



# Women and Girls Manifesto 2019

This general election offers an opportunity for all political parties to explicitly support equality for women. Women's lives have changed significantly in the last 50 years but there is still lots of work to do.

[#GE2019womenandgirls](https://twitter.com/GE2019womenandgirls)



We are a coalition of 29 organisations striving for gender equality and women’s human rights. We call on candidates from across the political spectrum to adopt policies to redress the imbalances in our society that harm all women and girls, especially those who are further marginalised by race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation or disability. We call on candidates to commit to:

- End violence against women and girls
- Secure women’s equal representation in politics
- Promote equality in the workplace and in the home
- Invest in public services
- Lift women & children out of poverty

**This is a manifesto for change. A manifesto for a more equal society.** Use this guide to inform conversations you have with candidates at hustings and on the doorstep. Share your thoughts on the manifesto with us by tweeting using #GE2019womenandgirls.

Endorsed by:



## End violence against women and girls

Domestic violence currently costs England and Wales £66bn<sup>1</sup> a year while 6000 women and girls<sup>2</sup> are awaiting support on the Rape Crisis waiting list. We need a system to prevent abuse and support survivors of all forms of VAWG.

### End violence against women and girls by:

**Introducing a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Bill that will fully ratify the Istanbul Convention<sup>3</sup>** and include a comprehensive framework of equal protection and support for all victims/survivors of domestic and, sexual violence and abuse, as well as all other forms of VAWG without discrimination on any grounds, including nation or migrant status.

**Equipping public services to respond to survivors of abuse.** We need a statutory duty on public authorities to ensure frontline staff are trained to make enquiries about VAWG can provide pathways to specialist trauma informed support and services - mirroring requirements in Wales. All nations need sufficient and sustainable investment in specialist services and investment in training and referral pathways.

**Creating a future free from violence and abuse** by fully funding the roll-out of high quality relationships and sex education, tackling the endemic sexual harassment and violence in schools<sup>4</sup> and sexism in society.

**Taking action on domestic and sexual violence at work and at home.** Over half of women<sup>5</sup> in the UK still experience sexual harassment in the workplace. This is in addition to violence or abuse faced by some women in the home. The International Labour Organisation Convention 190 on Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work<sup>6</sup> is a legally binding document which improves protections for all workers facing violence and harassment. We are calling on the UK government to lead the way in ratifying the Convention as soon as possible. In addition, employers ought to be required to provide victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence with flexible working arrangements, including paid leave.

**Delivering a secure funding future for specialist domestic and sexual violence services** that ensures no victim/survivor is turned away from the support they need. This includes working with all UK governments to ensure sustainable funding for life-saving women's refuges, guaranteed access to specialist, trauma informed therapeutic support and counselling for survivors of sexual abuse, and national ring-fenced funding for specialist 'by and for' led Black and Minoritised women's services.

**Ensuring the new duty of care on online companies** to protect their users includes tackling sexual harassment, bullying and violence that disproportionately affects girls and women, and ensuring online safety for all women and girls, acknowledging

<sup>1</sup> Home Office (2019) The economic and social costs of domestic abuse [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Rape Crisis England and Wales member returns

<sup>3</sup> The Istanbul Convention is a Council of Europe agreement which, among other things, requires states to have 1 shelter space per 10,000 inhabitants. The UK has yet to ratify the Istanbul Convention. <https://ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/downloads/materials/pdf/istanbul-convention-leaflet-online.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Education Union (2019) 'It's Just Everywhere – Sexism in Schools' <https://neu.org.uk/advice/its-just-everywhere-sexism-schools>

<sup>5</sup> TUC (2016) Still just a bit of banter? <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> ILO (2019) Violence and harassment convention [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C190](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190)

the intersectional nature and impact of this discrimination by requiring service providers to fund comprehensive digital citizenship education for users across the UK.

**Ensuring our Criminal Justice System works for survivors of sexual violence and rape**, by tackling unacceptably low prosecutions and convictions for rape, as evidenced by only 1.5% of reports to the police resulting in a charge or summons in 2018/19<sup>7</sup>.

## Secure women's equal representation

Women now make up 32% of MPs which is progress but not parity. At the local level we are further from equality with 96% of councils being dominated by men<sup>8</sup>. Black and Minoritised women are still further excluded: just 3% of MPs are women of colour.

### Secure women's equal representation and participation in politics by:

**Taking action to ensure women have equal seats and equal say in Parliament** by removing the multiple barriers that prevent a diverse range of women from being equally represented including the cost of a campaign and care constraints. Political parties should also introduce positive measures for women's participation such as training, quotas, all-women shortlists or zipping and introduce measures to tackle the abuse of women in politics.

**Supporting candidate diversity by implementing Section 106 of the Equalities Act** that requires political parties to collate and publish their candidate diversity in elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, and European Parliament. So far, it has not been put into force. Prospective candidate diversity data matters—we cannot know how representative politics are if we do not know who is participating in the pipeline to politics. We also call on the government to extend and enforce Section 106 to cover local government.

**Establishing a national mechanism to bring women and girls' voices into government.** Since the Women's National Commission (WNC) was abolished, there has been no public body to represent women's voices to government. 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.

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<sup>7</sup> EAVAW (2019) Guardian Reveals Collapse in Rape Cases Ending up in Court <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/guardian-reveals-collapse-in-rape-casesending-up-in-court/>

<sup>8</sup> Fawcett Society (2019) New Fawcett data reveals women's representation in local government is at standstill <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/new-fawcettdata-reveals-that-womens-representation-in-local-government-at-a-standstill>

## Promote equality in the workplace and in the home

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 Black and Minoritised women. Meanwhile, over half of women experience sexual harassment<sup>9</sup> in the workplace. At home, women continue to do the majority of unpaid care work leaving them with less time for paid work and leisure activities<sup>10</sup>.

### Promote equality in the workplace and in the home by:

**Taking action to deliver equal pay for all women:** We have seen that reporting on the gender pay gap is not enough to improve unequal pay. Larger companies ought to 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. Larger companies and public bodies ought to also be required to disaggregate their pay and retention data by other ‘protected characteristics’ including ethnicity and disability. The Equal Pay Act should be updated so that the law is fit for purpose – with women able to access the information they need to know if they are being paid less. And these changes should be taken within the context of wider measures to tackle the root causes of the pay gap including redistributing unpaid care and tackling occupational segregation at all levels of education as well as making it easier for all women to bring a case of unequal pay by reinstating legal aid and information services for discrimination. The gender pay gap also has ramifications for women in older life, candidates should commit to tackling pension inequality to secure financial autonomy for all women.

**Creating a new system of parental leave.** Take-up of Shared Parental Leave is under 10% and doesn’t reflect what parents want or need. 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, nontransferable entitlements for each parent, as well as a shared element, and incentives to encourage fathers to take leave. This needs to include an increased 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.

**Strengthen rights and access to flexible and part time working for all workers from day one, unless there’s a good business reason not to.** Flexible working can help parents balance paid work and care. It would therefore help to close the gender pay gap, assist parents to share childcare and help businesses retain staff.

### Ending pregnancy discrimination

Every year, three in four mothers suffer a negative or possibly discriminatory experience during pregnancy, during maternity leave or on their return to work. Pregnant women and new mothers are twice as likely as other women to be made redundant<sup>11</sup>. We call for stronger workplace protections for pregnant women

<sup>9</sup> TUC (2019) 1 in 2 women experience sexual harassment in the workplace <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/1-2-women-have-been-sexually-harassed-work-%E2%80%93-isn%E2%80%99t-it-time-government-did-something-about-it>

<sup>10</sup> Fawcett Society (2018) Value care work <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/value-care-work>

<sup>11</sup> EHRC (2019) Pregnancy and maternity discrimination and disadvantage [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/mothers\\_report\\_-\\_bis-16-146-pregnancy-and-maternity-related-discrimination-and-disadvantage-experiences-of-mothers\\_1.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/mothers_report_-_bis-16-146-pregnancy-and-maternity-related-discrimination-and-disadvantage-experiences-of-mothers_1.pdf)

and new mothers – including those in insecure forms of work such as zero-hours contracts and bogus self-employment – by introducing a legal ban on employers making a woman redundant throughout pregnancy, and until six months after return from maternity leave, other than in very limited circumstances.

#### **Increasing SMP and maternity allowance**

The value of Statutory Maternity Pay has fallen from 60% of the national living wage in 2010, to just 52%. Women on Universal Credit and Maternity Allowance are unfairly penalised, through no fault of their own, by denial of the earnings disregard available to those on Statutory Maternity Pay. We urge you to commit to relieving the financial pressure on new families, by amending the Universal Credit regulations so that Maternity Allowance is treated, just like Statutory Maternity Pay, as ‘earnings’ rather than ‘income’, and by increasing rates of SMP and Maternity Allowance.

**Strengthening the law on sexual harassment in the workplace.** We call for the introduction of a legal duty on employers to take proactive action to prevent harassment happening in their workplaces. The EHRC and other regulators should be funded to enforce this. This would stop the burden currently placed on women to report harassment to their employer after it has happened or take a case in the courts.

**Allowing refugees to take up paid employment.** Refugee and asylum-seeking women are facing destitution due to the extremely low levels of financial support available to them. The financial support is difficult to obtain and the lack of access to employment and housing for refugee and asylum-seeking women places them at further risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking. We therefore urge you to make sure that the government take measures to enable asylum-seeking and refugee women to gain access to employment, social security, health and social care and, appropriate housing.

## **Invest in Public Services**

Women continue to do the majority of unpaid care and rely on public services to support this. They also rely more on the public sector for employment, as it is more open to flexible work. Cuts to services have disproportionately impacted women, particularly Black and Minoritised<sup>12</sup> and disabled women but this election is an opportunity to do things differently. This should be funded by a fairer tax system which does not discriminate against women<sup>13</sup> and, increased borrowing in recognition that this form of social infrastructure is an investment in the wellbeing of society.

### **Invest in public services by:**

**Investing in Universal Free Childcare.** It is not just roads and rail that enable people to work but social infrastructure like health, care and education. This social infrastructure allows more people, particularly women, to enter and progress in the labour market. However, currently childcare costs are excessive in all of the

<sup>12</sup> WBG and the Runnymede Trust (2018) *Intersecting Inequalities: the impact of austerity of BME women* <https://www.intersecting-inequalities.com/copy-of-report>

<sup>13</sup> WBG (2018) *Tax and gender* <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/2018-wbg-briefing-tax-and-gender/>

UK, absorbing half of women's salaries for children under three.<sup>14</sup> This becomes an obstacle for women entering and progressing in the workplace. It also negatively impacts poverty rates amongst women and their pension wealth later in life.<sup>15</sup> Investing in universal free childcare would create up to 1.7 million jobs in the UK and contribute to gender equality by lifting the employment rate for women by an estimated six percentage points.<sup>16</sup> 90% of the investment would be recouped by savings in social security benefits and added tax revenue from jobs created.<sup>17</sup>

**Invest in legal aid to ensure women have access to justice and effective remedies in areas such as family, housing immigration and welfare benefits law, criminal injuries compensation claims and appeals.** Act to stop court closures to ensure adequate court time is available. Invest in funding for legal aid to provide early advice for housing and family and immigration cases and provide public funding for cases involving abuse and children. Victims of domestic and sexual abuse must not be required to pay an unreasonable contribution before grant of legal aid. Financial eligibility for legal aid must be realistically related to affordability so that the means test for legal aid is reformed to ensure it realistically calculates women's income, assets and spending.

**Sustaining and resourcing the specialist led by and for women's sector** (including ring-fenced funding for 'led by and for' Black and Minoritised women's organisations), starting by delivering on the commitment to award the Tampon Tax Fund to women's health and support charities. Women's organisations are by far the best suited to provide the most effective, suitable and appropriate support and service to women and girls. Women's organisations start from the point of view of women's lives and lived experience. We know that women and girls feel most safe and have the best chance to rebuild their lives if they access services from a women's organisation<sup>18</sup>. We do not think women should have to pay VAT on period products. We estimate that to date, £700 million has been collected from this tax. The government should pay back their debt and invest in services for women, particularly services for Black and Minoritised women.

**Investing in a National Care Service with provision for Independent Living Services.** The social care system is widely recognised to be in crisis and failing, amongst other groups, disabled women. Women rely more on adult social care for themselves and, are also more likely to provide care, paid and unpaid. 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. This would not only address the urgent crisis but support the right to independent living<sup>19</sup> for disabled people and boost employment. Women's Budget Group 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)<sup>20</sup>. 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.

<sup>14</sup> Fawcett Society and Women's Budget Group (2019) Making devolution work for women: Sheffield City Region data report (<http://bit.ly/2lmRmAn>)

<sup>15</sup> Women's Budget Group (2018) The Female Face of Poverty (<http://bit.ly/2CRlx8N>)

<sup>16</sup> Women's Budget Group (2017) Costing and funding free universal childcare of high quality (<http://bit.ly/2lpMIHb>)

<sup>17</sup> Women's Budget Group (2017) Costing and funding free universal childcare of high quality (<http://bit.ly/2lpMIHb>)

<sup>18</sup> Corry, D. (2018) Hearing Women's Voices: Why women 2018, Women's Resource Centre.

<sup>19</sup> As per Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (<https://bit.ly/2yiulBO>)

<sup>20</sup> 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/>

**Investing in social housing.** We need a substantial long-term investment in social housing and serious commitment by central government to build the houses women and their families need. The link between housing benefit and actual rents needs to be restored. Housing costs are currently taking up a large proportion of households' incomes, particularly for people on lower incomes and private-sector renters. Social housing is increasingly scarce, constituting just under 17% of all dwellings (from 31% four decades ago).<sup>21</sup> Women are more dependent on social housing (60% of social tenants).<sup>22</sup> They 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 with single mothers disproportionately affected, making up two-thirds of homeless families with children.<sup>23</sup>

**Committing to significantly reducing the number of women and girls in the criminal justice system** and reduce the human and financial cost of women's imprisonment. There must be significant investment in women's centres and other specialist community support services that are more effective than custody at addressing the root causes of offending (including abuse, trauma, mental ill-health, substance use, poverty and homelessness). The next Government must also deliver on the cross-party commitment to significantly reduce the use of short-term custodial sentences which disproportionately affect women.

## Lift women and children out of poverty

Women, on average, earn less, accumulate less wealth and have smaller pension pots due to their caring responsibilities. They also make up 90% of lone parents, 45% of whom are living in poverty according to the Department of Work and Pensions<sup>24</sup>.

### Lift women and children out of poverty by:

**Reforming the social security system so that it works for women.** Women rely more on social security because of caring responsibilities, unequal pay and discrimination in the workplace so have been hit hardest by cuts to social security and aspects of the design of Universal Credit (UC) which in some cases leave them worse, not better, off.

**The next government should:** restore the value of social security and the link between housing benefit and actual rents; end the 5-week wait and the two child limit which is discriminatory and disproportionately affects Black and Minoritised women and children; ensure migrant survivors of abuse are not barred from support due to restrictions on recourse to public funds; introduce separate payments of UC across the UK to reduce the risk of financial and other domestic abuse, ensure women have independent access to resources and to ensure equality between both parties in a couple; end sanctions and conditionality, particularly for disabled women, and tackle disincentives for second earners in UC. Any changes to social security should be subject to a comprehensive equality impact assessment.

<sup>21</sup> Women's Budget Group (2019) A Home of Her Own - Housing and women (<http://bit.ly/2L9c9Ts>)

<sup>22</sup> Women's Budget Group (2019) A Home of Her Own - Housing and women (<http://bit.ly/2L9c9Ts>)

<sup>23</sup> Women's Budget Group (2019) A Home of Her Own - Housing and women (<http://bit.ly/2L9c9Ts>)

<sup>24</sup> Women's Budget Group (2019) DWP data reveals: women and children continue to be worst affected by poverty <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/dwp-data-reveals-womencontinue-to-be-worst-affected-by-poverty/>

**Scrapping NHS charges for pregnant migrant women**

Black, minoritised 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 women<sup>25</sup>. 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. We call on all parties to commit to ensuring access to vital maternity care for migrant women living in the UK, by suspending NHS charging for maternity care.

## Ensure all government policymaking reflects the needs of women and redresses inequality

Decisions taken by the next government will heavily impact women and girls. Policy must therefore be designed to reflect this gendered impact. Engaging women, girls and women's civil society organisations in inclusive design and implementation as well as doing comprehensive equality impact assessments will help design policy which works for women.

### Ensure all Government policymaking reflects the needs of women and redresses inequality by:

**Taking action to ensure the voices of girls and young women are heard** on the issues that affect them now and, in the future, including tackling environmental issues and taking urgent action on climate change and plastic pollution.

**Ensuring all policy at local and national levels undergoes meaningful equality impact assessments** as per the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty to have 'due regard' for equality: all policy reform should be assessed for its impact on people with protected characteristics including women. Meaningful assessments should take account of the impact of a policy across a life course, on individuals as well as households, taking a cumulative and intersectional approach.



<sup>25</sup> Maternity Action (2018) Mothers Voices <https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/MothersVoices2018-FINAL.pdf>