



*Federation Northern Ireland*

**A Call for Evidence for  
Commission on a Gender Equal Economy**

**March 2019**

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Women's Aid NI is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. Women's Aid exists to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuate domestic violence. We seek through our work to promote healthy and non-abusive relationships. Women's Aid NI provides a range of support services to enable women to leave abusive situations including refuge accommodation and floating support. Women's Aid NI also provides a range of preventative education programmes and awareness raising, as well as carrying out policy and information work.

### **1. What are the causes of gender inequality in the economy?**

- Women's experience of the economy is fundamentally different to that of men's due to patriarchal social and political structures through which men dominate<sup>1</sup>. While there has been much advancement for women in the public sphere, women are still more likely to earn less than their male counterparts and remain underrepresented at management level.
- Women are more likely to take on unpaid subsistence work, caring for children or elderly relatives<sup>2</sup>. Cuts to government spending on care sector have pushed women out of the work place in order to care for children, which is not recognised as an economic contribution. This is particularly true in the case of women in NI, where there is no child care strategy at all. This push of women out of the economic sector renders them essentially without an income of their own and increases the danger of women in domestic violence relationships to be financially controlled by abusive partners and reduces their means to leave these partners given their financial dependence on them.
- In his comments on the United Kingdom, UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty Philip Alston identified that austerity policies have had a disproportionate impact on women and children. He notes that, under Universal Credit, single payments of benefits into one bank account entrench gendered power dynamics between a couple and may pay the entire household income to an abusive partner. Alston also identifies the changes to support payments for single parents, 90% of which are women, saw 2/3s of recipients' benefits capped<sup>3</sup>. WAFNI recognises that single payments make it easier for abusive partners to financially control women while simultaneously cutting benefits for single mothers. Therefore, under UC it is more difficult for women to leave abusive partners and easier for abusive partners to abuse.
- CEDAW has noted that the 2-child cap has had a disproportionate impact on women and changes to pension ages for women from 60 to 66 has had a disproportionate impact on women born in the 1950s, and has contributed to poverty, homelessness and financial hardship<sup>4</sup>.
- WAFNI recognises that changes to UC have included the possibility to apply for split payments but recognises that domestic abuse operates on a coercive level, women may still be unable to avail of these split payments for fear of their partner's reaction. This is particularly evident in NI, where we currently have no laws on coercive control and no functioning government which could introduce them. Split payments should instead be the default position of UC in order to ensure that women have access to an income and resources should they need to leave an abusive relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0966369X.2014.958066?needAccess=true>

<sup>2</sup> Ginn J, 'Austerity and Inequality: Exploring the Impact of Cuts in the UK by Gender and Age' (2013)

1 Research on Aging and Social Policy 28

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM\\_GB\\_16Nov2018.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/R.8

- WAFNI recognises that gender inequality within the economy often goes unaccounted for as poverty research is often conducted by household income and fails to take into consideration the unequal distribution of resources within the household. Patriarchal notions of the family still exist in our society and often men control the money within the home. Abusive men will use resources to control and subjugate their partners.
- 2. How does gender inequality interrelate to other forms of inequality in the economy, such as race inequality, disability, and poverty?**

### Race Inequality

- BME and migrant women face added barriers to economic equality due to a benefits system that reinforces gender stereotypes and renders women financially dependent on their partners<sup>5</sup>.
- Benefits are typically in the male partners name as often he has come to NI to earn money before the rest of the family join him and thus his entitlement to benefit is easier to prove than the woman's. This leaves the woman without access to an income of her own and therefore facilitates financial abuse.
- The UK's "no recourse to public funds" rule means that spouses of settled persons in the UK, spouses of temporary workers, people seeking asylum with their spouse, people with an invalid visa and people who have entered the country without a visa have no recourse to public funds. This leaves BME women in abusive relationships with the decision between staying in the abusive relationship or leaving and facing "destitution, loss of immigration status and potentially deportation". Women with no recourse to public funds means they have no access to housing benefit and cannot enter refuge. WAFNI identifies that this has not been addressed within the new Domestic Abuse Bill for England and Wales and no such protections have been introduced in Northern Ireland.
- WAFNI recognises that gender inequality in the economy exists among traveling communities, with women more likely to do subsistence labour without an independent income, making it difficult to leave in situations where abuse is occurring.

### Disability

- WAFNI recognises that families living with disability generally have lower incomes and are more vulnerably to poverty, more likely to be unemployed, in insecure employment or economically inactive<sup>6</sup>. Alston identifies that due to austerity, some families living with disability are projected to lose £11000 on average by 2021/22, which amounts to over 30% of their annual income. This is particularly detrimental to Northern Ireland, where the rate of disability payments is more than double that of the rest of the UK<sup>7</sup>.
- Disabled people face discrimination and barriers to their independence, for women living with disability this discrimination is compounded by their gender<sup>8</sup>. Women living with

<sup>5</sup> <http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/32688/1/BMEWomenDV-CEDAWsubmission.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM\\_GB\\_16Nov2018.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/knowledge\\_exchange/KESS-18-10-2012.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/knowledge_exchange/KESS-18-10-2012.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patricia\\_Welch\\_Saleeby/publication/228738719\\_Applying\\_the\\_capabilities\\_approach\\_in\\_examining\\_disability\\_poverty\\_and\\_gender/links/55ebb38108ae3e121846a070/Applying-the-capabilities-approach-in-examining-disability-poverty-and-gender.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patricia_Welch_Saleeby/publication/228738719_Applying_the_capabilities_approach_in_examining_disability_poverty_and_gender/links/55ebb38108ae3e121846a070/Applying-the-capabilities-approach-in-examining-disability-poverty-and-gender.pdf)

disabilities are often left more vulnerable to abuse and find it difficult to leave abusive partners who may also be acting as their carers or live in support. Therefore, cuts to disability benefits mean that disabled women living with domestic abuse are less able to leave due to a reduction in income. They may be increasingly forced to rely on their abusive partners for both financial means and also due to cuts to other support services.

**3. What issues are important to research and make proposals on in order to create policies for a gender-equal economy?**

- Research around intra-household poverty and how resources are divided within the home. Women's hidden poverty remains a pervasive problem within our society. This is compounded by domestic abuse and often goes unreported and thus unnoticed.
- Women without recourse to public funds – this is a problem that a lot of minority women are confronted with and it impairs their ability to seek support when affected by abuse in the home. Research into this problem and lobbying for its inclusion within the Domestic Abuse Bill is essential to providing resources to enable women to leave abusive situations.
- Problems with Universal Credit are becoming increasingly clearer. Attempts to redress these issues by the Government have not been effective. Research into the extent of poverty caused to women by UC is important. Also, research into the added impact of UC on victims of domestic violence would highlight that it has placed constraints on women's capacity to leave abusive situations, forcing them to choose between abuse or poverty.

**4. What resources or publications are important for the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy to consider?**

<https://www.womensaidni.org/>

<https://wrda.net/resources/wrda-publications/>

<https://blog.niwep.org/>

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