

The community women's sector

The women's sector is highly dependent on public funds due to the essential services that groups provide: childcare, education and training, non-traditional skills training, domestic violence support, well-being and mental health programmes, neighbourhood renewal, urban and rural development initiatives, cross-community projects and services in disadvantaged communities. Organisations also respond to government consultations and assist with public policy development.

Women's groups make a vital contribution to community cohesion and the overall well-being of society, but lack of funding has led to the closure of a number of women's organisations. Despite serious under-funding, the Northern Ireland Executive's review of resources is unlikely to make additional resources available to the women's sector. In the future, funding for community groups, including those in the women's sector, will be devolved to local councils.

We call on politicians to:

- Proactively engage with women's groups across the diverse range of organisations and ensure women are included in community planning.
- Support the call made by the UN's CEDAW Committee in 2008 for "increased and sustained funding" for women's groups.
- Ensure that women's groups will not be disadvantaged when Local Councils have greater power to decide on funding for the community sector.

Equality standards

Despite 40 years of legislation,³ policy change, national standards and international obligations⁴, inequalities remain for women. Sex discrimination legislation has now fallen behind the protections of the Equality Act 2010 in Britain which allows for stronger equal pay provisions and an extended range of positive action measures. The demands in this Manifesto are endorsed by parallel policies and requirements at the European and international levels.

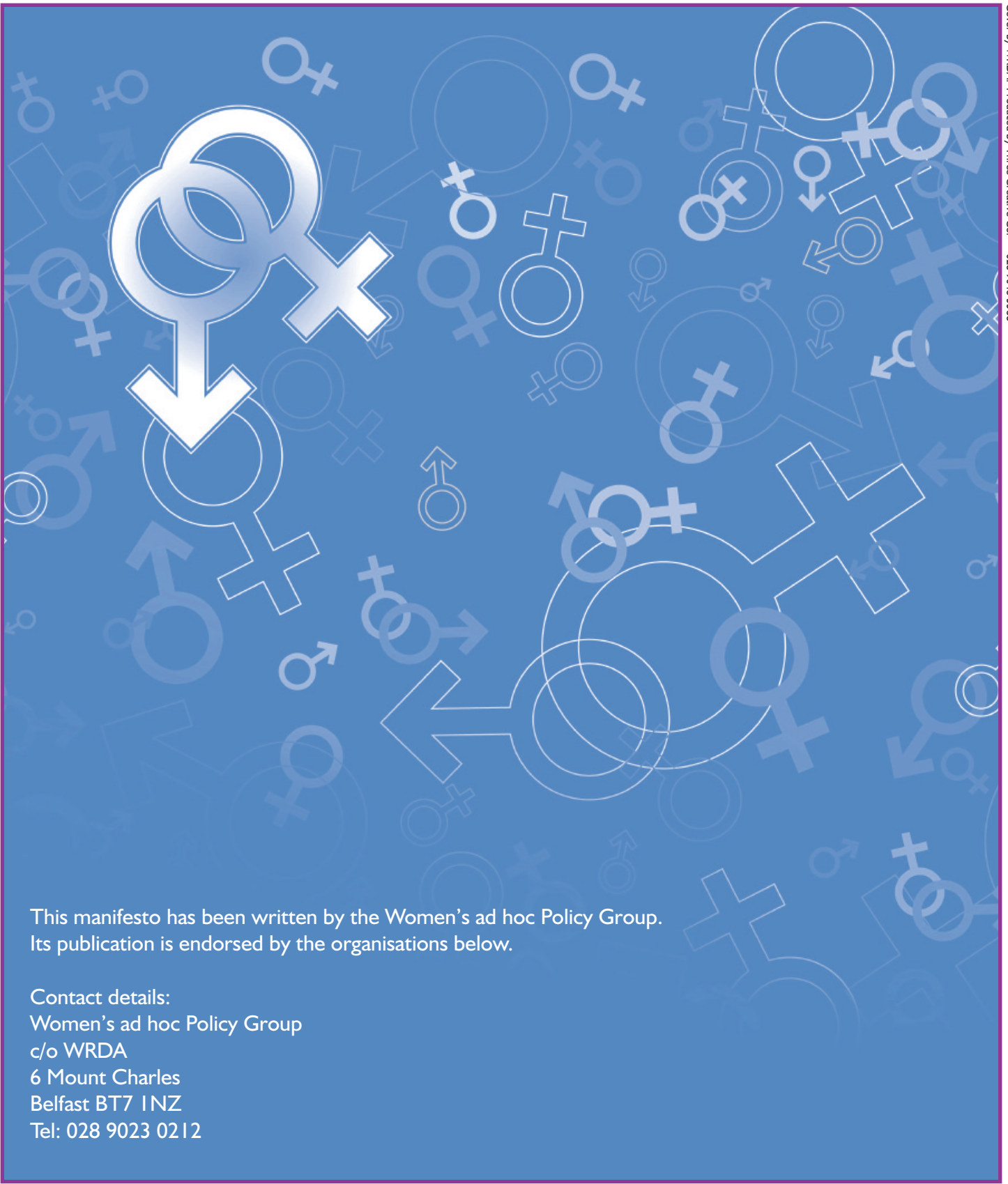
We call on politicians to:

- Review and strengthen sex equality legislation in respect of equal pay provisions and positive action measures, and work for legislative harmonisation in single equality legislation.
- Introduce robust measures to collect gender disaggregated data and use the analysis to deliver gender responsive budgeting across public spending.
- Match the situation of women in Northern Ireland against the European Union Women's Charter and meet the challenge of the EU Strategy for equality between women and men through effective delivery of the Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy.
- Work with the UK Government to make a full report to the UN CEDAW Committee on progress and remaining work to be done in Northern Ireland to meet the Committee's expectations as set out in its concluding observations in 2008.
- Fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security' in Northern Ireland and base the reform of local government on the principles of UNSCR 1325.

3 Including Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970 as amended; Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976, as amended; Section 75, Northern Ireland Act 1998

4 Including Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW); UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)





This manifesto has been written by the Women's ad hoc Policy Group. Its publication is endorsed by the organisations below.

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Your Money Garden Financial
Education Project



Northern Ireland Women's
Rights Movement

Women's Manifesto

ELECTIONS 2011

*Northern Ireland Assembly
and Local Government*



Education

Childcare

Representation

Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government Elections 2011

Introduction

This Manifesto from the Women's ad-hoc Policy Group contains a series of demands on a number of important gender equality areas.¹ It reflects the diversity of women in Northern Ireland across age, social class, life experience, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation, disability and religious and political belief.

Economic life, childcare, decision-making, education, violence, equality law and policy, and international requirements are matters that have concerned women for decades. We urge our political representatives in the incoming Assembly and Local Councils to consider and take action on these when elected.

Much remains to be done to achieve gender equality, and we must guard against rolling back the gains of the last two decades. For example, the number of women MLAs has dropped from 17% to 14% in Northern Ireland while elsewhere the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life is regarded as a benchmark of a healthy and prosperous society.

The Assembly and Local Councils should build on the Northern Ireland Executive's Gender Equality Strategy and take decisive steps to advance women's equality. We call on all parties and candidates to commit to the demands in this Manifesto, and challenge you to make gender equality a priority by incorporating these demands into your policy consideration and decisions.

1 The Women's ad-hoc Policy Group is comprised of a wide range of organisations, individuals and trade unions who are concerned to ensure that gender equality is protected and promoted in and through government policies.

Women and the Economy

Paid work is not an equal experience for women and men. The labour market is highly segregated and women are concentrated in low-paid and part-time jobs – 38% of female employees work part-time compared with 8% of male employees. The reality for many women is that they must fit their working life around having and caring for children. This results in reduced earning capabilities with the consequence that women are doubly disadvantaged; in retirement there is a significant difference in the average pension received by women and men. The gender pay gap is 12.7% when measured in terms of median hourly pay, excluding overtime, across full and part-time workers. It widens progressively when considering weekly, annual and lifetime earnings; women's annual earnings are on average 33% below that of men, partly due to interruptions to their employment and consequent loss of opportunities.²

Women will shoulder almost 75% of the cuts announced in the June 2010 emergency budget – almost £5.8 billion, yet they have been largely invisible in the narrative around the economic downturn. The reform of income support entitlement has a dramatic impact on lone parents – 90% of whom are women – who are required to actively seek work when their youngest child is 7 years despite grossly inadequate childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Women are at greater risk of poverty throughout their lives: lone parents, carers and pensioners are particularly vulnerable – 20%-25% of families in Northern Ireland are headed by a lone parent and 23% of single female pensioners live in poverty.

We call on politicians to:

- Guarantee that budget decisions made in Northern Ireland will not affect women disproportionately.
- Make every effort to ensure that in paid work there is a level playing field for women and men.
- Require mandatory pay audits and a government strategy with concrete measures and timetable to eliminate the gender pay gap.
- Promote flexible working arrangements for men and women.

² As detailed in OFMDFM research "The Gender Pay Gap in Context: Causes, Consequences and International Perspectives", March 2010

Women and Childcare

Women bear most of the burden of caring for children and other dependents. In Northern Ireland the ratio of childcare places per child is 1:6.4, compared to England's ratio of 1: 4. Since 2002 daycare places in Northern Ireland have fallen by 1%, playgroup places by 13% and places with registered childminders have decreased by 17%. Unlike other regions of the UK, there is no lead department with responsibility for childcare in Northern Ireland, no childcare strategy and no statutory obligation on public authorities to ensure adequate provision of childcare.

We call on politicians to:

- Urge the Executive to give priority to the provision and resourcing of affordable, accessible childcare to enable women to enter/re-enter the labour market.
- Demand that a lead department is nominated to take responsibility for ensuring adequate childcare provision.
- Press for the introduction of an integrated childcare strategy which covers all aspects of early years and childcare provision.



Women in Decision Making

In 2007 just 18 women were elected to the Assembly, but by 2010 this had fallen to 15 out of 108 members. Women are 22% of councillors, but were just 15% of Transition Committees. When political representatives took up their places on District Policing Partnerships the proportion of women decreased. These are choices that parties have made – candidate selection, cooption to vacancies in elected office and appointment to Assembly and local government committees are all within the control of political parties. Despite being 51% of the population, women make up only 34% of public appointments and just 18% of chairs of public bodies. Few councils actively outreach to women or engage them in community planning or in regeneration and development committees.

The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allows political parties to take special measures to tackle the deficit in women's representation within their party. The Women in Local Councils partnership is working to increase the number of women in senior positions in local government.

We call on politicians to:

- Take positive action measures to ensure that women are selected as the party's candidates for Assembly and local government elections in 2011, setting 40% as an initial target
- Demand that the Executive and its Ministers appoint women and men equally to the chairs and memberships of public bodies.
- Actively work with Women in Local Councils to gather baseline data on women in the party and to develop and resource a gender action plan with targets and timetables.
- Engage with the women's sector and appoint women to community planning processes and social, economic, cultural and other committees established by government or local councils.



**Gender
Equality for a
Stronger Democracy**

Violence Against Women

In 2009-10, there were over 32,300 calls to the 24-hour Domestic Violence helpline and refuge was provided for 1,077 women and 854 children – every day 5 women and children turn to a refuge for help – and outreach services supported almost 3,000 women and 4,500 children. Almost 24,500 domestic incidents were reported to the PSNI; 39% of murders and 9% of all recorded crime had a domestic motivation; and 75% of adult victims of domestic crime are women. Government and voluntary agencies observe that trafficking of women, children and men in Northern Ireland for sexual exploitation and labour exploitation is increasing. Northern Ireland lacks effective rape crisis provision.



Women and Education

In 2008/09, 60% of girls left school with at least one A-level, compared with 45% of boys; and 76% of girls left school with at least 5 GCSE's Grades A*- C compared with 64% of boys. However, girls' educational attainment is not reflected in their position in the labour market. Fewer girls study science and maths with women comprising only 21% of graduates in engineering and technology and 33% in science and computing in Northern Ireland universities.

We call on politicians to:

- Ensure that the high educational attainments achieved by girls translates into success in the labour market.
- Support strategies to encourage girls and women to enrol in science, technology, engineering and maths classes.
- Ensure that students are given non-gendered careers advice and girls are supported to undertake non-traditional career paths.
- Guarantee that there will be equal access to all apprenticeship opportunities and general work training opportunities for women and men.

We call on politicians to:

- Seek amendment of the Legal Aid rules to give all victims of domestic violence automatic right of access to legal protection and justice free of charge.
- Safeguard the benefits that many women who have experienced domestic violence rely upon and press the Social Security Agency to improve the processing and payment of these benefits.
- Establish an emergency fund for women victims of domestic violence who have no or limited access to public funds so they can seek refuge from their abusers.
- Pursue a strategy and sustainable resources to deliver support to children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence.
- Support an awareness raising programme to highlight the issue of human trafficking and sexual slavery across communities in NI.
- Support the provision of independent rape crisis support and ensure that statutory services, including the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, are complemented by a spread of accessible services across NI.

Reproductive Health

Access to sexual and reproductive health services is crucial to women's health and well-being. Provision of non-directive information and advice is an international requirement under CEDAW – the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Yet clinic staff, and young women and men trying to access independent advice and support, often face intimidation. There is no mandatory sex education in primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Provision of emergency contraception is restricted by cost and accessibility. Termination of pregnancy is lawful in Northern Ireland, but eligibility criteria make access highly restricted; over 1,500 women a year travel to Britain for terminations.

We call on politicians to:

- Introduce a standardised programme of relationships and sexuality education in the school curriculum.
- Demonstrate support for sexual and reproductive health clinics and seek to have these services extended across Northern Ireland.
- Establish within the DHSSPS a means of assisting women who need to travel to Britain for terminations
- Support the UN CEDAW Committee's recommendation for a public consultation on the reform of abortion law in Northern Ireland.