



**Alternative Report to the UK Questionnaire Response of  
Progress of the Platform for Action and the Outcome of the  
Twenty-Third Session of the General Assembly**

**Prepared by**

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## 1. Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

The UK government had given an overall picture of the achievements and challenges of gender equality and women's empowerment. However, these are mainly aggregated figures and do not reflect the differences between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of these.

<b>Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Although the Northern Ireland Civil Service is made up of 52% of women only 13% (2001) women are at the senior level (Grade 5+).</li> </ul>
<b>Judiciary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ In Northern Ireland there has never been a female High Court judge</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ When the devolved government was established in 1998 the first elections to the NI Assembly saw 14% of women elected. In the second elections in November 2003 the number of women elected increased slightly to 16% but this compares very unfavourably to Scotland with over 35% and Wales with 50% representation</li> <li>❑ At Westminster Northern Ireland has 18 seats but out of 18 only 3 women are MPs.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ In Northern Ireland in 2002 it was estimated that 17.8% of males in employment were self-employed, while the corresponding self-employment figure for women was 4.2%. While male self-employment in Northern Ireland is the highest of all in the UK regions the self-employment rate for females in Northern Ireland is the second lowest.</li> </ul>
<b>Policing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The Police Service of Northern Ireland recruit around 16% of female officers - the same average number in the rest of the UK, although 35% of police applications received are from women.</li> <li>❑ The number of women recruited to the Police Service of Northern Ireland is on the increase but retaining them within the force is a problem. Most of the policewomen are not within any of the so-called "specialist Units".</li> <li>❑ NIWEP strongly recommends the establishment and monitoring of 50% targets for female recruitment to PSNI and for gender to be given the same emphasis as religion in relation to the composition of the Police Service for Northern Ireland.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ It is true that women are attaining higher educational qualifications, but unfortunately that is not being reflected in their representation in senior positions in the labour force, not only in Northern Ireland but also in other regions of the UK.</li> </ul>

<b>Childcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Northern Ireland has 62.4-day nursery places per 1000, for 0 – 4 year olds, compared to a United Kingdom average of 95.</li> <li>❑ While the introduction of flexible working conditions for parents is to be welcomed we still see a stereotypical response, with more women than men making use of flexible time to look after children and other caring responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Poverty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ 68% of recipients of Invalid Care Allowance are women<sup>1</sup></li> <li>❑ 61% of those receiving Income Support are women<sup>2</sup></li> <li>❑ 59% of those who receive Housing Benefit are women</li> <li>❑ 57% of the families who receive Working Families Tax Credit have women as the main earner. This figure reflects the relative disadvantage of households headed by women</li> <li>❑ Only 24% of those receiving Job Seekers Allowance are women, again reaffirming that women’s access to contributory-based benefits is limited as a result of their very different experiences in the labour market.</li> <li>❑ Recent research in Northern Ireland (Hillyard et al, 2003) has pointed to the high rates of poverty among lone mothers in Northern Ireland and among children.</li> <li>❑ As a result of the concentration of women in no employment or in low paid jobs women are less likely to be in a position to make provision for pensions.</li> </ul>
<b>Income/Pensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Women in Northern Ireland are less likely to be in paid employment than in any other UK region and the average wage of full-time female manual employees is the lowest of all UK regions.<sup>3</sup> Linked into this lower economic activity and income is the higher birth-rate and consequently heavier responsibilities for childcare and homecare. Women in Northern Ireland therefore exemplify the problems of pension provision.</li> <li>❑ Figures (April 2002) demonstrate that the average hourly earnings of women in Northern Ireland is 85% of those of men. The average hourly pay for women working part-time is 68% of the average hourly full-time male rate.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> DSD, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance, May 2002. Belfast

<sup>2</sup> DSD, Social Security Summary Statistics Northern Ireland, May 2002, Belfast NISRA

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics, 1999

## **2. Progress in Implementing the Crucial Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Future Initiatives and Actions identified in the 23rd Special Session At the General Assembly**

### **Women in Decision Making**

Non Departmental Public Bodies in Northern Ireland are responsible for a diverse range of responsibilities with significant budgets, and, during the long absence of local “devolved” government in the province, have assumed considerable involvement in the running of public and social services in Northern Ireland. Examples of appointed public bodies include: the Policing Board of Northern Ireland; Education and Library Boards; Health and Social Services Boards and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission

Some of the facts relating to women in decision-making are:

- Of the 2065 public appointments in 2003/4 figures show that 31% of women held public appointments while men held 69%. This was an increase of 1% for men and a decrease of 1% for women compared to 2002/3 figures.
- 50 Chairmen (74% of the 69% men appointed to boards) and 22 Chairwomen (26% of the 31% women appointed to Boards) receive £10,000 + remunerations.
- In 2003/4 of the 844 applications received 77% were from men and 23% were from women. Compared to the figures for 2002/3 this represented a 7% increase in men with a 7% decrease in women’s applications.
- Women in 2003/4 continue to be more likely to be appointed to boards such as Culture, Arts and Leisure (34%) and Health and Social Services and Public Safety (38%), while the number of female appointments in agriculture (20%) and environment (9%) are very low.
- In December 1999 the governments of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland agreed appointments to the new Cross Border Implementation Bodies. It is not clear how the appointments were made -the procedures used do not appear to be based on the systems in place in either jurisdiction or have applied policy on gender balance. Although these are high profile positions none of the posts were advertised and no job or person specifications were made public. The policy commitment to gender balance does not appear to have been applied. It is unclear as to whether any nominating agencies were asked for suggestions, and if indeed this happened, which agencies were consulted. This change in practice contravenes any guidance or codes in place, and reinforces the view that the whole system of appointments is undemocratic, unrepresentative, elitist and unfair. It does little to instil public confidence. NIWEP is concerned about the number of bodies in Northern Ireland which do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. This includes bodies falling within the responsibility of the Northern Ireland office. This is particularly significant as it therefore includes bodies important for peace building and conflict resolution.

## Women and Health

- The Family Planning Association in Northern Ireland reported that Northern Ireland has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe with 1,700 births per year in the 13 – 19 age bracket. Young women have a right to access sexual health services that are appropriate to their needs. With regard to tackling high rates of teenage pregnancy, we acknowledge that there has been a concerted effort on the part of government at Westminster through the Teenage Pregnancy Unit.
- At the end of 2002 the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland published its *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy and Action Plan* which was developed by an inter-sectoral working group. This publication sets out the aims of the Strategy and the actions associated with it. The strategy will be taken forward by a Multi-Agency Implementation Group set up at the beginning of 2003.
- However the resources allocated, some £300,000, are extremely limited and has to be shared between the four health boards. The level of funding is a significant concern, given the fact that Northern Ireland has some of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe. Research has demonstrated that the causes of high rates of teenage pregnancy are complex and interrelated, including social and economic deprivation, underachievement in education, lack of self-esteem and lack of sex education. Policy and resource allocation needs to reflect this and to include services specifically developed to meet the needs of young people.
- The 1967 Abortion Act was not extended to Northern Ireland and therefore women in Northern Ireland are generally denied access to a service which is provided under the NHS to women living in other parts of the United Kingdom. Although abortion is legally permissible in certain situations in Northern Ireland, the Law is very unclear. Rape, incest and foetal abnormality are not grounds for abortion in Northern Ireland. The lack of clarity re the law has meant that even where the courts in Northern Ireland have permitted termination, there are examples of doctors refusing to carry out the procedure, thus requiring those women to have to travel to Great Britain or overseas to access a service which they are entitled to. It is believed that the stance adopted by the doctors arises from their concern that legal action might be taken against them.

## **Women and armed conflict**

- ❑ The dividends and benefits of involving women in conflict resolution are clearly evident in Northern Ireland, where women played and continue to play a pivotal role in building peace, and are essential contributors to the ongoing process of fostering reconciliation in Northern Ireland.
- ❑ The role of women in the peace process, considered in its broadest sense to include community-based women and women in other areas of public and political life, must be sustained and the commitment to the Good Friday Agreement to ensure ‘equal opportunity in all social and economic activity’ must be lived up to.
- ❑ Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, an international treaty, which pledged the commitment to the right of women “to full and equal political participation”, the British and Irish governments and all the political parties in NI have a duty to ensure full implementation of the agreement including the clauses relating to women. So far, no measures have been enacted to ensure numerical equality of representation.

In relation to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, while the UK government has been diligent in promoting its commitment to the Resolution, more emphasis needs to be placed on the practical implementation of the resolution in Northern Ireland. The following are some examples:

- ❑ Following the recommendations of the Patten Report a Policing Board to monitor the set up of the new policing structures was established with 19 members. Of the 19 members 10 were appointed from political parties, and 9 were through public appointment applications. None of the political parties appointed a woman and out of the 9 public appointments only two of these were women.
- ❑ Parades in Northern Ireland have been a cause of contention and community tension. The first Parades Commission saw 6 men appointed and 1 woman. In the next round of appointments 7 men were appointed.
- ❑ The Independent Monitoring Commission’s role is to monitor paramilitary activity. The Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the Republic of Ireland appointed 4 men as Commissioners.
- ❑ Although women’s centres, groups and organisations have played a pivotal role in training, childcare and cross community work, influencing policy and contributing to the economic development in Northern Ireland, all are severely under- resourced.

## **Women and Violence**

Although awareness of domestic violence in Northern Ireland has been raised by such organisations such as Women's Aid, levels of violence are on the increase and this has been highlighted by District Policing Boards.

- ❑ Recent consultations in Northern Ireland with women survivors of Domestic Violence highlighted a deep sense of dissatisfaction by many women with the way in which they had been treated by many of the personnel connected with the justice system.
- ❑ Sentencing is currently inconsistent. The fact that the violence is located within the home is still frequently viewed as a mitigating rather than an aggravating factor.

### 3. Institutional Development

<b>Women Ministers</b>	Both Ministers referred to in the UK response to the questionnaire, their staff and office, Women’s Equality Unit, (WEU) are based at Westminster in England. There is no Minister responsible for women in Northern Ireland and no one department has responsibility to ensure the maintenance of the women’s sector.
<b>Gender Equality Unit</b>	This is based in the Office of the First and the Office of the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The office is under resourced and does not have the opportunity to participate at an international level such as at CSW.
<b>Equality Commission Northern Ireland</b>	The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, included a radical proposal which required all public bodies to promote equality of opportunity across a range of constituencies, including explicitly gender. The subsequent Northern Ireland Act (Section 75) requires that detailed arrangements be put in place to ensure that equality of opportunity is given due regard in all statutory policy formulation and delivery. The Equality Commission Northern Ireland is responsible for monitoring and reporting. Section 75 is unique to Northern Ireland and is not implemented Scotland, England or Wales. The Equality Commission needs to be fully resourced as it not only has the responsibility for monitoring gender but race, disability and religion
<b>NI Assembly</b>	<p>Looking at the Northern Ireland Assembly, which has the responsibility to scrutinise the government departments (presently suspended), established the Committee of the Centre which "..... has been established to examine and report on the following functions carried out in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The complex structure of the Committee of the Centre is responsible for monitoring the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Economic Policy Unit (other than the Programme for Government)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Equality Unit</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Civic Forum (a cross-sectional appointed body which acts in an advisory capacity to government)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> European Affairs and International Matters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community Relations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Public Appointments Policy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of Information</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Victims</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nolan Standards (standard relating to ethics and standards in public life)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Public Service Office</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Planning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Women's Issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Those functions relating to the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission transferred to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister by the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland 2001)</li> </ul> <p>The concentration of such an extensive and diverse range of responsibilities in the hands of one committee means that the importance attached to issues of gender equality is undermined and diminished.</p>



#### **4. Main Challenges and Actions to Address Implementation**

##### **Timescale**

- ❑ The main challenge within the Platform for Action and the General Assembly Special Session Outcome Document is setting timescales for the implementation of the critical areas.
- ❑ **Women and Armed Conflict**
- ❑ Implementing fully Resolution 1325 and the implement the commitment to the Good Friday Agreement ‘full and equal political participation’ and clauses relating to women by political parties and both governments in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- ❑ The Gender Equality Unit of the OFMDFM should be resourced to be able to support the 350 women’s organisations and groups in Northern Ireland whose diversity represent women politically, socially, economically and geographically across Northern Ireland.

##### **Women and Health**

- ❑ There is an issue about equal rights to services across the countries of the United Kingdom in relation to the full range of reproductive health services including abortion.
- ❑ The lack of appropriate and available services for young women.
- ❑ A final timeframe and full resources be available in Northern Ireland to implement the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety strategy on teenage pregnancy and parenthood

##### **Women and Violence**

- ❑ Guidelines to ensure consistency in sentencing across all courts in Northern Ireland. These should be reviewed and monitored regularly.
- ❑ Training in domestic violence for all court staff, and all service police officers (not just new recruits)
- ❑ A strong pro-prosecution policy to reinforce a pro-arrest and pro-charge policy.

## **Women in Power and Decision Making**

- What initiatives will government introduce to ensure that the targets set for the representation of women in public bodies and in senior government positions is achieved and regularly reviewed?

## **Women in Politics/Judiciary**

- The current imbalance of gender representation should be taken into account when advertising, interviewing and appointing for judicial posts. The Government should consider using some form of positive action (in achieving) a more gender-balanced judiciary.
- There should be an Equality Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly where Women politicians have testified to the fact that women's issues are 'buried' within the current Committee of the Centre.
- The Sex Discrimination (election candidates) Act 2002 allowing for all women shortlists in the selection process has not been implemented by any political party and should be strengthened to have 'teeth'.

## **Women in the Poverty/Pensions**

- Anti-poverty plan with set targets for 2010 to be gender proofed and a gender budget of all policies
- Steps should be taken to ensure that data on gender and poverty in Northern Ireland should be based on the person and not the income

## **Women in Employment**

- The current legislation on equal pay still lags behind that of men which perpetuates gender stereotyping by valuing the work that women typically do less than men. In addition, women's average weekly earnings in Northern Ireland are £301 per week as opposed to £317.7 in Scotland and £348.3 in England and Wales.
- Northern Ireland's childcare provision to be brought into line with the rest of the UK