunity for all political parties and candidates to commit to a more gender-equal future for all women in the UK. This is the Women's Budget Group's detailed set of recommendations. The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is a network of academics, women's civil society organisations and trade unionists who analyse the impact of government policy on gender equality and promote alternative policies to secure a more gender equal future. Following these recommendations would help reduce gender inequalities for all women including those further marginalised by race, ethnicity, class, ability and other identities:

Summary

The next government should commit to building public services which work for women by:

- Including funding for public services within its definition of investment. Our health, care and education systems make up our social infrastructure which, like physical infrastructure, require spending now for social and/or economic benefits in the future. Spending on services that lead to long term improvements in people's health, education and well-being are therefore investments in our social infrastructure.
- Ensuring that all reforms to locally and centrally funded services undergo comprehensive equality impact assessments to ensure they do not harm to women and other groups.
- Restoring central government funding to local government to a level which enables councils to meet their statutory obligations and provide the preventative, non-statutory services which are vital to the wellbeing of women, children and those in need of care.
- Ending outsourcing and redundancies in local authorities and equip local government to return local services 'in house' creating worthwhile jobs and opportunities.

The next government should commit to a health and social care system which works for those who need it and those who do unpaid and paid work in it by:

- Recognising that spending on health and social care is an investment in social infrastructure, whose importance to society and return on investment should be evaluated like that of physical infrastructure.
- Establishing a National Care Service that provides care as well as provision for independent living for disabled people; free at the point of delivery and integrated with the NHS and funded at the national level to avoid the entrenchment of regional inequalities.
- Giving priority to investment in public health and community-based care for local governments.
- Investing in substantial and longstanding training, career development and pay progression for both health and social care workers so they have equal standing and a regulatory body.

The next government should promote sharing of care between women and men by:

- Investing in free universal childcare for all children
- Ensuring childcare workers have decent pay, training and a career structure
- Reforming parental leave so that each partner gets a dedicated period of leave on a non-transferable individual basis. Leave should be paid at an increased statutory rate for *all* parents including precarious workers

The next government should reform the education system by:

- Ending cuts to education and reinvest in all schools and further education institutions.
- Considering cuts to education as regressive in redistributing women's unpaid care and addressing the gender pay gap because increased workloads fall disproportionately on women who make up the majority of teachers and carers of school-age children.

- Reviewing the pay of teachers, along with other public sector workers, to ensure it rises in line with inflation and compensates for losses since 2010.
- Ensuring all forms of state education are properly funded.
- Tackling occupational segregation and, in turn, unequal pay in apprenticeships and training to ensure that this investment does not reproduce the gender division of labour.

The next government should reform the housing system to work for women and their families by:

- Investing in social housing to ensure an effective housing safety net.
- Updating local housing allowance rates to reflect real rents and updated in line with inflation every year.
- Ensuring local authorities and housing associations recognise links between homelessness and domestic abuse for women and provide women-only accommodation including refuges, homelessness shelters and supported accommodation.
- End, 'vulnerability testing' for domestic abuse victims/survivors.

The next government should improve public transport by:

- Reinvesting in public transport, including local bus services on which women are more likely to rely on as part of reinvesting in local government.
- Ending cuts to fuel duty to create a more equitable and green tax system which does not discriminate against women and helps fight the climate emergency.

The next government should reform the justice system so that it works for women by:

- Reversing funding cuts to legal aid and reviewing its eligibility requirements and regulations.
- Significantly reducing the number of short-term custodial sentences for women by opening women's community centres delivering holistic, women-centred, services including support for the major drivers of women's offending: mental health, housing, employment, substance abuse, and domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
- Take all measures necessary to prevent women's offending including by tackling violence against women and girls and ensuring all victims'/survivors' have the support they need.

The next government should address the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG) by:

- Providing needs-based and sustainable funding for all victims'/survivors' services and preventative interventions that ensure all women and girls have the support they need, including ringfenced funds for BAME and migrant-specific services.
- Equipping all public services (police, hospital, job centres etc.) to ensure all frontline staff make trained enquiries about VAWG, responding appropriately to take into account trauma and can provide pathways to support.
- Reversing cuts to central local government funding for VAWG and other public services needed by women and, as explained below, halt the roll out of Universal Credit unless the ways in which it can facilitate financial abuse are tackled.
- Introducing a Domestic Abuse Bill which ratifies the Istanbul Convention, ensuring there is 1 shelter placed per 10,000 inhabitant, and applies to all women including migrant women and Northern Irish women. Abolishing the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy.
- Introducing well-designed Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in all schools as a crucial preventative measure.

The next government should reform the social security system by:

- Pausing the roll out of Universal Credit for a comprehensive review of its impact and make necessary changes to build a system that ensures individual incomes, is less reliant on conditionality and means testing and is respectful rather than punitive.

In the short-term government should:

- Abolish the two-child limit
- Improve the gains to employment for second earners, especially those with childcare costs, the majority of whom are women
- End the five-week wait
- Introduce separate payments by default to reduce the risk of financial abuse
- Address punitive sanctions and conditionality
- Assess the impact of all future reforms on women and other equality groups

The next government should ensure sustainable funding for social protection by:

- Calculating the net costs of public services and social security systems in the longer run by taking account of the extent to which people are enabled to enter the labour market, and, through becoming healthier and more productive, better able to contribute to and benefit from society.
- Not raising tax thresholds and introducing a more progressive system of income tax, in which all income, including capital gains, is taxed in the same way.
- Reversing planned decreases to corporation taxes which fuel a race to the bottom, overwhelmingly benefit men and take away from public revenue.
- Considering introducing taxes on wealth and financial transactions.
- Increasing fuel duty, and possibly other green taxes, while giving financial support to those who have exceptionally high costs in reducing their environmental footprint.
- Reviewing the tax and social protection systems *together*.
- Reducing tax allowances to reduce the scope for tax avoidance and clamping down on tax evasion.

The next government should govern with mind to gender equality by:

- Taking action on equal pay at levels of the economy by making action plans mandatory for larger organisations as well as extending reporting to smaller organisations, requiring intersectional data to be collected and making it easier to bring a case of unequal pay by reinstating legal aid.
- Working holistically across departments to avoid short-term decision to make cuts in one department which produce need for emergency intervention in another.
- Carrying out and publishing comprehensive equality impact assessments of all policy which take account of the impact across a life course, on individuals as well as households and take a cumulative and intersectional approach.

The next government can work towards a trade system which works for all women by:

- Publishing a comprehensive equality impact assessment of Brexit.
- Averting 'no deal' at all costs and, putting in place measures to stop women and marginalised groups absorbing the impact of Brexit.
- Analysing the gendered impact of all future trade agreements.
- Ensuring social protections cannot be rolled back under future trade deals.'
- Continue to commit to 0.7% of GDP on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA.)
- Reverse cuts to Department of International Development (DFID) and corporation tax to halt the 'race to the bottom.'

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	2
Introduction	6
A Genuine End to Austerity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Public Services: Invest in Social Infrastructure	7
Reinvestment in local government and an end to outsourcing.....	7
Health and social care	9
Adult social care	9
Health	10
Maternal health.....	11
Staffing the NHS	11
Public health.....	11
Mental Health	12
Childcare	13
Universal free childcare.....	13
Paid parental leave.....	13
Education	14
Housing	15
Transport.....	17
Legal aid and criminal justice reform	17
The Criminal Justice System (CJS)	18
Funding for the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector	18
Social security reform.....	19
Rethinking Universal Credit (UC)	20
Funding welfare reform and public service investment.....	22
Borrowing.....	22
Taxation	22
Better gender-equal governance	24
Taking action on equal pay.....	24
Cross-departmental planning	25
Equality Impact Assessments.....	25
Participatory governance	26
Brexit and international trade.....	26
Overseas development assistance	27
Conclusion.....	28

Introduction

WBG is an independent network of leading academic researchers, policy experts and campaigners who analyse the intersectional impact of economic policy on women and men. We produce robust analysis and aim to influence the people making policy. We also work to build the knowledge and confidence of others to talk about feminist economics by offering training and creating accessible resources. WBG is independent and not-for-profit.

This is our submission to all political parties in the UK for policies that will improve the lives of all women and girls - including those further marginalised by race, ethnicity, class, ability etc. – and, help move towards a more gender equal economy. This set of recommendations is evidence-led and builds on our library of reports¹ and previous election campaigns including: *Women and the 2019 Spending Review*,² *Plan F: a feminist economic strategy to stimulate social and economic recovery*³ and many discussions for our Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy: an 18 months exploration to promote alternative economic policies to achieve gender equality⁴.

Whatever happens with the UK's negotiations on leaving the European Union, this is a pivotal moment for the next government to mitigate the economic and social impact of Brexit and a decade of cuts. The UK population has been promised that austerity has come to an end. We call on all parties to commit to not only ending cuts to public services and social security but investing in our social infrastructure to reverse the damaging impact of ten years of austerity.

A Genuine End to Austerity

After nearly a decade of chronic underfunding, our public services are in crisis. An increasingly penurious social security system is failing the most vulnerable in society, and severe cuts to local council funding and funding for other public services have led to the steady deterioration of our public services such as health, education and care. These public services and our social security system make up what we call our social infrastructure, a foundation upon which the prosperity of our nation depends. Investment in social infrastructure is as important, if not more so, especially for women, as investment in our physical infrastructure of roads, railways and town centres.

Repairing and restoring our social infrastructure should be an urgent priority for the next government. Women have been disproportionately impacted by cuts to social security and public spending, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) women and disabled women hardest hit, while men have benefited from tax cuts.⁵ This is the result of structural inequalities which mean women – particularly BAME women - earn less, own less and have more responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work.⁶ Therefore, in order to tackle the gross inequalities in the UK, more than just an end to the cuts is needed. For those already impoverished by austerity, maintaining the current levels of public spending for the next few years certainly won't feel much like the end of austerity.

Ending the cuts tomorrow would still leave day-to-day spending levels 8% lower than in 2009/10¹. The funds announced by the government in the 2019 spending review do not make up for a decade of austerity: a generous programme of investment to actively *reverse* the cuts and return spending to pre-2010 levels is desperately needed. In many cases, (for example social care), spending will need to be higher than pre-2010 levels, when it was already inadequate. Business-as-usual policies will not do; instead, a significant public investment boost could have positive effects on economic growth and debt reduction.⁷

Public Services: Invest in Social Infrastructure

WBG would like to see the next government take a broader approach to infrastructure to include social infrastructure. Alongside transport and telecommunications, investment in social infrastructure builds the social and human capabilities that are just as important to future productivity. Like roads and the internet, for example, high quality childcare helps parents get to their jobs and use their skills. It also improves children's educational outcomes and therefore national productivity in the long run.

The next Chancellor should invest in social infrastructure, particularly in the care sector, not only to address the urgent crisis in care but also boost employment. WBG research shows that investing 2% of GDP in the care sector would create 1.5 million jobs, double the 750,000 that would be created if the same amount was invested in construction⁸. The gender gap in employment would also be reduced by investment in care, but increased by investment in construction, unless mitigating measures to combat gender segregation in the industry were put in place.

Reinvestment in local government and an end to outsourcing

Local government is responsible for providing or funding many of the services and local infrastructure crucial to the daily lives and wellbeing of women and those they care for – children, families and vulnerable adults. Central government funding for local authorities fell by over 49% between 2010/11 and 2017/18⁹ with councils in the most deprived areas suffering the greatest cuts. Once local income from

¹ Institute for Financial Studies (2018) IFS Green Budget 2018 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/green-budget/2018>

Council Tax and Business Rates was factored in, this amounted to 28.6% real terms drop in spending power between 2010/11 and 2017/18¹⁰. The Local Government Association (LGA) has calculated that £16 billion will have been cut from councils' budgets between 2010 and 2020 – the equivalent of 60 pence from every pound of central government – taxpayer - funding.¹¹ The impact of these cuts since 2010 on housing, education, social care, childcare, transport, leisure and youth services has been destructive and debilitating for women – whether as primary users themselves, or as mothers and carers of elderly and disabled relatives.

In September 2019, the new Chancellor announced a funding package of £3.5 billion for local authorities. This was a welcome announcement, yet the investment does not go far enough to compensate for cuts made since 2010. This short-term approach to local government funding is not sustainable and the government has not commented on its previous plans to fund local government solely from locally raised revenue (council taxes and business rates.) The move to using business rates rather than central funding to supplement council tax receipts will make the funding system no longer redistributive between local authorities in the richest and poorest areas. We call on the Government to review this funding system in the next Local Government Finance Settlement in order to make it more redistributive and move local government funding away from reliance on business rates.

As well as affecting the ability of local councils to provide services and support to women, drastic funding reductions made since 2010 have had a negative impact on the ability of other public services and the voluntary sector to function effectively. For instance, due to cuts in central funding, social care now accounts for over 54% of all local authority spend – up from 45% in 2010/11.¹² Alongside significant reductions in numbers of people receiving social care, this means that substantial cuts have been made elsewhere that, according to the Local Government Association, are “threatening the future of other vital council services such as parks, leisure centres and libraries, which help to keep people well and from needing care and support and hospital treatment”.¹³ Underfunding is also undermining prevention and leading to more crisis interventions, which often prove costlier and less effective in the long term.

Cuts have also led to almost 1 million redundancies in councils across the UK and cuts to pay and conditions for the local government and school workforces since 2010.¹⁴ More than three quarters of council and school employees are women.¹⁵

For women's organisations, cuts in local authority spending have had two main consequences, namely reduced funding and increased demand for services: 75% of England's local authorities slashed their spending on domestic violence refuges – by nearly a quarter (24%) – between 2010 and 2017¹⁶. The lack of refuge spaces saw more than 1,000 vulnerable women and children turned away from centres over a six-month period in 2017.¹⁷ 17% of specialist women's refuges were forced to close between 2010 and 2014, and a third of all referrals to refuges are currently turned away. A consequence of the cuts has been the closure of many small local women's organisations, particularly organisations specialised in supporting BAME, migrant and disabled women.

Local government funding needs to be urgently restored to a level which enables councils to meet their statutory obligations as well as providing the preventative, non-statutory services which are vital to the wellbeing of women, children and those in need of care. Adequate funding should come from central government to ensure that local authorities in poorer areas, often with a higher need for services have the funding that they need.¹⁸

As well as an end to the cuts, outsourcing and redundancies must end at the local level. Research by the Association for Public Service Excellence has concluded that an increasing number of local authorities are

'insourcing' public services (bringing them back in house). The main reasons for this are to ensure service continuity, address issues of poor performance; build flexibility and integration into the service delivery chain; and provide more accountable local services.¹⁹ WBG believes that insourcing must be a central part of repairing local authorities. We recognise that many councils have lost the capacity and infrastructure to return all services to councils overnight and that capacity and organisational intelligence will need to be rebuilt in order to in-source but this is necessary part of rebuilding the capacity of local authorities.

The next government should commit to building public services which work for women by:

- Including funding for public services within its definition of investment. Our health, care and education systems make up our social infrastructure which, like physical infrastructure, require spending now for social and/or economic benefits in the future. Spending on services that lead to long term improvements in people's health, education and well-being are therefore investments in our social infrastructure.
- Ensuring that all reforms to locally and centrally funded services undergo comprehensive equality impact assessments to ensure they do not harm to women and other groups.
- Restoring central government funding to local government to a level which enables councils to meet their statutory obligations and provide the preventative, non-statutory services which are vital to the wellbeing of women, children and those in need of care.
- Ending outsourcing and redundancies in local authorities and equip local government to return local services 'in house' creating worthwhile jobs and opportunities.

Health and social care

Adult social care

Successive governments failing adequately to fund, or plan for, rising care needs has pushed adult social care to breaking point. Women bear the brunt of the care crisis, as the majority of both formal care workers and informal carers, and of those in need of care².

With adult social care primarily funded through local government, a reduction of £6bn in social care budgets between 2010 and 2017 has hit provision hard. The 2-3% extra council tax local authorities are now allowed to raise to pay for social care, even with the additional funding announced in the 2019 spring budget and spending round do not sufficiently compensate for this, and would return spending only to the woefully inadequate funding levels of 2015/16. To return to the higher although still critically underfunded levels of 2009/10, the social care budget would need to rise from £17.9bn to £27bn by 2021/22.²⁰ Further, funding social care through council tax or local business rates, as is planned for all local authority spending, will deepen regional inequalities as the local authorities with the greatest demand for services are those that are able to raise the least through local taxation.

Local authorities have sought to protect social care budgets and relieve funding pressures through local efficiency initiatives and cuts to other service budgets. However, as the scope for such savings reduces, local authorities are having to manage social care funding pressures by other means, including service reductions, shorter care packages, stricter eligibility criteria, and reducing the prices paid to providers. It is now estimated that approximately 1.4m people have unmet care needs²¹, an increase of 48% since 2010.

CASE STUDY: Social care in Manchester

² The Fawcett Society (2019) Value care work <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/value-care-work>

In 2016 Greater Manchester took control of its Social Care budget via a historic devolution deal with the government. They have used this devolved power to introduce a new 'whole system' approach which addresses the link between health and standard of living. As well as joining up health and social care services in the wider community and investing in the right specialist care, they are also taking steps to prevent illness by tackling factors like eating habits and exercise, through public health education and improving everyone's ability to earn a decent living. Evidence suggests their changes are already starting to make a positive difference.²²

Adult social care presents one of the most pressing issues that would benefit from cross-departmental planning. There are certainly lessons to be learned from Greater Manchester, particularly in relation to the delivery of joined up services. Although such initiatives could help to save money in the long-term, they will not substitute for the substantial increase in funding needed to have a care system that meets all social care needs.

We call on the government to redress the crisis in care by establishing a National Care Service that provides care, free at the point of delivery, has equal standing to the NHS and is properly funded.

We call on a new government to set up a National Care Service, with provision for Independent Living Services which can be tailored to individual requirements to facilitate disabled people's independence. This service ought to be fully integrated with the National Health Service and funded based on realistic assessment of need: The Kings Fund has estimated that additional funding for free personal care at the highest level of need would need to be £7 billion by 2020/21 and £14bn by 2030/31²³.

This would address the urgent care crisis, support the right to independent living²⁴ for disabled people and boost employment. WBG research shows that investing 2% of GDP into the health and social care sector would create 1.5 million jobs (compared to 750,000 in construction for the same amount)²⁵. A National Care Service would particularly benefit disabled people who are more likely to need care, more likely to be in poverty and currently, forced to pay for social care.

Health

Over the last decade health services have seen some of the lowest spending increases in their history. The pressure on NHS services affects women disproportionately: women made up 55.2% of hospital admissions in 2015-16, and 77% of the NHS workforce are women²⁶. In addition, women bear the brunt of the additional burdens of looking after family members who need ongoing or immediate health care, and of organising their access to an ever more complicated and automated NHS system. These spending cuts have had a number of profound effects, including on life expectancy. Recent data shows that more older people, particularly older women, are dying than expected given historical trends.²⁷

Cuts to health and social care services lead to increased costs for emergency interventions. There is evidence to indicate that the strain on acute hospital services can be reduced by strengthening community provision for health and social care.²⁸ The last 8 years have seen a steady growth in all areas of hospital activity. Emergency admissions have risen by 14% since 2008/09.²⁹ Evidence indicates that up to 50% of hospital beds are occupied by people who could be cared for in community settings.³⁰

Increased funding for public health must therefore be included in any long term plan for the NHS, especially if these services continue to be decentralised. This must go alongside increased funding to restore and develop local services including public transport, libraries, parks and other community leisure facilities which are so essential to the health and wellbeing of all - young and old.

Maternal health

Women have been affected by these cuts in several ways. For example, to give birth is the single largest reason for admission to NHS hospitals in England.³¹ Nearly half of England's maternity units had to close admissions at some point in 2017. Capacity and staffing issues were the most common reasons.³² The Royal College of Midwives reports a shortage of 3,600 in the profession.³³ The NHS desperately needs a long-term funding plan capable of maintaining high quality care and retaining high quality staff.

BAME women are harder hit by insufficient health care as a result of their specific health care needs.³⁴ For example, BAME and low-income women experience significantly worse maternal and child health outcomes, with black women five times more likely to die as a result of childbirth than white women³⁵. The reasons for this are complex but Maternity Action research has found that poverty and discrimination are key factors.³⁶ Additionally, the NHS 'overseas visitors' charging regime is deterring some vulnerable migrant women living in the UK from seeking vital maternity care, and leading to others being wrongly denied maternity care, or wrongly told that they must pay in advance.

This is part of the 'Hostile Environment' being cultivated in all public services including housing, employment, social security and the NHS. We call on the next government to commit to ensuring access to vital maternity care for migrant women living in the UK, by suspending NHS charging for maternity care.

Staffing the NHS

The government should ensure that funding for the NHS is sufficient to improve services including investing in training and adequate salaries for staff.

Making the NHS an attractive place to work, is crucial to improving and sustaining its ability to meet the nation's health needs. WBG has long advocated for *a substantially increased and sustained* investment in developing the skills and career paths of care workers. There are concerns that the number of staff vacancies could rise from the current level of around 100,000 NHS staff vacancies (1 in 11 NHS posts are unfilled) to 250,000 by 2030.³⁷ The highest number of vacancies, 38,000 are in nursing and midwifery, where women make up 89% of staff.³⁸

Staff shortages are due to both fewer numbers entering health services and staff leaving the NHS, with a worrying number leaving at younger ages. This is not helped by Brexit which has seen many European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who are nurses or midwives leaving the UK³⁹. There has been a failure to train sufficient numbers of staff with a large decline in the number starting nursing after the early 2000s.⁴⁰ A loss of bursaries led to an 18% drop in applicants for nursing places between 2016 and 2017, the biggest fall in nursing applicants on record.⁴¹ WBG calls on the government to reinstate nursing bursaries and ensure adequate training, conditions and progression for all NHS staff including nurses and midwives.

Public health

Women have also suffered from reductions in funding for public health services. Women dominate the public health workforce and women are more likely to use its services for post-natal support or care in old age. The 2013 transfer of responsibility for public health services to cash-strapped local councils was associated with major cuts and wide regional disparities in provision; public health funding is expected to be 14% lower by 2020 than in 2015.⁴² In 2015, responsibility for health visiting was also transferred to local

authorities. The Royal College of Nursing has expressed serious concern about cuts to local authority children's health services with falling numbers of health visitors and school nurses it has resulted in.⁴³ For example, the proportion of 6-8 week reviews completed for new born children in 2016, varied from only 57% in London to over 90% in the North East and in some areas is as low as 10%.⁴⁴

Public health and community-based services need immediate attention and additional resourcing from central funds if they are to meet the needs of women and their families.

Mental Health

Historically, mental health has been chronically underfunded, accounting for 28% of the burden of disease in the UK but only 13% of the total budget allocated to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).⁴⁵ According to a 2016 report by the National Audit Office only 25% of people needing mental health services have access to them.⁴⁶

The impact of inadequate funding for mental health includes widespread evidence of poor-quality care, bed occupancy above recommended levels, community services unable to provide sufficient levels of support to compensate for reductions in beds, and high numbers of out-of-area placements for patients that have a detrimental impact on patients and are associated with an increased risk of suicide⁴⁷.

Mental health is a gendered issue with suicide being the leading cause of death for men under the age of 45. At the same time, women are more likely than men to disclose a common mental health problem and three quarters of people who care for a person with a mental health problem are women.⁴⁸ There is also an emerging crisis in mental health of young women and girls. Girls are considerably more likely to self-harm than boys (37.4 per 10,000 compared with 12.3) and there has been a marked increase in self-harming in girls, particularly in girls aged 13-16 where the incidence of self-harming increased by 68% between 2011 and 2014⁴⁹.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are overstretched and underfunded, which can lead to long waiting-times and such high thresholds for treatment that even young people who are self-harming or suicidal can't always get the right support. Despite huge public concern about children's mental health, CAMHS currently accounts for just 0.7% of NHS spending, and around 6.4% of mental health spending.⁵⁰ In 2015, the Government committed to an extra £1.4 billion to CAMHS over five years, but there are concerns that this is not reaching frontline services,⁵¹ and simply isn't enough to tackle the crisis.⁵²

Any additional funding for health must lead to a new, improved funding settlement for CAMHS and mental health services more generally. But we also need greater transparency and accountability to ensure that all money for mental health services is spent where it's intended.

The next government should commit to a health and social care system which works for those who need it and those who work in it (paid and unpaid) by:

- Recognising that spending on health and social care is an investment in social infrastructure, whose importance to society and return on investment should be evaluated like that of physical infrastructure.
- Establishing a National Care Service that provides care as well as provision for independent living for disabled people; free at the point of delivery and integrated with the NHS and funded at the national level to avoid the entrenchment of regional inequalities.
- Giving priority to investment in public health and community-based care for local governments.

- Investing in substantial and longstanding training, career development and pay progression for both health and social care workers so they have equal standing and a regulatory body.

Childcare

Universal free childcare

The childcare system in the United Kingdom is failing to meet the needs of parents, children and the economy. Policy under successive governments has not addressed fundamental supply, affordability and quality issues in the childcare sector.

The increase in the free entitlement to 30 hours for working parents and the introduction of ‘tax-free’ childcare (both in 2017) does not help many children from the most disadvantaged households. These regressive changes, in which increased support is disproportionately to help better off households, will result in the widening of the achievement gap. Support for childcare costs in Universal Credit will only benefit those parents who find employment, and has failed to effectively mitigate the effects of increasing childcare costs and a lack of adequate supply.⁵³

Only half of local authorities in England provide enough childcare for parents who work full-time.⁵⁴ Lack of available childcare hampers women’s ability to participate in the labour market and establish financial independence. Additionally, lack of flexibility in available childcare limits its usefulness for those who work unsocial hours or need after school care.

Inadequate funding per free entitlement childcare place leaves childcare workers largely low paid and unable to gain qualifications, whilst their employers struggle to run a profitable business. Urgent action is required to overhaul the childcare system. This requires adequate funding for providers, as well as better training for the workforce and increased support for second earners.

WBG calls for the free universal provision of high-quality early education and childcare provided by well qualified staff for all pre-school children in the UK. Modelling of the employment and fiscal impacts of such a system shows that while the upfront investment is significant, almost all of it is recouped in a few years through higher tax revenue and reduced spending on means-tested benefits.⁵⁵ If implemented, this would have long-term benefits for children, their parents, and for the economy.

The next government should invest in childcare so that it works for women by:

- Providing free universal provision of high-quality early education and childcare.
- Ensuring all staff for pre-school childcare in the UK are well qualified and paid in line with other educational pay grades.

Paid parental leave

The birth of a first child is a pivotal moment in how couples organise responsibility for childcare throughout their lives and is foundational in (re)producing gender inequality in the home and, as a consequence, the workplace. UK maternity, paternity and parental leave policy design is based on an out-of-date model that does not encourage sharing of care between parents. Instead, a number of incentives and defaults preserve the status quo where women undertake the majority of unpaid care.

Coverage and eligibility for maternity and paternity leave is a key issue. Among new parents, 27%⁵⁶ of employed fathers who had a child in the last year were not eligible for paid paternity leave due to their

employment status, with 20% ineligible due to self-employment and 7% because they had been employed for under 6 months⁵⁷. For employed mothers, 16%⁵⁸ of those who had a child in the last year were not eligible for paid maternity leave, either because their earnings fell below the economic activity test earnings threshold (7%), because they were self-employed (7%) or did not meet the continuous employment condition (2%)⁵⁹.

With increasing casualisation of working arrangements, there are fears this number will rise and particularly impact some of the most vulnerable workers. Restrictions on entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), Paternity Pay and Shared Parental Pay limit productivity and cause hardship. By default, they should be day one rights.

Additionally, statutory maternity and paternity pay rates are, in relative terms, among the lowest in Europe. Since 2010, the value of Statutory Maternity Pay has fallen from 60% of the national living wage, to just 52%. The low rate of pay for paternity leave interacts with the gender pay gap, providing significant barriers to fathers using more leave, because families are more dependent on their higher wages. The Government should look to increase both paternity and maternity statutory payment rates to ensure families can afford to share caring responsibilities meaningfully.

The introduction of Shared Parental Leave is an important recognition that care should be shared equally between parents. However, the design of the system means take-up by men has been low. Introducing an individual, non-transferable fathers' or partners' only portion of leave which is not based on the eligibility status of the mother would widen coverage and, if combined with a period of higher, earnings-related, pay, would encourage greater take-up and enable more gender equal caring roles.

In line with the work of the Fawcett Society and Maternity Action⁶⁰, we call for the new government to significantly shift its approach and create a new parental leave system that genuinely works for families. We call on the new government to create a new system of parental leave with well-paid, individual, non-transferable entitlements for each parent, as well as a shared element, and incentives to encourage fathers to take leave. This needs to include a better-paid period for dads/partners, in addition to improved rates of Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance for mothers. Investing in better provision for new parents would establish better equality in the home, which in turn supports better equality in the workplace. It would create better outcomes for children and give families what they want.

The next government should promote sharing of care between women and men by:

- Investing in free universal childcare for all children
- Ensuring childcare workers have decent pay, training and a career structure
- Reforming parental leave so that each partner gets a dedicated period of leave on a non-transferable individual basis. Leave should be paid at an increased statutory rate for *all* parents including precarious workers

Education

Schools

Public spending on education has been in decline since 2010. There has been an 8% reduction in real terms in school spending between 2009-10 and 2017-18.⁶¹ Money out of this schools budget has been allocated to free schools, and independent schools continue to be subsidised through tax relief. The proliferation of selective schools raises concerns for social mobility, integration and gender equality.

Classroom teaching remains a low-paid area of women's employment. Cuts to primary, secondary and further education funding have worsened pay and affected women disproportionately as the majority of classroom teachers in primary and secondary schools⁶². Women earn less than men at all levels of education and are, proportionally, less likely to be in senior roles than men.⁶³ There is a gender pay gap in every grade, ranging from 7% among management staff to 3% among teaching staff⁶⁴.

The impact of the fall in real-terms school funding has been widespread and included cuts to special needs support in schools and after-school clubs. These have impacted disproportionately on mothers, who take on the majority of caring responsibilities for school-age children.

The government should make sure all state education is properly funded per pupil. It should review the funding of free schools and the tax status of independent schools. Additionally, the government should review the pay of teachers along with other public sector workers, to ensure it rises in line with inflation and compensates for previous losses in real earnings.

Further education and apprenticeships

Further education receives the least educational spending (10% less per pupil than for those in schools) and has seen a 12% cut in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20.⁶⁵

Apprenticeships are excluded from the spending freeze, and funding for these is set to double between 2015/16 and 2019/2019. It is intended that much of the additional funding will be provided from the apprenticeship levy on business, rather than by government directly. It remains to be seen whether this levy system can produce the necessary funding to expand apprenticeships as planned.

In 2016/17, women made up 54% of all students on apprenticeships⁶⁶. However, most women are on apprenticeships that lead to low-paid occupations. For example, 84% of those on health and social care apprenticeships in 2016/7 and 93.1% of those on childcare apprenticeship programmes were women. In comparison, men made up 97% of those on engineering apprenticeships and 78% of students on STEM degree apprenticeships.⁶⁷ The government must take action to ensure investment in apprenticeships is not deepening occupational segregation and, in turn, unequal pay.

The next government should reform the education system to work for women and girls by:

- Ending cuts to education and reinvest in all schools and further education institutions.
- Considering cuts to education as regressive in redistributing women's unpaid care and addressing the gender pay gap because increased workloads fall disproportionately on women who make up the majority of teachers and carers of school-age children.
- Reviewing the pay of teachers, along with other public sector workers, to ensure it rises in line with inflation and compensates for losses since 2010.
- Ensuring all forms of state education are properly funded.
- Tackling occupational segregation and, in turn, unequal pay in apprenticeships and training to ensure that this investment does not reproduce the gender division of labour.

Housing

Homes are central in guaranteeing people's wellbeing and allowing individuals and families to achieve their potential. Getting housing right is especially important for women as more of their lives centre around their homes and they are more at risk of domestic abuse in the home.

Domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness among women.⁶⁸ The interplay between domestic abuse and financial dependence also has a specific impact on women in relationships and on their housing situation. A woman's ability to live her life free of violence and abuse is greatly dependent on her capacity to afford a home of her own⁶⁹. Therefore, cuts to local authority budgets and VAWG services are increasing the precarity of women and could force them to stay in abusive households given the lack of alternative options. As elsewhere, reinvestment in local government and sustainable funding for VAWG services are drastically needed as part of a housing system which supports women.

For women specifically, there is a lack of women-only emergency accommodation, supported accommodation and council-provided temporary accommodation. Given the link between women's homelessness and violence perpetrated by men, it is crucial for their well-being and progress that women-only spaces are available for homeless women and women sleeping rough. Additionally, 'vulnerability testing' for domestic abuse victims/survivors must end to avoid reproducing trauma and limiting women's access to safe housing.⁷⁰

Housing costs are currently taking up a large proportion of household's incomes, particularly for people on lower incomes and private-sector renters. On average in England, median private rents absorb 43% of women's median earnings (compared to 28% of men's).⁷¹

Social housing is increasingly scarce, constituting just under 17% of all dwellings (from 31% four decades ago). Women are more likely to be dependent on social housing (60% of social tenants) due to lower incomes and more often being the sole carers of children.⁷² A lack of social housing not only adds to women's insecurity and homelessness, it also costs the public purse billions in housing benefit paid to private landlords.

Women find it harder to rent privately and to own their own homes and this is reflected in homelessness statistics: two-thirds of statutory homeless people are women.⁷³ Single mothers are disproportionately affected, with lone mother families making up two-thirds of homeless families with children.⁷⁴ Due to a lack of affordable homes, women and their children are spending long periods in temporary accommodation at a great cost to their wellbeing and to the public purse (local authorities spent £1bn last year in temporary accommodation.)⁷⁵

We need substantial long-term investment in social housing and a serious commitment by central government to build the houses women and their families need. The link between local housing allowance rates and actual rents needs to be restored, as 90% of private renters claiming housing benefit are facing a shortfall between their housing benefit and actual rents, with 20% experiencing a shortfall of more than 50%.⁷⁶

The next government should reform the housing system to work for women and their families by:

- Investing in social housing to ensure an effective housing safety net.
- Updating local housing allowance rates to reflect real rents and updated in line with inflation every year.
- Ensuring local authorities and housing associations recognise links between homelessness and domestic abuse for women and provide women-only accommodation including refuges, homelessness shelters and supported accommodation.
- End, 'vulnerability testing' for domestic abuse victims/survivors.

Transport

Travel by public transport is highly gendered: as women are far more likely than men work part time, live in poverty and to undertake unpaid work in the home and the community. This means poor quality, unreliable and expensive public transport has a far bigger impact on their lives than it does on the lives of men. A lack of public transport creates barriers to women accessing employment opportunities, education, health and other essential services and reduces women's ability to socialise and participate in public life.

In 2017 across England, a third more women than men travelled by bus.⁷⁷ The impact of cuts to local authorities is having a harmful effect on public transport provision, particularly buses, which in turn, is limiting women and those living on low income's ability to participate in the labour market and have mobility independence.

Local Authority funding for buses across England has been cut by 46% since 2010/11 and by nearly £20.2 million in 2017/18 alone.⁷⁸ Across the UK (excluding London), public spending on 'local public transport' including buses, was £2.3million. This equates to £8 per person per year for buses.⁷⁹ At the same time, fuel duty has been frozen to the cost of £9 billion by 2020/21⁸⁰. This saving will mostly be to the benefit of men and well-off families who are more likely to travel in private cars⁸¹ and undermine efforts to respond to the climate emergency.

It is imperative that public transport policy and spending is understood from a gender perspective at a local, regional and national level. Harmful cuts to local authority budgets must be halted as a matter of urgency and rises in fuel duty should be reinstated on environmental grounds, with financial support given to those for whom reducing their use of fossil fuels is exceptionally costly (see below under taxation).

The next government should improve public transport by:

- Reinvesting in public transport, including local bus services on which women are more likely to rely on as part of reinvesting in local government.
- Ending cuts to fuel duty to create a more equitable and green tax system which does not discriminate against women and helps fight the climate emergency.

Legal aid and criminal justice reform

By 2019-20 the Ministry of Justice will have seen cuts to its overall budget of 40% – among the deepest of any government department⁸². In addition to these cuts, the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) dramatically reduced access to civil legal aid for individuals by removing many areas of law from the scope of legal aid funding. In the five years following LASPO, spending on legal aid shrunk by more than £1bn, a 38% reduction⁸³

Women are more likely than men to be affected by these cuts and changes. In 2010 women made 62.2% of the applications for civil legal aid. The Government's own impact assessment into the cuts found that women made up 65% of those who will no longer receive legal aid for family law cases; 60% of those in housing cases; and 73% of those in education cases (often bringing a case on behalf of a child).⁸⁴ The number of social security cases receiving legal aid plummeted from 83,000 in 2013 to 440 in 2017⁸⁵ – a 99% reduction. Women's greater reliance on social security for some or all of their income means they will undoubtedly feel these cuts the most.

The ability of domestic abuse survivors to obtain safety and justice is also threatened by changes enacted under LASPO. Strict "evidential" eligibility requirements and a slew of conditions attached puts onerous

obstacles in the way of the poorest and most vulnerable victims. Research carried out by Rights of Women, Women's Aid and Women's Aid Wales a year after LASPO was introduced found that 43% of victims/survivors reported no longer having the prescribed documentation required to apply successfully for legal aid – meaning they couldn't even get to the first stage of meeting with a solicitor.⁸⁶

Legal Aid is an important part of our social protection system ensuring that people can enforce their legal rights in practice. It is fundamental in a country governed by rule of law, for people to be able to seek redress and justice. We call for the funding cuts to the Ministry of Justice to be reversed and for the UK Government to review urgently the legal aid regulations to ensure that they match women's lived experience and afford them the protection that was intended.

The Criminal Justice System (CJS)

Despite cross party support for the findings of the Corston Review undertaken in 2007, successive governments have failed to address the treatment of women in the criminal justice system.⁸⁷ Women are a small minority in the prison population and most are convicted of crimes of poverty (shoplifting or being unable to pay fines etc.). Short term prison sentences have an extremely disruptive impact on the lives of women (and their children) including increased risk of homelessness, loss of family ties and loss of custody of children.⁸⁸ 60% of offenders who are women have experienced domestic abuse and there is correlation between cycles of offending and abuse where vulnerability is cause and consequence of crime.⁸⁹

WBG therefore recommends two significant interventions in the CJS:

1. Sustainable and needs-based funded VAWG services as early prevention work, including for developing comprehensive understanding of how violence against women and girls (VAWG) and crime are connected. For women and girls, prevention must mean interrupting the cycles of violence, abuse, crime and reoffence.
2. The funding of non-custodial alternatives for women offenders: the economic case for sustainable funding of a national network of Women's Centres delivering holistic, women-centred, services, is very strong⁹⁰. The services will vary according to local need but will typically include support for the major drivers of women's offending: mental health, housing, employment, substance abuse, and domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

The next government should reform the justice system so that it works for women by:

- Reversing funding cuts to legal aid and reviewing its eligibility requirements and regulations.
- Significantly reducing the number of short-term custodial sentences for women by opening women's community centres delivering holistic, women-centred, services including support for the major drivers of women's offending: mental health, housing, employment, substance abuse, and domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
- Take all measures necessary to prevent women's offending including by tackling violence against women and girls and ensuring all victims'/survivors' have the support they need (see below).

Funding for the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector

VAWG remains widespread with multiple and lasting impacts on victims/survivors as well as society as a whole. It both cause and consequence of gender inequality. While the Government's own VAWG Strategy recognises the scale of the problem, this is not backed by enough funding for either victims' services or preventive interventions to reduce the incidence of VAWG in the longer term.

The government's recent draft Domestic Abuse Bill⁹¹ estimates the economic and social costs of domestic abuse to society to be £66 billion annually while 6000 women and girls³ are awaiting support on the Rape Crisis waiting list. We need a system to prevent abuse and support survivors of all forms of VAWG. The current piecemeal approach to funding for domestic abuse and VAWG services more generally is not only failing women but also makes no economic sense.

The government initially committed £80m to supporting the VAWG strategy, with an additional £20m announced for domestic violence services in the 2017 Spring Budget – a total of £100m over the life of the parliament, that is, five years. However, this does not compensate for the effects of central government cuts to local government funding, which provides a significant proportion of funding for VAWG support.

We call on the government to put in place sustainable and needs-based funding for VAWG services that both meets the needs of victims and allows for investment in preventive measures. Sex and Relationships Education in schools is another preventative measure that must be delivered outside the women's sector to help end VAWG. It is also vital that central government provide leadership and pooled, ringfenced funding to promote local systems change.

There should also be ringfenced funding at a national level for BAME women's specialist VAWG support services – these are local organisations which provide unique, tailored support for women who may face additional barriers to seeking help. In all instances funding for VAWG services should be based on meeting the provision of need as well as the requirements in the Istanbul convention a Council of Europe agreement which requires states to provide a minimum of one woman's shelter space per every 10,000 inhabitants⁹² Finally, we call on the government to abolish the current policy of No Recourse to Public Funds for non-EEA migrant women.

The next government should address the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls by :

- Providing needs-based and sustainable funding for all victims'/survivors' services and preventative interventions that ensure all women and girls have the support they need, including ringfenced funds for BAME and migrant-specific services.
- Equipping all public services (police, hospital, job centres etc.) to ensure all frontline staff make trained enquiries about VAWG, responding appropriately to take into account trauma and can provide pathways to support.
- Reversing cuts to central local government funding for VAWG and other public services needed by women and, as explained below, halt the roll out of Universal Credit unless the ways in which it can facilitate financial abuse are tackled.
- Introducing a Domestic Abuse Bill which ratifies the Istanbul Convention, ensuring there is 1 shelter placed per 10,000 inhabitant, and applies to all women including migrant women and Northern Irish women. Abolishing the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy.
- Introducing well-designed Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in all schools as a crucial preventative measure.

Social security reform

Social security is a necessary part of the social infrastructure on which a caring economy and society is based.⁹³ The social security system should promote well-being for all, decent living standards and opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential in life.⁹⁴ The current system is failing vulnerable people.

³ Rape Crisis England and Wales member returns

A social security system based on principles of human rights must go hand in hand with adequate investment in the social infrastructure of education, health and care public services. Failing to do so risks making short-term cost-savings but storing up long-term problems.

Cuts to social security spending since 2010 are estimated to be worth £39bn per year by 2021/22.⁹⁵ These cuts affect women more than men because of their generally lower income, longer lives and greater contribution to caring responsibilities over their life course. Poorer women, disabled women and BAME women are particularly badly hit.⁹⁶

There is an urgent need for a review of the social security system so that it fulfils principles of treating people with compassion and dignity and pays benefits at levels based on an individual assessment of need. The current benefit freeze and arbitrary limits, sanctions and conditions do not fulfil these principles or keep people from destitution. As a first step, WBG calls for an immediate lifting of the benefit freeze and an end to the benefit cap and two child limit to payments for families. We also call for an end to cruel sanctioning systems: in particular, all conditionality systems must take into account caring responsibilities and disability.

Rethinking Universal Credit (UC)

WBG calls for a serious rethink of Universal Credit. The rollout of UC has disproportionately increased the vulnerability to poverty and abuse of women, because they are more likely to require social security due to lower earnings, and unpaid care responsibilities and more likely to be responsible for managing household budgets in poorer families.⁹⁷ These consequences will impact more women as Universal Credit is rolled out to all recipients of legacy benefits claimants under 'managed migration.'

In the short term, we would recommend pausing the roll out of UC to make the following changes that might help mitigate some of the worst impacts of the current system:

End the five week wait: Having to wait a minimum of five weeks before a first payment is made has already brought hardship to people who have had to resort to foodbanks, borrowing, going without and debt to make ends meet. WBG recommends the government ends the five week wait and allows people to claim as soon as possible without getting into arrears.

Address the high taper rate: The tapering of Universal Credit at 63% for net income, reduces the incentive for second earners to enter paid employment, or to work more hours in relation to the tax credits system⁹⁸. This is because in many couples the wages of the 'first earner' will have already used up the work allowance of income that is not subject to the taper. The taper in the tax credits system was 41% of gross income, a considerably lower employment disincentive⁹⁹.

The high taper rate causes problems especially for lone parents and second earners on the minimum wage. For these claimants, working over 30 hours a week can translate into lower disposable income compared with working fewer hours, once the tapering of UC, the tax that has to be paid on such income, and the part of childcare costs that still need to be paid are taken into account.¹⁰⁰

Target payment of social security benefits to relevant individuals: Wrapping all payments into one, as in Universal Credit, can create economic dependence and therefore power imbalances within couples which could result in abuse or coercive control in the worst cases. In addition, a single monthly payment into one bank account means that if something goes wrong with a claim virtually the whole of some households' income can be put at risk. Non-means-tested benefits, notably child benefit and carer's allowance, are

acting as a last resort safety net when waiting for UC, or when there are problems or delays in payment, because they are the only secure and separate payments made to individuals.

Abolish the two-child limit: The two-child limit is punitive to all families with more than two children. It is impoverishing particularly Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) families who are more likely to have three or more children and lone parents – of which 90% are women. The limit also increases women’s vulnerability to domestic abuse as women with more than 2 children may feel trapped between abuse and poverty if they cannot leave their abusive partners for fear of not being able to feed their children.

Address the scope of conditionality: Under UC conditionality has been introduced for the first time for many people with a partner in employment. This will bring a large group of women, with and without children, into conditionality for the first time. Conditionality for parents was increased from April 2017 onwards. Parents of 3- and 4-year-olds are expected to be available for work and actively seeking it. Parents of 2-year-olds are required to attend work-focused interviews, and they have a work preparation requirement, while parents of 1- year-olds are required to attend work-focused interviews. This may be problematic in particular for lone parents who struggle with job-seeking and looking after their children. WBG is concerned that there is little awareness amongst those who increased these forms of conditionality, and in the management of Jobcentre staff, of the complexities of gender roles and relationships, or of the potential impact of the combination in UC of joint claims, conditionality for both partners, a joint earnings threshold target and a single monthly payment for most couples.

Tackle the gender division of labour: currently couples who receive social security can adapt the job seeking requirements of one partner on the basis that they are the ‘main carer.’ This reinforces the idea that one person in heterosexual households (usually women) cares and the other earns household income (usually men) and is therefore reinforcing a regressive gender division of labour. Flexible job search requirements ought to be applied to all recipients with caring responsibilities.

Introduce separate payments by default: Currently, Universal Credit is paid monthly into a single bank account. This increases women’s vulnerability to financial and other forms of domestic abuse¹⁰¹. It is possible to arrange Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) but this requires the victim/survivor to disclose abuse, which could exacerbate their situation. WBG recommends a system of separate payments for all payments.

Restore the value of benefits and commit to no further benefit freezes: In the summer 2015 Budget, the freeze on working-age benefits was extended to four years. The freeze is disadvantaging 13 million families (7.4 million of whom will be in work), who will lose an average £260 annually¹⁰². Benefit levels should be calculated on the basis on need, not an arbitrary blanket freeze despite higher than expected inflation.

Restore the link between local housing allowance rates and actual rents, as 90% of private renters claiming housing benefit are facing a shortfall between benefit levels and actual rent, with 20% facing a shortfall of more than 50%.¹⁰³

Carry out an updated Equality Impact Assessment: Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, the government has a legal obligation to have ‘due regard’ to the impact of policy on people with protected characteristics, including women. There has not been an Equality Impact Assessment of Universal Credit Assessment since 2011 despite evidence that its impacts are disproportionately disadvantaging women, disabled people and BAME households. In order to ensure the DWP is meeting its obligations under the PSED it should carry out a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment before UC is rolled out to all claimants during the forthcoming ‘managed migration’ process.

WBG would like to see a social security system redesigned with users at the centre which relieves, but also prevents, poverty and destitution as an integral part of securing mutual insurance against risk and women's economic independence. As far as funding goes, WBG suggest a review of the tax and social protection (social security and public services) systems *together* to fund this investment.

The next government should reform the social security system so that it works for women by:

- Pausing the roll out of Universal Credit for a comprehensive review of its impact and make necessary changes.
- Assessing the impact of all future reforms on women and other equality groups.

In the short-term government should:

- Abolish the two-child limit
- Address the high taper rate
- End the 5-week wait
- Introduce separate payments by default
- Remove punitive sanctions and conditionality.

Funding welfare reform and public service investment

This brief calls for investment in public services and social security to be seen as part of the infrastructure of society, whose existence underpins the economy and everyone's life course. It has public collective benefits as a system that all can use, and most do at some stage in their lives, in the same ways as the more widely recognised public good benefits of physical infrastructure (such as a transport system). Revenue to fund these reforms can be raised by borrowing, to fund the investment element and progressive general taxation.

Borrowing

Borrowing will be required to invest in public services such as childcare that can largely pay for themselves in the long run. Our work modelling investment in childcare and investment in care services has shown the return that such investments can bring in terms of jobs created, benefits saved and additional tax revenue¹⁰⁴. At least some of the costs of a properly funded social security system should be seen as an investment in the future where it is justified to borrow to invest for future returns.

Taxation

The remaining costs of investment in public services and social security will need to be paid for by general taxation. Tax is the necessary financial contribution that individuals and companies make to a well-functioning society. Women tend to benefit particularly from the public spending that tax can be used to finance.

Taxing income

The coalition and Conservative governments successively raised the personal tax allowance by £4,000 since 2010 and higher rate thresholds, rendering income tax, the fairest and most redistributive tax we have, far less effective in raising revenue. By 2020, £19bn of revenue will be given away annually by those rises, in each case regressively to those who earn above and not those who earn below those thresholds, most of whom are women.¹⁰⁵

Income tax cuts worsen gender inequalities in two ways: they raise the disposable income of the better off gender (men) more than that of the poorer gender (women). And second, they erode the tax base on which the government can hope to raise revenue both now and in the future. To better promote fairness, tax needs to be both more progressive and more inclusive.

WBG calls on the next Chancellor not to raise income tax thresholds any further; instead the whole income tax system should be reformed to make it more progressive, more inclusive and reduce the use of income tax allowances, which are unfair to those earning below the tax threshold and encourage tax avoidance and a view of income tax as a burden.

Income from all sources should be taxed in the same way. Currently income from capital, both investment income and in the form of capital gains, are taxed at lower rates than income from work. All income should be taxed at the same rates. Not only will this raise more tax, making sure that all income is taxed in the same way will make switching the form in which income is received no longer available as a means of avoidance (see below).

Corporation tax

Since 2010 the main rate of corporation tax has also been reduced from 28% to 19%, with the government reaffirming its aim to reduce it to 17% by 2020/21. This policy continues to increase income inequality.¹⁰⁶ The OECD warns that this tax cut increases inequality between men and women, since men are the majority of business owners, top managers and shareholders.¹⁰⁷ We call on the next government to cancel further planned reductions in corporation tax; instead of continuing to fuel a race to the bottom, the government should lead efforts towards the international coordination of tax rates. In the meantime, corporation tax should be set at average international levels.

To pay for improvements in social protection, not only should the policy trajectory of cutting income and corporation tax be reversed, but also new taxes could be introduced, for example, on wealth, as exist in many other European countries. In particular, inheritance tax should be reformed and used more forcefully to reduce wealth inequalities and promote social mobility. Progressive taxation of receipts, at the same rate as other income, rather than estates should be pursued. WBG has long advocated for more progressive models of wealth taxation and we would like to see commitments to this from prospective governments.

A redistributive tax the next government could consider is a financial transfer tax. Current estimates are that the so-called 'Robin Hood Tax' would raise £20bn from a 0.01% tax on speculative financial transactions¹⁰⁸. WBG has previously argued for a proportion of this additional revenue to be hypothecated as a "Maid Marion Tax", directed at funding services which directly benefit women's economic independence such as social care, childcare and services preventing and addressing violence against women. We would also argue that a substantial portion of the revenue be directed at fighting poverty in developing countries and assisting in prevention or mitigation of the effects of climate change.

Taxes can also be used as a means of protecting the environment. As mentioned elsewhere, the fuel tax escalator should be reintroduced, rather than fuel duty frozen as it has been for many years; not only is fuel tax duty a useful source of revenue, but it is vital that fossil fuel use be reduced to help meet climate change targets. As with all "green taxes", financial support should be given to those for whom reducing their use of fossil fuels is exceptionally costly.

WBG urges the next government to make a commitment to conduct a review of the tax and social protection (social security and public services) systems *together*.

Clamp down on tax avoidance

WBG supports all efforts to reduce tax avoidance and to reform tax rules to reduce the loopholes whereby high income and wealthy individuals may legally avoid paying tax, whether by paying their income into companies or by treating it as capital gains. Arguments that the 50% income tax rate or taxes on the wealthy do not raise much tax depend on there being ways in which such taxes can be avoided or reduced. Rather than using such arguments to cut or not implement such taxes, the government should ensure that such loopholes are either closed or rendered unprofitable. Reducing the range of tax allowances, and restricting them to basic rate income tax, would not only decrease the scope for tax avoidance, it would also be redistributive since those with low incomes, the majority of whom are women, can make little or no use of such tax allowances.

It is not only tax avoidance by individuals that must be stopped. It is estimated that £16bn could be recovered if all multi-national corporations were required to file accounts in the UK thereby revealing their use of tax havens, the profits they earn and what tax they pay in each country of operation¹⁰⁹. This should also include making banks give details of all accounts for companies operating in the UK allowing for greater scrutiny by HMRC.

The next government should ensure sustainable funding for social protection by:

- Calculating the net costs of public services and social security systems in the longer run by taking account of the extent to which people are enabled to enter the labour market, and, through becoming healthier and more productive, better able to contribute to and benefit from society.
- Not raising tax thresholds and introducing a more progressive system of income tax, in which all income, including capital gains, is taxed in the same way.
- Reversing planned decreases to corporation taxes which fuel a race to the bottom, overwhelmingly benefit men and take away from public revenue.
- Considering introducing taxes on wealth and financial transactions.
- Increasing fuel duty, and possibly other green taxes, while giving financial support to those who have exceptionally high costs in reducing their environmental footprint.
- Reviewing the tax and social protection systems *together*.
- Reducing tax allowances to reduce the scope for tax avoidance and clamping down on tax evasion.

Better gender-equal governance

Taking action on equal pay

Nearly 50 years on from the Equal Pay Act 1970 we do not have equal pay in the UK, with an even bigger gap for BAME women. Women are now 47% of those in employment but are still the majority of those in part-time employment (73%), involuntary part-time employment (54%), temporary employment (52%), zero-hour contracts (53.6%) and part time self-employment (60%). Women account for 70% of low earners (67% of full-time low earners), a proportion slightly up from 2011 (69%) when measured as earnings below 60% of full-time weekly earnings¹¹⁰. Unequal pay is cause and consequence of inequality as well as being a key contributor to women's poverty and overreliance on public services and social security.

Reporting is not enough to improve unequal pay. In 2019 the pay gap barely changed despite mandatory reporting for companies with 250 employees or more¹¹¹. Larger companies should be required to publish and put in place compulsory action plans with meaningful sanctions for inaction. Reporting needs to be extended to smaller organisations with more than 100 employees, to be decreased to 50 within 10 years.

Larger companies and public bodies ought to also be required to disaggregate their pay and retention data by other 'protected characteristics' including ethnicity and ability.

This action should be taken within the context of wider measures to tackle the root causes of the pay gap - many of which are outlined in this document - including redistributing unpaid care and tackling occupational segregation at all levels of education. The next government also needs to make it easier for all women to bring a case of unequal pay by reinstating legal aid and information services for discrimination.

Cross-departmental planning

Many of the issues affecting women's lives stretch across different government departments (such as those relating to health and social care, Brexit or violence against women and girls). Similarly, while government departments are responsible for specific areas of policy, action taken by one department can impact upon others. Cuts to spending on social care have increased pressures on the NHS. Cuts to funding for NHS mental health services may increase pressure on other public services such as the police¹¹², and so savings made by one department are often offset by increased costs elsewhere. Similarly investment in one department can reduce costs in another.

When it comes to setting funding and policy priorities, it would therefore make sense for these to stretch across government departments. Problems need to be tackled holistically, particularly when attempting to put preventative measures in place. As it stands, the current structures largely discourage departments from working together, preventing them from being able to look at spending overall and find the best opportunities for greater efficiency or reform.¹¹³

We support the recommendation made in the recent Institute for Government report; that the Treasury "look beyond individual departments and use the review as a chance to solve problems that extend across departmental boundaries".¹¹⁴ A focus on high-level strategy – aimed at identifying opportunities for departments to work together or share resources – should be fully reflected in decisions across government. For example, cuts to local government budgets have led to an increase in crisis intervention in the social care sector (social care now accounts for over 54% of all local authority spend – up from 45% in 2010/11)¹¹⁵ managing the UK ageing population by cutting social care has simply led to an increase in emergency intervention required within the health service. A cross-departmental look at the needs of different demographics is needed in this and all areas.

Equality Impact Assessments

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) all public bodies, including government departments are obliged to have 'due regard' to the impact of their policies on equality of those with 'protected characteristics.' The main way in which most public bodies do this is through carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

WBG has long called for the Treasury to carry out meaningful gender and other EIAs of all spending and taxation decisions as part of a cumulative impact assessment.¹¹⁶ This would show the combined impact of a series of decisions across different areas of policy. Unfortunately, the Treasury has repeatedly failed to do this. Other government departments and public bodies also fail to carry out EIAs systematically or robustly enough to appropriately inform policy decisions. All too often, EIAs are just tick-box exercises conducted *after* decisions or changes have already been made.

Both the Women and Equalities Select Committee¹¹⁷ and, more recently, the Treasury Select Committee,¹¹⁸ have recommended that the Government do more to demonstrate it has fulfilled its obligations to assess the impacts of the Budget and financial statements. Manifestos should be assessed for the impact they will have on different groups. In the absence of time to do so, the incoming government must prioritise Equality Impact Assessments on all of their policies before they are implemented. Taking account of such EIAs could help mitigate the disproportionate negative impact on women and marginalised groups of many policies.

Participatory governance

This briefing demonstrates that all policy is gendered and will affect women and men in different, and often disproportionate, ways. Women's civil society has long been making these arguments and should be involved in policy making consultation in order to ensure our perspectives are taken into account. This used to be one of the key roles of the Women's National Commission (WNC) – until abolished in 2010.

Women's organisations are uniquely positioned to advise the government on the needs of women and girls. A new government should set up a national body with representatives from the women's sector to bring women and girls' voices into government and oversee, promote and protect women's rights in the UK. WBG would like to see a statutory body similar to the WNC with responsibility for engaging women's civil society in governance reintroduced. We have not reached equal gender representation in either chamber of national government or in most local authorities¹¹⁹. A dedicated body like the WNC is necessary to ensure the voices of women and girls are heard in policy design and implementation.

The next government should govern with mind to gender-equality by:

- Working holistically across departments to avoid short-term decision to make cuts in one department which produce need for emergency intervention in another.
- Carrying out and publishing comprehensive equality impact assessments of all policy which take account of the impact across a life course, on individuals as well as households and take a cumulative and intersectional approach.

Brexit and international trade

In our 2018 and 2019 reports and briefings¹²⁰ we have set out our opposition to Brexit, particularly a no deal Brexit,¹²¹ due to the shock it will cause to the economy, job losses and our concerns that, should more austerity follow this recession, it will be women who pay the highest price once again.

Nevertheless, should Brexit go ahead, the investment and reforms to public services and social security set out above will help to mitigate some of the impact on women and marginalised groups. Brexit makes these policies even more fundamental.

The UK decision to leave the European Union will not only affect our trading arrangements with the EU, it will also mean that we will be responsible for setting our own trade policy with the rest of the world. Modern trade agreements not only cover tariffs, but also create obligations on states in a number of areas including regulation of consumer and environmental standards, labour standards, human rights, investor protection, intellectual property, procurement of public services and regulation of service industries. These commitments can have both positive and negative social impacts, that are likely to be gendered.

Without the underpinning of European law, equality and workplace rights in the UK are vulnerable to change by a future government, especially if the UK is in a weakened negotiating position. If Brexit has the

widely predicted negative impact on the UK economy¹²² there is a danger of moves to reduce workplace rights and equality protection with the justification of ‘cutting red tape’. There is a particular worry about women’s working rights to equal pay for equal work, flexible working, maternity rights, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment legislation. Workers’ rights must be protected against any ‘race to the bottom’ type scramble to secure free trade deals with non-EU countries in the post-Brexit Britain. A no deal Brexit would also put the UK in a weaker position to resist pressure from countries which may require a reduction in environmental or consumer standards, or greater access for their companies to tender to deliver public services in the UK, as the price of a trade deal.

UK trade deals will also impact on the economic situation of women in our trading partners. The benefits of trade may not be equally shared and any negative impacts are disproportionately likely to affect women. Costs of employment adjustment are likely to be higher for women, whose caring responsibilities restrict their flexibility in changing jobs. Action Aid has argued that ‘trade and investment rules that compel countries to rapidly liberalise and deregulate their economies can have dire consequences for women and men living in the Global South [...and...] have served to exacerbate and exploit women’s historical position of social and economic disadvantage’.¹²³

UK Government Ministers have made commitments to post-Brexit trade agreements that “support greater participation by women and underrepresented groups in the economy” and uphold gender equality.¹²⁴ To do this:

- Gender equality should be included as an end in itself rather than subsumed under the overarching goal of economic growth in all future Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) so that they provide governments with sufficient policy space to actively protect women’s rights and promote gender equality.
- Providing and publishing a meaningful impact assessment of Brexit and all future trade deals as per their impact on women and other marginalised in the UK and around the world.
- Ensuring post-Brexit Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) do not allow for the privatisation or outsourcing of vital public services, namely the NHS. The NHS employs 77% women and provides healthcare to all women, privatisation would undoubtedly have gendered consequences on employment and care.
- Limiting the potential of Investor State Dispute Settlements (ISDS) in FTAs that can allow corporations to claim compensation for a wide range of social protections if they threaten profit. The ISDS system can only be used by companies suing governments and does not allow governments to sue companies – it is a real threat to marginalised people in the labour market.

Overseas development assistance

WBG firmly supports the continuation of international development funding and urges the Government to resist any pressures to reduce current levels. WBG support the government’s commitment to providing 0.7% of GDP as development assistance. However, we call on the next government to halt the decrease in funding to the Department for International Development, stop loosening the 0.7% target by including within it debt relief on money that was never expected to be repaid, halt the upsurge in the use of private sector for-profit contractors and the step backwards to tied-aid.

Additionally, there are spill-over effects from the UK continuing to pursue low rates of corporate taxation. The race to the bottom to attract foreign investment, puts pressure on low and middle income countries to further reduce their tax base to retain and attract foreign investment. Besides putting an end to this race (see under taxation), the next government should announce concrete measures to tackle international tax avoidance in British tax havens.

WBG shares the concerns of other women's organisations that there has been narrowing of the development agenda to focus on economic growth and support for the private sector. Instead we would like to see the adoption of a broader agenda that puts gender equality and women's human rights at the heart of the UK development assistance.

The next government can work towards a trade system which works for all women by:

- Publishing a comprehensive equality impact assessment of Brexit.
- Averting 'no deal' at all costs and, putting in place measures to stop women and marginalised groups absorbing the impact of Brexit.
- Analysing the gendered impact of all future trade agreements.
- Ensuring social protections cannot be rolled back under future trade deals.'
- Continue to commit to 0.7% of GDP on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA.)
- Reverse cuts to DFID and corporation tax to halt the 'race to the bottom.'

Conclusion

WBG hopes that all political parties will commit to building an economy which works for women. This work is part of building a vision for an alternative economy where care and the wellbeing of people and planet are placed front and centre. This is the aim of WBG's new Commission, launched in 2019: Commission for a Gender-Equal Economy.

There is more information available including individual briefings on each of these topics on our website www.wbg.org.uk.

October 2019

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- ¹²³ Action Aid (2018) From Rhetoric to Rights: towards gender-just trade (<https://bit.ly/2CLLYOs>)
- ¹²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/global-economic-outlook-trade-growth-and-the-commonwealth>
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