



gender
equality

SUMMARY

Gender Equality

Policy Priorities and
Recommendations

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Executive Summary

1. To advance gender equality, we recommend that the Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders act to address the following policy priorities, including via the Programme for Government and Budget; the Gender Equality Strategy; and the wider policies and programmes of government.

- **Attitudes:** Tackle gender stereotypes; the objectification of women; and prejudicial attitudes towards trans people.
- **Education:** Ensure gender mainstreaming via the curriculum, careers advice, teacher training and key policies; address the under-attainment of boys; and tackle bullying.
- **Employment:** Advance gender equality in access to, and progression within, employment, and ensure women's economic independence.
- **Caring:** Address the negative consequences for those who fulfil caring roles and ensure access to appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare.
- **Public Life:** Increase the participation of women and trans people in political and public life and decision making.
- **Violence:** Eradicate gender based violence and transphobic hate crime.
- **Healthcare:** Provide gender appropriate health and social care to address the particular needs of women and men, trans people, and those with multiple identities.
- **Sport:** Increase women's participation in sport, and the governance of sport; and tackle barriers to the participation of trans people.
- **Social Protection:** Mitigate against the adverse impacts of welfare reform; and ensure gender equality in access to social protection and pension provision.
- **Law Reform:** Reform sex equality and equal pay law to address gaps; and to harmonise, simplify and clarify the law.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:** Ensure Executive action to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

ATTITUDES: Tackle gender stereotypes; the objectification of women; and prejudicial attitudes towards trans people.

Action is required to counter gender stereotypes throughout the life course in school, training, work and in the family and wider society, including the media; tackle the objectification and degradation of women and girls; and tackle high levels of prejudicial attitudes towards trans people.

2. Gender stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes affect individuals throughout their lives, and limit the options that are open to them and the choices that they can make in economic, social and family life. Gender stereotyping in the curriculum, careers advice and subject choice can impact on future employment and lead to occupational segregation¹.
3. Gender stereotypes are prevalent in the *media and social media*, including advertising and marketing. The *Leveson Inquiry* (2012)², for example, highlighted a lack of respect for the dignity and equality of women. Further, the *Bailey* report (2011) in Great Britain found evidence of an increasingly sexual and sexualised culture³.
4. Further, trans people experience high levels of prejudicial attitudes. For example, the Commission's *Equality Awareness Survey 2011* found that 22% of respondents held negative attitudes towards transgender people⁴. There is also evidence of a lack of societal understanding of issues facing trans people⁵.

EDUCATION: Ensure gender mainstreaming via the curriculum, careers advice, teacher training and key policies; address the under-attainment of boys; and tackle bullying.

Action is required to tackle gender inequalities and stereotyping including through the curriculum, teacher training, subject choice, careers advice and the policies and practices of educational bodies; address the educational under-attainment of boys; and challenge gender based / transphobic bullying.

1 Women, for example, are under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in higher education and in the STEM workforce. See STEM Business Group (2013) [Addressing Gender Imbalance Reaping the Gender Dividend in STEM](#).
2 Report (2012) of the [Leveson Inquiry](#), p664.
3 Bailey, R (2011) [Letting Children be Children. Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood](#)
4 See ECNI (2012), [Equality Awareness Survey](#) ECNI.
5 See McBride, R S. (2013). [Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland](#). Institute for Conflict Research

5. While girls' educational attainment has improved, stereotyping, the curriculum, subject choice and careers advice still inhibit girls in fulfilling their potential. As regards subject choice, there is a higher proportion of boys studying STEM⁶ subjects in higher education; with 78% of Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology enrolments being male⁷.
6. Although the gap is narrowing, girls continue to outperform boys in terms of qualifications achieved at school^{8,9}. Boys are also less likely than girls to enter higher education (34.7% boys, 50.2% girls)¹⁰. A report *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland (2015)*¹¹ has highlighted the persistent attainment gap between males and females and that this gap consistently increases, to the detriment of males, after leaving primary school. Statistics also highlight the under-attainment and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds¹² - those entitled to free school meals, particularly males, notably Protestant males¹³.
7. There is also evidence of gender based bullying, including transphobic bullying and bullying of a sexual nature in schools, as well as a lack of awareness of transgender issues¹⁴.

EMPLOYMENT: Advance gender equality in access to, and progression within, employment; and ensure women's economic independence.

Action is required to mitigate the negative impact on women of post-recession restrictions in public expenditure; eliminate occupational and industrial segregation; promote workplace equality, encourage flexible working practices and sharing of family roles; and address barriers due to gender identity and multiple identities.

6 STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

7 In particular, in 2014/15 of enrollees (at Northern Ireland HEIs) to Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology, 22% were female and 78% were male. Figures derived from DEL. [Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15](#). See also Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*.

8 See Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland* p86.

9 For example, in 2014/15, at GCSE level 85.1% of girls achieved 5+ GCSEs at grade A*-C or equivalent, compared to 76.9% of boys. [Dept. of Education \(2016\) Statistical Bulletin 5/2016 School Leavers 2014/15](#).

10 In 2014/15, 34.7% of boys compared to 50.2% of girls progressed to higher education.

[Dept. of Education \(2016\) Statistical Bulletin 5/2016 School Leavers 2014/15](#).

11 Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*.

12 It noted that social disadvantage (as measured by free school meals entitlement FSM) can impact on the type of school attended, with socially disadvantaged children less likely to attend grammar schools. It also highlighted that FSM entitled students had poorer attainment at GCSE and A level than students who were not entitled to FSM and that FSM males were the most likely to leave schools with no GCSEs.

13 FSM-entitled Protestant males had the lowest achievement rates out of all the group categories, with consistently lower attainment proportions at GCSE and A Level than all other groups; and that this was a persistent inequality. [Dept. of Education \(2016\) Statistical Bulletin 5/2016 School Leavers 2014/15](#) p19

14 See DENI (2011) [The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland report](#) and Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) [Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#) at p9.

8. The recession had negative impacts on men and women¹⁵. Measures taken in response to the recession, including changes to welfare reform and restricted public expenditure, have had a further negative impact on women¹⁶. It is also envisaged that steps to rebalance the economy will have a further disproportionate impact on women; for example, the proposed further reduction of funding for public/third sector services on women's employment¹⁷, reduced services of which women are the primary users, and potentially subsequent requirements to provide care.
9. Men and women experience industrial and occupational segregation within the labour market with a gender imbalance within some industry sectors¹⁸. For example, in STEM –related professions, men outnumber women by nearly three to one¹⁹. Whilst women are over-represented in the public sector as a whole, they are significantly under-represented at a senior level in the NI public sector, with men and women holding 70.8% and 29.2% of all executive level positions respectively²⁰. Women are persistently over-represented in administrative/ secretarial work²¹. Further, women are more often employed with atypical contracts, particularly part time working²², on zero-hours contracts, as well as in low paid jobs. While the gap is narrowing, more men (73.4%) are in employment than women (64.7%)²³ and rates of economic inactivity remain higher among women (32%) than men (21%)²⁴.
10. Whilst there is a small gender pay gap in favour of women²⁵, women frequently experience sex discrimination in the workplace, including due to pregnancy / maternity and unequal pay²⁶.

15 For example, the loss of jobs in the male dominated construction and manufacturing sector disproportionately affected men. See McQuaid R, Hollywood E, Canduela J (2010) [Employment Inequalities in an Economic Downturn](#) commissioned by ECNI. More recently, there have been some indications of recovery in employment levels, including in construction.

16 For example, women's jobs, including those in the public sector previously viewed as more secure, were seen to be becoming more precarious. See Hinds, B,(2011) [The NI Economy Women on the Edge?](#) . See also ECNI (2012) [ECNI policy position on welfare reform](#).

17 See Fawcett (2013) [The Impact of Service Cuts on Women](#), ECNI (2013) [ECNI Shadow Report CEDAW](#)

18 For example, women predominate in 'caring, leisure and other service' and 'administrative and secretarial' occupations and men are disproportionately represented in 'skilled trades' occupations.

19 See STEM Business Group (2013) [Addressing Gender Imbalance Reaping the Gender Dividend in STEM](#).

20 See Ballantine J, Banks G, Haynes K, Manochin M, Wall T, (2014) [An Investigation into Gender Equality Issues at the Executive level in NI Public Sector Organisations](#) OFMDFM

21 In 2015, 72.1% of those employed in administrative and secretarial occupations are women. 40.4% of all managers and senior officials are women (aged 16-64) (compared to 31.6% in 2011). ECNI analysis of LFS Q2 2015. Data obtained upon request from UK Data Service.

22 In 2015, 38% of female employees work part time compared with 10% of male employees. NISRA (2015) [Women in Northern Ireland](#) Department for the Economy

23 NISRA (2016) Quarterly Supplement to the Labour Market Report April – June 2016 Data Tables. [Table QS2.1 Employment by sex, 16-64](#)

24 NISRA (2016) Quarterly Supplement to the Labour Market Report April – June 2016 Data Tables. [Table QS4.1 Economically inactive](#)

25 In terms of the gender pay gap in Northern Ireland, in 2016 median hourly earnings were higher for full time and part-time females than males. The ratio of female to male median hourly earnings excluding overtime for all employees has increased to 90.9% (2016) from 88.3% (2015). The full time ratio of female to male earnings has increased slightly from 101.5% in 2015 to 103.2% in 2016. [NISRA \(2016\) NI Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Report April 2016](#) .

26 It will be noted that over a quarter of discrimination enquiries(26.2%) made to the Commission in 2015/16 related to sex discrimination and the vast majority of these related to employment; particularly in the area of pregnancy and maternity. ECNI Discrimination Enquiries Statistics 2015/16.

11. Barriers also persist for men in seeking flexible working arrangements²⁷. A recent report in Great Britain (2016) has highlighted that flexible working can benefit all employees, men and women, as well as employers and the economy, and expressed concern about the lack of Government policies encouraging employers to promote flexible working²⁸. Additional barriers exist for trans people, women with multiple identities, and those with caring responsibilities, including lone parents²⁹.

CARING: Address the negative consequences for those who fulfil caring roles and ensure access to appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare.

Action is required to consider the economic impact of the pattern of paid / unpaid care work and address the undervaluation of this work; ensure appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision; and encourage employers to develop carer friendly policies and practices.

12. There are negative consequences³⁰, particularly for women, in relation to their role as primary providers of care³¹, including of adult care. Women predominate in the social care system in general as low paid workers and in work that is undervalued. For example, a report in Great Britain (2016)³² found that many women are trapped in low paid, part-time work; which is partly due to women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid caring but also because many of the sectors women work in, including the adult social care sector, offer predominantly low-paid, part-time work.
13. A report³³ (2013) published by the Commission highlighted the need for more coherence, co-ordination and organisation, with clear accountable leadership in order to improve childcare provision in NI. It recommended the implementation of a Childcare Strategy³⁴ that addresses the full range of childcare needs, links childcare and employment and assigns responsibility across government and relevant actors.

27 See A Hegewisch, EHRC, (2009) [Flexible working policies: a comparative review](#).

28 House of Commons (2016) [Women and Equalities Committee Report on Gender Pay Gap](#). Second report of session 2015-2016, March 2016

29 FRA (2014) [Being Trans in the EU](#), UCD (2010); [All Ireland Traveller Health Study](#), Carers UK (2015) [The State of Caring Report](#)

30 Negative consequences for carers include restrictions on their ability to access, remain or progress in, employment due to having to balancing care requirements, and the negative impact on their mental and physical health, including experiencing social isolation and loneliness. See Carers UK (2015) [The State of Caring Report](#)

31 Women are more likely than men to be carers. 19% of adult women in Northern Ireland have caring responsibilities compared to 13% of adult men and 64% of carers in NI are women and 36% are men. [Carers UK : Census Figures 2011-England, Wales and NI](#), and DHSSPS (2006) DHSSPS Caring for Carers

32 House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016) [Gender Pay Gap](#), Second report of session 2015-2016. See also Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) [Pay, conditions and care quality in residential, nursing and domiciliary services](#) – Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2014

33 See McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

34 The Commission has responded ([ECNI response to the consultation on an Executive childcare strategy – November 2015](#)) to the OFMDFM Consultation on a draft Executive Childcare Strategy and raised a number of key issues such as the need for flexible childcare as well as childcare for disabled and minority ethnic children, clear commitments as regards the introduction of effective interventions, action to tackle gender stereotypes in parenting and childcare roles in society and effective leadership and cross departmental delivery.

14. There is also a need for employers to develop carer friendly policy and practices, including the promotion of flexible working practices; as this can support carers to remain in work, and can bring considerable benefits to carers themselves, employers and the wider economy³⁵.

PUBLIC LIFE: Increase the participation of women and trans people in political and public life and decision making.

Action is required to increase the participation of women in political and public life, the judiciary and economic decision making; promote the participation of women in peace building; and increase the visibility of trans people in public life.

15. Women remain under-represented in all spheres of political life; at Westminster, in the Assembly and in local government; for example, while 66% of MEPs are women, only 11% of MPs, 28% of MLAs and 25% of councillors are women³⁶. Women are also under-represented in terms of public appointments; with 40% of public appointments being held by women³⁷. Further, women remain under-represented in the judiciary³⁸ and in economic decision making³⁹. We note that in March 2016 the NI Executive agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies⁴⁰ and we await the outcome of the proposed actions designed to deliver the target outcomes.
16. An *Inquiry* (2014) found that women face barriers to participation in peace building and post conflict reconstruction, as well as in other areas of decision making⁴¹. Barriers include the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare, the heavily male-dominated political institutions, and pressures that ensured their voices were silenced in local communities⁴².
17. Further, negative or stereotypical attitudes towards trans people can result in their being excluded from posts, including public life posts⁴³.

35 See Department of Health (2013) [Supporting Working Carers: The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy, Final Report of the Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group](#)

36 NISRA (2015) Women in Northern Ireland, Department for the Economy and updated to reflect NI Assembly elections in May 2016

37 Figures as at 31 August 2015. This represents an increase from 32% in 2000. However, across the 115 public bodies in Northern Ireland, only 19 have women chairs and seven have women vice chairs. NISRA (2015) [Women in Northern Ireland](#), Department for the Economy.

38 Women made up only 25.4% of the total permanent and deputy judiciary as at August 2015, OFMDFM Gender Equality Statistics 2015. This figure does not take account of the recent appointment of 2 female High Court Judges in November 2015.

39 A study (RalSe 2015) of the boards of the top 100 private companies in Northern Ireland has indicated that only 15.4% of board members are women. RalSe (2015) *Women on Boards of the top 100 companies in Northern Ireland*.

40 In particular, that by 2017/18 there should be gender equality for appointments made in-year; and by end-year 2020/21 there should be gender equality for all appointees in post, reflected both in board membership and at chair level. As cited in CPANI (2016) [Annual Report 2015/16](#) p8.

41 See NIWEP (2014) [An Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement, summary report](#)

42 Ibid

43 For example, a recent report in Great Britain into Transgender Equality (2016) found that trans people have long endured high levels of prejudice and misunderstanding which had manifested in numerous forms, including discrimination, and had impacted, for example, on trans people's career opportunities. Women and Equalities Committee, 2016 [UK Parliament Report \(2016\)](#) on Transgender Equality

VIOLENCE: Eradicate gender based violence and transphobic hate crime.

Action is required to tackle gender based violence and domestic violence in gender specific contexts; assist the UK Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention; and prevent and detect transphobic hate crime.

18. There is a need⁴⁴ to tackle the nature and specific impact of gender based violence on women and men and due to a person's gender identity; and to tackle cultural and stereotypical attitudes, including through education⁴⁵.
19. In Northern Ireland, domestic violence experienced by both women and men is increasing⁴⁶, with research also pointing to specific barriers for those with multiple identities⁴⁷. Women and men's experience of domestic violence may be different and there is therefore a need to ensure a gender specific (non-gender neutral) approach to tackling domestic violence and ensuring appropriate service provision⁴⁸.
20. To date the UK Government has signed, but not ratified, the Council of Europe's *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (Istanbul Convention). By ratifying the Convention, the treaty's obligations would become binding on the UK - including to exercise due diligence to prevent /protect against violence against women, to prosecute and punish perpetrators and to provide reparations for victims⁴⁹.
21. There is a need to continue to tackle transphobic hate crime⁵⁰ and to support its victims; and to address the under-reporting and lower rates of detection for transphobic motivated crime⁵¹.

44 The Council of Europe has made clear that Member States should "introduce or reinforce a gender perspective in human rights education programmes and reinforce sex education programmes that give special importance to gender equality and mutual respect". [CoE Rec \(2002\) 5](#), Recommendation (2002) 5 of the Council of Europe

45 The Joint Committee on Human Rights has recommended that schools play a greater role in tackling cultural attitudes through teaching on issues surrounding gender equality and violence. [JCHR, 6th Report, 2015](#)

46 For example, there were 5,832 adult female victims of domestic abuse crimes in 2009/10 which rose to 7,685 crimes in 2014/15; and 1,903 adult male victims of domestic abuse crimes in 2009/10 which rose to 3,107 crimes in 2014/15. Source: PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes 2004/5-2014/15

47 For example, research has highlighted that 'structural issues regarding immigration and access to public funds serve to reinforce minority ethnic women's economic dependency on their partner thereby reducing the women's potential to leave'. McWilliams, M. and Yamel, P. (2012): [The Protection and Rights of Black and Minority Ethnic Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland](#) (Belfast: NICE) 2013.

48 For example, Research by the Men's Advisory Project on male victims of domestic violence and abuse in) has highlighted gaps in provision of, and access to, services for male victims: MAP (2010) [Towards Gender Equality: Exploring the evidence of the attitudes towards and needs of male victims of domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland](#).

49 Joint Committee on HR, (2015) [Violence Against Women and Girls](#), 6th Report of Session 4014/15,

50 Trans people are at high risk of being the victim of hate crimes, including crimes against the person and property related crimes. See [Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities](#), ECNI, 2016

51 McBride R-S (2013) [Grasping the Nettle: the experiences of gender variant children and transgender youth](#), ICR

HEALTHCARE: Provide gender appropriate health and social care to address the particular needs of women and men, trans people, and those with multiple identities.

Action is required to address the particular needs of women and men, trans people and those with multiple identities; consider options to address barriers to women accessing reproductive health care; raise understanding amongst health / social care professionals of gender equality, including gender identity; and address gaps in research as regards the experiences of trans people.

- 22. Men have lower life expectancy (78.3 years for men, 82.3 years for women)⁵², and higher suicide rates (77% men, 23% women)⁵³ and health risks in relation to alcohol, drug and substance abuse than women⁵⁴. Women also experience barriers to accessing health and social care services, including access to reproductive health services⁵⁵.
- 23. Further, there is evidence of a lack of transgender awareness and understanding among healthcare professionals, particularly GPs, as well as a need for further research on the experiences of trans people in health and social care⁵⁶. Additional health issues exist aligned to men and women with multiple identities⁵⁷. There is also a clear link between socio-economic disadvantage and health inequalities experienced by both women and men⁵⁸.

SPORT: Increase women’s participation in sport, and the governance of sport; and tackle barriers to the participation of trans people.

Action is required to increase women’s participation in sport at all levels, and their participation in the governance structures of sport; and tackle barriers to the participation of trans people in sport, including transphobia.

52 It will be noted that life expectancy has continued to increase for both males and females in Northern Ireland with the gender gap decreasing by 0.4 years between 2008-10 and 2012/14. In 2012-14 the gap between life expectancy for males and females in NI was 4 years .. DHSSPS, [Health Inequalities, NI Health & Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System, Regional 2016](#)

53 Of the 268 deaths in 2014, 77% were male and 23% were female. [OFMDFM Gender Equality Statistics 2015](#)

54 ECNI response (2012) to [Fit and Well](#)

55 The Commission has, for example, recommended a full public consultation on abortion law. See ECNI (2015) [Response to DOJ consultation on criminal law on abortion](#)

56 McBride (2011) as cited in McBride, R-S. (2013). [Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland](#). Institute for Conflict Research.

57 These include high levels of mental ill-health among gay men, high suicide rates amongst Traveller men and barriers for disabled women in accessing sexual health and maternity services See Carafriend, Rainbow (2011) [Left out of the Equation](#). UCD (2010) [All Ireland Traveller Health Study](#) and ECNI (2014) [UNCRPD Parallel jurisdictional report](#).

58 For example, male life expectancy was 7.0 years lower in the most than least deprived areas and female life expectancy was 4.4 years lower in the most than least deprived areas. See DHSSPS, 2016, [Health Inequalities, NI Health & Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System, Regional 2016](#)

24. Sport participation rates of women are particularly low in Northern Ireland⁵⁹ (63% men, 47% women) compared with other jurisdictions including England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.
25. Barriers to women's participation in sport include family responsibilities and personal or emotional issues⁶⁰, such as body image, negative experiences at school and perception of the competitive environment and the absence of role models.
26. Women are also under-represented within the coaching workforce⁶¹; for example, 78% of coaches in Northern Ireland are male, and women are underrepresented in senior positions in sports governance⁶². Further, research in Great Britain has shown that there were particular barriers to trans people taking part in sport both at community and elite performance level⁶³; in particular, issues around changing rooms and access to competition, as well as transphobia in sport.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: Mitigate against the adverse impacts of welfare reform; and ensure gender equality in access to social protection and pension provision.

Action is required to mitigate against the identified adverse impact of welfare reform proposals on women; improve access to social protection for certain groups of minority ethnic women; and protect women with smaller pension provision.

27. In relation to welfare reform proposals, in 2011 the Commission had expressed concern that the negative impact on women had not been identified nor acted upon⁶⁴. Also, some minority ethnic people who are not from the UK and with insecure immigration status have 'no recourse to public funds'. This means that victims of domestic and sexual violence, mainly minority ethnic women, can be left financially dependent on their abuser⁶⁵.

59 Hull D (2014) [Women in Sport](#) – NI Assembly research p7. In 2014/15, 63% of men and 47% of women had participated in sport/ physical activity in the previous 12 months. See NISRA [Continuous Household Survey 2014/15](#).

60 Ibid

61 See Hull, d (2014) Coaching Workforce Survey. [Women in Sport](#) – NI Assembly research p7

62 Only one in five members of the boards of national governing bodies for sports is a woman; just nine of 57 organisations have a female chief executive; one quarter of sports have no women in board positions at all. Ibid

63 The report also highlighted that 80% of trans respondents had witnessed or experienced homophobia or transphobia in sport. Equality Network (2012) [Tackling Transphobia in sport](#).

64 The Commission has called for steps to identify and commit to specific measures which will mitigate the adverse impact of welfare reform on the promotion of equality of opportunity, or any alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity. For example, as regards the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2011, we recommended that the Department consider the matter of payment to the primary carer, usually the mother. See [ECNI policy position on welfare reform](#) and [ECNI Response to EQIA on Welfare Reform](#), 2011. We note recent proposals designed to mitigate the impact of some aspects of the welfare reform proposals -see Evason E (2016), [Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report](#)

65 The Joint Committee on Human Rights has raised concerns about service provision for victims of domestic violence with insecure immigration status, asylum seekers or refugees. See Joint Committee on HR, (2015) [Violence Against Women and Girls](#), 6th Report of Session 2014/15.

28. Further, older women, are less likely to have occupational and private pensions and, if they do have them, to receive lower payments than men because of broken careers for caring duties. Research has also highlighted that women in low-paid, temporary work lose out most because they often cannot afford to make pension contributions^{66 67}.

LAW REFORM: Reform sex equality and equal pay law to address gaps and to harmonise, simplify and clarify the law. Action is required to address the significant gaps in protection against sex discrimination and harassment; harmonise, simplify and clarify the law; and strengthen the Commission's enforcement powers, as well as the available remedies.

- 29 The Commission has identified a number of significant gaps and weaknesses in sex equality law that urgently need addressed. In Northern Ireland, men and women have less protection against sex discrimination/harassment than in other parts of the UK.
- 30 Gaps in protection include the need to introduce protection against sex discrimination by private clubs / associations, by public bodies when carrying out their public functions; by schools as regards their treatment of trans pupils; prohibiting 'pay secrecy clauses'; measures to require large private / voluntary sector employers to publish gender pay information; provisions to strengthen the Commission's enforcement powers, and improve the remedies available under this legislation.
- 31 These changes will, for example, ensure that sex equality legislation in Northern Ireland keeps pace with legislative protection in other parts of the UK; help address key gender inequalities; harmonise, simplify and clarify the sex equality legislation; and ensure unjustifiable inconsistencies are removed.

66 Research has highlighted that women in low-paid, temporary work lose out most because they often cannot afford to make pension contributions See CARDI (2014) [Understanding Socio-economic Inequalities Affecting Older People](#).

67 In addition, some women will be worse off following the introduction of the flat rate pension throughout their pension life. Hinds B (2011) [The NI Economy Women on the Edge?](#) .

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS: Ensure Executive action to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

Action is required to ensure a high level commitment to gender equality; to ensure gender mainstreaming, and take positive action where appropriate; to improve gender data collection and disaggregation; and to develop and implement an effective Gender Equality Strategy.

- 32 There is a need for the Executive to demonstrate a visible ongoing commitment to gender equality and to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality. National machineries for gender equality must be allocated sufficient resources, and powers; and there should be engagement with stakeholders and sustained resourcing.
- 33 There is also the need to ensure gender mainstreaming⁶⁸, including using the tools of gender budgeting⁶⁹, and impact assessment⁷⁰, and to promote gender equality through the use of positive action where appropriate⁷¹. In addition, there is a need for improved collection and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and to ensure the development and delivery of an effective Gender Equality Strategy (GES).

68 "Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors involved in policy making", see [Council of Europe definition of gender mainstreaming](#). In addition, designated public bodies must comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and apply their equality scheme arrangements.

69 Including measures in procurement. See ECNI, DFP (2008) Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement, ECNI guidance (2015) [Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide for public authorities](#) and Quinn S (2013) Equality Responsive Budgeting, Expert paper, commissioned by ECNI.

70 Equality scheme arrangements and tools - i.e. screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA) - provide a means for public authorities to assess the likely impacts of policy proposals on gender equality.

71 As regards the taking of positive action, the Commission has highlighted in its *S75 Guide for Public Authorities*, that public authorities should give particular consideration to positive action where the impact of a policy will affect different people in a different way, for example, the impact of a policy on women. It also has highlighted that mainstreaming may also require the taking of positive action. See ECNI (2010) [S75 Guide for Public Authorities, 2010](#), p 9. Positive action can be taken to promote gender equality both inside and outside employment. For further information on taking positive action in employment see ECNI (2016) Guide on [Outreach Positive Action](#).



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