

## **‘Knowing Me Knowing EU’**

A very successful event was held by the Women’s Information Group in partnership with the Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform – known as NIWEP for short! On 11 November the WIG groups travelled to the Wellington Park Hotel for an ‘ABBA’ morning. A packed room heard NIWEP’s Chair, Kate McCullough, use the popular ABBA records to work her way through ‘Knowing me, Knowing EU’. It was a fun way to be introduced to the European Union and particularly to talk about what Europe, and the United Nations, are doing for women. We started off having laugh about regulations on ‘bendy bananas’ and moved onto understanding the benefits of easy travel, lower mobile phone rates, consumer protection and environmental safeguards introduced through the EU.

Hearing about the benefits women gained by way of European equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation we were singing ‘Gimme, Gimme, Gimme’ the European Roadmap for Gender Equality through which the EU is trying to increase women’s rights whether in such areas as equal economy independence, balancing work and family life, ending gender-based violence, getting more women into positions where they are in charge of making decisions.

Following Kate’s presentation we all took part in workshops to discuss what we wanted to improve life for ourselves and other women. Here are some points that came up which show what women want to be tackled:

**Managing poverty:** higher bills and living expenses on low incomes, higher costs in Northern Ireland, decrease in the living standards, culture of debt, choice between ‘heating or eating’;

**Health:** long waiting times for doctor and dentist appointments, poor standards of care and cleanliness in hospitals, long waiting lists for mental health appointments, greater liaison between mental health agencies and family support groups needed, end postcode access to drugs, use safe but cheaper medicines, lack of maternity services in some areas, impact of the conflict on health, eliminate the age limit for breast screening, young people’s suicide and lack of mental health provision;

**Caring and work:** more available, affordable childcare so people can work, paid leave for family care responsibilities, impact on women of cutbacks in home helps and care support, grandparents should have equality with other childcare providers, carers should have support, training and respite, funding for family and community support projects, more facilities for young people, high rise flats are not acceptable;

**Work and benefits:** impact of home working on women’s pension entitlements, hardship for women and migrant workers on low incomes, impact of unemployment on women and local areas; lower wages/incomes in Northern Ireland, single parents to be entitled to extra benefit for heating;

**Violence against Women:** compulsory anger management courses for men involved in domestic violence,

**Decision-making:** not enough women in the Assembly or councils, not enough action by political parties to change this, should be women's advisory committee in the Assembly, women should recognise their power.