

Women's Budget Group Response to the Queen's opening parliament

14th October 2019

The Women's Budget Group is a network of academics, civil society organisations, trade unionists and activists who analyse the gendered impact of economic policy and promote alternatives for a more gender-equal economy. This is our response to the Queen's Speech of 14 October 2019.

Key points

Brexit

- Brexit will have a gendered impact because women and men are differently situated in the economy. Women earn less, own less and take up the majority of unpaid care work. Reinvestment in public services and ringfencing of women's rights is needed to mitigate the impact if Brexit happens.
- All post-Brexit trade deals must be assessed for their impact on women as well as other marginalised groups. Women's civil society organisations must be consulted on trade policy and the need to promote gender equality gender must be mainstreamed across all chapters of trade agreements

Domestic Abuse Bill

- The Domestic Abuse Bill must come hand in hand with sustainable and needs-based funding for the sector as well as reform of the social security system so that it does not discriminate against or put women in danger. The Bill should include an end to 'no recourse to public funds' policies that trap women in abusive relationships

Adult Social Care

- Action on funding of adult social care has been repeatedly promised but has yet to be delivered. The investment announced in the 2019 Spending Review is welcome but it is just keeping the social care sector afloat for another year. A sustainably funded National Care Service is needed to truly end the crisis in social care.

Infrastructure Investment

- Investment in 'National Infrastructure' should include spending on social infrastructure including health, care and education. These investments are to the benefit of women's wellbeing as well as economic growth.

Climate change

- Action on climate change must be gender sensitive. For example, the fuel tax freeze that benefits wealthy men the most should end to benefit women and the planet. All 'green' policies need to undergo equality impact assessments.

Criminal Justice

- Women are part of the Criminal Justice System too: short term sentences have detrimental impact on their (and their children's lives.) The Corston Review must be enacted to ensure that alternatives to custody for women are properly funded.

NHS

- The NHS long term plan should take account of the ways in which health and social care is gendered and ensure sustainability of staffing is considered along with sustainability of funding.
- The extraordinary contribution migrant women from in and outside of the EU must be factored into proposals for immigration as part of the NHS long term plan.

Pensions

- Efforts to reduce the number of poor pensioners should not be limited to pension schemes but extended to tackling pension inequalities between women and men.

Voter ID

- There are serious concerns that proposals to require voters to have photographic identification could act as a barrier to democratic participation particularly for BAME women and women on low incomes.

Brexit and future trade deals

WBG has set out its concern about the impact of Brexit, particularly a no deal Brexit, in multiple reports¹ and briefings² since 2017. Women earn less, own less and have more responsibility for unpaid care in the economy which means that Brexit is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women, especially poor, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and disabled women.

It is widely accepted that Brexit will have a negative impact on the UK economy. We are concerned that if the Government responds to an economic downturn with further austerity it will be women, particularly the poorest, BAME and disabled women who will be the hardest hit as we have seen since 2010³. Women rely more on public services and social security for care as well as paid work and the redistribution of unpaid work.

Any Brexit deal as well as all future trade and investment agreements, must undergo meaningful equality impact assessments to ensure they do no harm to women or other groups with protected characteristics. Action must be taken to mitigate the impact of Brexit on women including significant reinvestment in public services and provisions to protect women's workplace rights and social protections.

International trade agreements will have an impact on women in the United Kingdom and in our trading partners⁴. The effects of trade policy are felt by everybody, but some groups may be disproportionately impacted. Women – particularly BAME women – are overrepresented in precarious labour⁵ as well as being more vulnerable to cuts in public services or social security. This often leaves them more vulnerable to job losses or rights deterioration as a result of changing trade arrangements.

Trade agreements also impact on GDP which may also dictate how much money the government has to spend on public services relied on more by women and minority groups. All post-Brexit trade agreements must undergo equality impact assessments as well as enrolling women's civil society in their design and mainstreaming gender equality throughout, not limiting it to one chapter alone⁶.

The Domestic Abuse Bill

WBG is glad to see the government recommit to introduce the Domestic Abuse Bill. However, the aims of the Bill are compromised by severe cuts in national government funding for local government which has led to cuts to services which provide refuge and support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. More than 75% of England's local authorities slashed their spending on domestic violence refuges – by nearly a quarter (24%) – between 2010 and 2017. The lack of refuge spaces saw more than 1,000 vulnerable women and children turned away from centres over a six-month period in 2017.⁷ 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.⁸

¹ <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Economic-Impact-of-Brexit-on-women-briefing-FINAL.pdf>

² <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/operation-yellowhammer-briefing-from-the-womens-budget-group/>

³ <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/intersecting-inequalities/>

⁴ <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/gender-impacts-of-trade-and-investment-agreements/>

⁵ including part time (73%), temporary (53%) and zero hour contracts (53.6%) work <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/2018-wbg-briefing-employment-and-earnings/>

⁶ For more information on gender and trade see: <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/gender-impacts-of-trade-and-investment-agreements/>

⁷ Bureau of Investigative Journalism (October 2017) 'Revealed: Thousands of vulnerable women turned away as refuge funding is cut' (<https://bit.ly/2yPBRpV>)

⁸ WBG (2018) Funding for the violence against women sector <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VAWG-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

A sustainable and needs-based funding model for the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector must come hand in hand with introducing a Domestic Abuse Bill or its impact will be jeopardised.

The commitment to tackle domestic abuse is also undermined by the social security system which is trapping women in violent relationships.⁹ Women are disproportionately affected by cuts to housing benefit, the 5-week wait for universal credit, the two child limit and the benefit freeze¹⁰. The requirement that Universal Credit payments are made to a single bank account increases women's vulnerability to financial and other forms of domestic abuse¹¹. In order to tackle Domestic Abuse the Government must fund support services and redesign the social security system.

Adult Social Care

We were pleased to see mention of adult social care in the Queen's speech but disappointed after repeated promises by successive governments to address the underfunding of social care there were no concrete commitments to action. The social care system is widely recognised to be in crisis, and this is disproportionately impacting women, who are the majority of those needing care and the majority of those providing it, both paid and unpaid. Disabled women are particularly badly affected.

We welcomed the additional investment in adult and children's social care in the 2019 Spending Review through new grants and precepts, but two problems remain. Firstly the investment is only just enough to keep the social care system from collapse but is not a sustainable funding plan. The new funding brings spending close to the woefully inadequate levels of 2015/16. To return to the higher although still underfunded levels of 2009/10, the social care budget would need to rise from £17.9bn to £27bn by 2021/2022¹². Secondly, leaving social care funding dependent on the adult social care precept raised from Council Tax exacerbates regional inequalities.¹³

We call on the government to redress the crisis in adult social care by establishing a National Care Service with provision for independent living services that provides care, free at the point of delivery and has equal standing to, as well as being fully integrated with, the NHS¹⁴.

Infrastructure

The Queen's speech repeated the government's commitment to infrastructure investment, yet once again this has been limited to transport, energy and internet. It is not just roads and high-speed internet which enable people to work and underpin the economy, but childcare, healthcare and education. We have long called for the government to count spending on public services as investment in social infrastructure, recognising its importance for the productivity and wellbeing of the economy.

Investment in social infrastructure would support women to enter the labour market, close the gender pay gap and promote gender equality. It is also cost-effective: 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

⁹WBG (2019) Benefits or barriers? Making the social security system work for survivors of violence and abuse across the four nations <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/benefits-or-barriers-making-social-security-work-for-survivors-of-violence-and-abuse-across-the-uks-four-nations/>

¹⁰ WBG (2019) DWP data reveals women continue to be worst affected by poverty <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/dwp-data-reveals-women-continue-to-be-worst-affected-by-poverty/>

¹¹WBG (2019) Benefits or barriers? Making the social security system work for survivors of violence and abuse across the four nations <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/benefits-or-barriers-making-social-security-work-for-survivors-of-violence-and-abuse-across-the-uks-four-nations/>

¹² WBG (2018) Social care: A system in crisis <http://bit.ly/2PjlyMC>

¹³ WBG (2019) An end to austerity? What the spending review means for women <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-budget-assessments/an-end-to-austerity-what-the-spending-review-means-for-women/>

¹⁴ WBG (2018) Social care: A system in crisis (<http://bit.ly/2PjlyMC>)

amount)¹⁵ and, the majority of the cost of investing in free Universal Childcare would be recouped by the increase in productivity in the economy¹⁶.

Climate change and the environment

We urgently need action as well as words to tackle the climate emergency. Climate justice relates to gender justice and many of the policies which would benefit women would also benefit the planet. For example, WBG has long called for the coalition and subsequent Conservative governments to end the freeze to fuel tax which will cost about £9bn a year by 2021- 22¹⁷, money which could have been spent on the NHS or social care system.

As well as severe economic and environmental costs, cuts in fuel duty primarily benefit men, who are more likely to drive and drive longer distances than women.¹⁸ Rises in fuel duty should continue on environmental grounds, with financial support given to those for whom reducing their use of fossil fuels is exceptionally costly. We would also urge the government and opposition to ensure all new environmental policies undergo meaningful equality impact assessments to ensure they are to the benefit of all people and the planet.

The Criminal Justice System (CJS)

Measures relating to law, order and the criminal justice system formed a significant part of this Queen's speech yet there was no mention of the specific needs of women in the criminal justice system, despite cross party support for the findings of the Corston Review undertaken in 2007¹⁹. Successive governments have failed to address the treatment of women in the criminal justice system. 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.²⁰ 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 crime²¹.

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 strong²². 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.

¹⁵ WBG (2016) Investing 2% of GDP in care industries could create 1.5 million jobs <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/investing-2-of-gdp-in-care-industries-could-create-1-5-million-jobs/>

¹⁶WBG (2017) Costing free universal childcare <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/costing-funding-childcare/>

¹⁷WBG calculations using OBR policy measures database (March 2017) <http://bit.ly/2l70HWH>

¹⁸ Department of Transport (2016) Road Use Statistics Great Britain 2016 (<http://bit.ly/1ScwLEM>)

¹⁹ Home Office (2007) The Corston Report <http://criminaljusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Corston-report-2007.pdf>

²⁰ Corston, J. (2007). The Corston Report: a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system: <https://bit.ly/2OtBRTc>

²¹Ministry of Justice (2018) Female offenders strategy

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719819/female-offender-strategy.pdf

²² Women in Prison (2019) Alternatives to Custody <https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/research/briefings-bulletins.php?s=2015-11-23-alternatives-to-custody>

The NHS Long-term plan

Sustainable funding for the NHS is rightly a key priority for this government, inadequate funding has led to a strained health service and a care system in crisis. Health care is a gendered issue: women – as the majority of patients, those receiving care, (55.2% in 2016/17) health and care staff (77%) and unpaid carers (80%) – have borne the brunt of cuts to NHS funding since 2010²³. Long term funding plans must reflect the gendered nature of health and care and consider the impact not only on those needing health or social care, and the paid workforce, but on unpaid carers who fill the gap when public provision fails²⁴.

WBG therefore recommends:

- Spending on health and social care recognised as an investment in social infrastructure, which is as important to society as capital infrastructure.
- Priority should be given to investment in public health and community-based care in local government and funding should reflect this
- The establishment of a National Care Service that provides care free at the point of delivery and integrated with the NHS, funded from general taxation at the national level to avoid the entrenchment of regional inequalities.

WBG believes that any consideration of health also needs to look at integration with social care and other public services (as above.) A sustainably funded health service will not function without staff therefore the long-term plan must also include plans to train and retain high quality staff. NHS staff have been under a 1% public sector pay cap since 2010, which has led to a decline in real wages of around 14%.²⁵ There has been a failure to train sufficient numbers of staff with a large decline in the number starting nursing after the early 2000s.²⁶ A loss of bursaries led to an 18% drop in applicants for nursing places between 2016 and 2017.²⁷

WBG calls on the government to reinstate nursing bursaries and ensure adequate training, conditions and progression for all NHS staff including nurses and midwives. Substantial and longstanding investment in the training, career development and pay progression of both social and health care workers so they have equal standing is needed.

Staffing the NHS is crucial to improving and sustaining its ability to meet the nation's health needs. This is also compromised by Brexit as thousands of European Economic Area (EEA) NHS workers including nurses and midwives leave²⁸. The Immigration Bill also announced in the Queen's speech could also see migrant nurses and childcare staff unable to meet the proposed threshold for residency (£30,000.)

Pensions

The Queen's speech also confirmed that the Government plans to introduce an amended Pensions Schemes Bill to protect private pensions. Part of tackling the poverty faced by elderly people in the

²³ WBG (2018) Pre-budget briefing: health and gender (<http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/health-pre-budget-nov-2017-final.pdf>)

²⁴ For more on women and the NHS see WBG (2018) Pre-budget briefing: health and gender (<http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/health-pre-budget-nov-2017-final.pdf>)

²⁵ The Guardian (2018) Brexit blamed as record number of EU nurses give up on Britain <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/25/brexit-blamed-record-number-eu-nurses-give-up-britain>

²⁶ Nuffield Trust (2019) "The NHS workforce in numbers" <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/the-nhs-workforce-in-numbers#references-and-notes>

²⁷ The Health Foundation, The King's Fund and the Nuffield Trust (2018) *The health care workforce in England: Make or break?* Joint briefing. www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/the-health-care-workforce-in-england-make-or-break

²⁸ The Guardian (2018) Brexit blamed as record number of EU nurses give up on Britain <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/25/brexit-blamed-record-number-eu-nurses-give-up-britain>

United Kingdom is tackling pension inequality as women live longer, on average, and due to caring responsibilities and unequal pay accrue less pensions earnings over a lifetime.

Private pension schemes, promoted and subsidised by UK governments, are the main reason for the gender gap in pensions, placing women at a disadvantage due to their domestic roles and lower pay. Efforts to mitigate poverty in old age should include efforts to close the gender pension gap: in 2012-14, about three quarters of men but only half of women aged 65+ had some private pension. For those with some private pension in payment, the median amount of such wealth held was £162,400 for men and £73,900 for women²⁹. The DWP estimates that 23% of elderly women are poor, the highest figure in 15 years³⁰.

Voter ID proposals

WBG is concerned that plans to require voters to bring photographic identification to polling stations in order to be allowed to vote could disenfranchise marginalised BAME women and poorer women most. Women make up the majority of the UK's poor as well as being the majority (90%) of single mothers – 45% of whom are living in poverty according to Department of Work and Pensions statistics³¹. Photographic ID is not a legal requirement in the UK therefore many citizens who can't afford to go on foreign holidays don't have passports, and those that can't drive don't have driving licences.

The Electoral Commissions estimates that 3.5 million citizens do not have access to photo ID and 11 million citizens do not have a passport or driving licence.³² For example, DVLA statistics³³ when compared with ONS population estimates³⁴ suggest that 67% of men have a driving license compared with 56% of women. From what we know about economic inequalities based on gender and race in the UK, a larger majority of those without the necessary photo ID will be women and BAME groups and this could act as a barrier to voting. Even provision for a free national ID card would require people to apply and some may slip through the net.

For more information about any of our response please contact jenna.norman@wbg.org.uk

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²⁹ All statistics: WBG (2018) Women and pensions <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/2018-wbg-briefing-women-and-pensions/>

³⁰ WBG (2019) DWP data confirms and women and children continue to be most affected by poverty <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/dwp-data-reveals-women-continue-to-be-worst-affected-by-poverty/>

³¹ WBG (2019) DWP data confirms and women and children continue to be most affected by poverty <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/dwp-data-reveals-women-continue-to-be-worst-affected-by-poverty/>

³² Electoral Commission (2015) Proof of identity scheme https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Proof-of-identity-scheme-updated-March-2016.pdf

³³ Gov.uk (2018) Driving license data <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/d0be1ed2-9907-4ec4-b552-c048f6aec16a/gb-driving-licence-data>

³⁴ ONS (2018) Population estimates <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/datasets/electoralstatisticsforuk>