



Northern Ireland
Women's European Platform

Northern Ireland shadow interim report to CEDAW

September 2021

Introduction

This submission builds on the 2019 shadow report and is designed to assist the Committee in assessing the State Party's interim report. It has been coordinated by Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), with members and civil society partners.

The core message is deep concern over long term low priority given to gender equality in Northern Ireland. The COVID-19 crisis is worsening the situation, while the impacts of post Brexit arrangements cannot yet be fully assessed.

Progress on Concluding Observations: Response to Recommendation 13

There has been no meaningful action to secure gender equality or implement the Concluding Observations. Gender is absent from the New Decade, New Approach agreement that underpinned the return of devolved institutions in January 2020¹. Differences with Great Britain in equality law remain².

Work on an updated Gender Equality Strategy only begun in September 2020³, as part of a suite of social inclusion strategies including an LGBT Strategy⁴. The process, due to complete in late 2021⁵, includes engagement with the women's sector⁶; however, the effectiveness of this process cannot yet be assessed.

Marriage equality was fully achieved in October 2020^{7,8,9}, but assisted conception remains an issue for lesbian and bisexual (LB) women in same sex relationships¹⁰. A commitment to

¹ [New Decade, New Approach agreement](#) 8 January 2020

² These include the absence of protection against discrimination and harassment by public bodies on grounds of sex when carrying out their public functions. Other legislative gaps potentially impact on women; for example, there is no protection on the ground of age beyond the workplace

³ The previous strategy officially expired in 2016

⁴ ['Minister announces work is to commence on development of Social Inclusion Strategies'](#), Northern Ireland Executive press release 24 September 2020

⁵ [Timetable for development of Social Inclusion Strategies](#) ,

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ [Northern Ireland \(Executive Formation etc\) Act 2019 secured marriage for previously unmarried people of the same sex](#)

⁸ Amnesty International press release 22 October 2020 ['Northern Ireland: marriage equality fully achieved as civil partnership conversion legalised'](#); a provision to convert existing civil partnerships into marriages was secured in October 2020

⁹ Only civil partnerships formed in Northern Ireland can be converted to marriage in Northern Ireland; in other cases, conversion must take place in the relevant jurisdiction, in person. Conversions must take place within three years; capacity for the process is limited, with fees introduced after the first year. See NI Direct website - [Convert civil partnership to marriage and marriage to civil partnership](#) [Guidance on civil partnerships in Northern Ireland](#)

¹⁰ [Fertility Network | NHS Funding in Northern Ireland | Fertility Network \(fertilitynetworkuk.org\)](#),. Regulations for Donor Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) have been introduced, but without adequate resources. LB women must

three cycles of IVF within the New Decade, New Approach agreement has not yet been implemented.

Children of same sex couples born outside the island of Ireland have difficulty accessing Irish passports, and citizenship¹¹, as the Irish system currently only recognises the birth mother for this purpose.¹²

Rural women experience additional, intersectional inequalities compared to women in urban areas. Key priorities for rural women include digital inclusion, access to employment and access to services, including in particular childcare, adult social care and adequate public transport.¹³

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened gender inequalities. The women's sector produced a COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan¹⁴ to address this. The response received from the Head of the Civil Service, with contributions from all but one Department, and later by Ministers, demonstrates the very poor policy framework and practice in respect of gender equality¹⁵. This is echoed in a finding by the Equality Commission that the Department of Finance failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme in budget preparation 2019-20.¹⁶

The Feminist Recovery Plan was updated in July 2021 to evidence impact and the experiences of Northern Irish women one year on¹⁷. To date there has been no action.

also have completed a number of self funded/ self sourced IUI which have huge cost and legal risks respectively. The Regional Fertility Clinic is not enforcing this requirement, but this is on the basis of good will rather than policy

¹¹ People born in Northern Ireland have the right to be either British or Irish, or both, but this requires proving eligibility for citizenship through parental lines; citizenship is not available eg. to children of two EU/EEA nationals even if they are born in Northern Ireland (children of heterosexual couples with one parent from Northern Ireland are eligible for citizenship)s

¹² [Citizenship - Department of Foreign Affairs \(dfa.ie\)](#) - the Irish system currently only recognises a birth mother as capable of transferring citizenship, and therefore an Irish non birth mother cannot pass on citizenship, even where she is a legal parent.

¹³ Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (2018) [Rural Voices](#).

¹⁴ Women's Policy Group (July 2020) [COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#)

¹⁵ [Response](#) to Feminist Recovery Plan by Northern Ireland Departments, September 2021; at the time of writing, only one Minister has met with the sector to discuss the Plan

¹⁶ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (September 2020). Investigation under Paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Department of Finance - in its preparation of the Budget for Northern Ireland 2019-20. [Investigation Report](#)

¹⁷ Women's Policy Group (July 2021) [NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Relaunch - One Year On](#)

Economic empowerment and social protection

Gender pay gap reporting regulations¹⁸ have not been introduced, and the gender pay gap remains at around 10 per cent¹⁹. There is currently no legislative timetable for introducing these²⁰.

Universal Credit claims almost doubled between February 2020 and February 2021²¹. The only change to the system, a £20 per week increase, will be cut from October 2021^{22,23}. There is a culture of mistrust regarding migrants; claims and appeals can be delayed and advisors may suggest applicants are lying about UK work history.

Separately, the benefit system penalises disabled people who get married, affecting disabled women in particular.²⁴

Impact of COVID-19

Female unemployment rose by almost 1% between autumn 2020 and spring 2021 and redundancies are increasing in female dominated areas^{25,26,27,28}.

There are no programmes planned to assist women to access training or alternative employment²⁹. Investment in apprenticeships have focused on the construction and IT

¹⁸ [Employment Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#) includes a provision for this, as well as a gender pay gap strategy, but Regulations were not passed before the institutions collapsed in 2017 so new legislative process is required

¹⁹ A frequently highlighted figure indicates a gender pay gap in full time pay in favour of females. This is largely explained by a very small number of high earning women in senior positions, particularly in the public sector. The response to the Feminist Recovery Plan further illustrates the limitations and poor use of equality data, by referencing this figure, alongside slower increase in the employment rate for women and women's enduring high 'economic inactivity rate' without any further analysis. The pay gap is explained by women 'choosing' to work part time, highlighting the impact of gender stereotypes on policy. The gap is larger for women who work part time, women with children, and older women. Women, particularly young women, are overrepresented in the lowest paid occupation sectors (Wilson, L. (2020) [How Unequal? The unadjusted gender pay gap in earnings in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland](#); NISRA (November 2020) [Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication](#))

²⁰ [Written Assembly Question 12666/17-22](#)

²¹ Department for Communities (February 2021) [Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary](#); Universal Credit is paid by household and no gender breakdown is available. The majority of claimants are in low paid work. 30 per cent are lone parents and ten per cent two parent families; in addition, over 8,000 lone parent families continue to claim the legacy Income Support benefit.

²² *The Guardian* 7 July 2021 '[Universal credit £20 top-up will end this autumn, MPs are told](#)'

²³ The two child cap and benefit cap have not been removed and a [Supreme Court ruling](#) in July 2021 states that the two child cap is not discriminatory (R (on the application of SC, CB and 8 children) (Appellants) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and others (Respondents), and split payments remain the exception. For impacts see: [Women's Regional Consortium Response to Work & Pensions Committee Inquiry into Universal Credit Five Week Wait for First Payment](#); [Impact of ongoing austerity: Women's perspectives: Making ends meet: Women's perspectives on access to lending](#)).

²⁴ BBC News 5 July 2021 '[Benefits and disability: 'I'll never cohabit again, to protect myself'](#)'

²⁵ NISRA [Labour market figures June 2021](#)

²⁶ Department of the Economy (July 2020) [COVID-19 and the Northern Ireland economy](#); The, [Economic Activity in Northern Ireland by quarterly NI Composite Economic Index \(NICEI\) Quarter 1 \(January – March\) 2021](#)

²⁷ NISRA (June 2021) [Economic commentary summer 2021](#)

²⁸ These changes occurred while the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('furlough') was still in place; it is set to end in September 2021

²⁹ Department for Communities (January 2021) [Equality Impact Assessment - Draft DfC Budget 2021-2022](#)

sector³⁰, with no plan to invest in care³¹; a draft Skills Strategy proposes a focus on STEM with reduction of resources in other areas.³²

Violence against women and girls

Policy on domestic abuse is gender neutral^{33,34}. The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act 2021³⁵ updates some protections, but falls short of fully criminalising coercive control, unlike Great Britain³⁶ or Ireland³⁷. Gaps that have in part prevented the UK from ratifying the Istanbul Convention^{38,39} are addressed in this Act and in a Protection from Stalking Bill under Assembly scrutiny; both include measures on extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Calls for a strategy on violence against women and girls has been repeatedly declined. Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland launched a public petition calling for a strategy⁴⁰. The Executive has now committed to a strategy^{41,42} but this remains at preparation stage.

A hate crime review recommended gender as a new protected characteristic, but rejected a stand alone misogyny offence.⁴³ There is no timescale for implementation; many people experiencing homophobic or transphobic incidents and crime also feel unsupported by the judicial system and are reluctant to engage with it⁴⁴. A review of the handling of serious sexual violence cases, the Gillen Review, was initiated following a high profile trial in 2018⁴⁵. The review made 16 main recommendations⁴⁶ - none have been implemented as yet⁴⁷.

³⁰ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (March 2021) '[Statistical Bulletin: Higher Level Apprenticeships \(Level4/5\) in Northern Ireland: Academic years: 2017/18 - 2019/20](#)'

³¹ Department for the Economy (February 2021) '[Economic Recovery Action Plan](#)'

³² Department for the Economy (July 2021) '[A Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10x economy](#)'

³³ Department of Health (2016) '[Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence in Northern Ireland](#)'

³⁴ Department of Health (2020) '[Progress under the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence strategy's Year Four action plan](#)'

³⁵ '[Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings \(Northern Ireland\) Act](#) (2021)

³⁶ '[Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland evidence to Justice Committee on Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill](#)', presented 28 May 2020 to the Justice Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In Scotland new legislation that criminalises psychological abuse and controlling behaviour came into force in 2019 and in England and Wales, a new Domestic Abuse Act was passed in spring 2021 strengthening protections, although falling short of protecting migrant and minority ethnic women.

³⁷ '[Domestic Violence Act 2018](#) (Ireland); this Act criminalises coercive control as well as forced marriage.

³⁸ '[Protection from Stalking Bill 2021](#):'

³⁹ A consultation on non fatal strangulation legislation launched in July proposes a stand alone offence for this. Department of Justice (July 2021). '[Consultation on non fatal strangulation](#)'

⁴⁰ Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland '[press release](#) 9 March 2021; the Executive was also called to act by the Assembly, which passed a motion on a strategy addressing violence against women and girls on 23 March, following public outcry over highly publicised murders of women in both England and Northern Ireland ([Item 5: Order Paper 86/17-22 – Tuesday 23 March 2021](#)).

⁴¹ BBC News 18 March 2021 '[Naomi Long: Executive 'must act on violence against women'](#)'

⁴² Northern Ireland Assembly '[motion](#)' Tuesday 23 March 2021

⁴³ Department of Justice (December 2020) '[Final Report into Hate Crime legislation in Northern Ireland Independent Review](#)'. As an example of gender blind policy making, in their consultation responses, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Human Rights Commission advocated for hate crimes against men and women equally

⁴⁴ See eg Victim Support NI (April 2020) '[Hate crime review consultation response](#)'

⁴⁵ The case involved well known rugby players who were ultimately acquitted; the case was detailed in the 2019 shadow report

⁴⁶ The Gillen Review (2019) '[Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in NI](#)'; recommendations focused on ensuring sensitive treatment of victims, appropriate court proceedings and addressing rape myths

⁴⁷ The Justice Bill (Sexual Offences and Trafficking) Bill 2021 is introducing some limited implementation, in particular regarding anonymity of complainants in sexual offence cases and exclusion of the public from court.

In 2019-20, only 28.7% of all sexual violence cases sent to the Public Prosecution Service led to prosecution. Only 60 cases of rape, out of over 700 reported to PPS (8%), proceeded to prosecution and out of these, 20 cases led to conviction (3% of all cases reported).⁴⁸

There are no specialist services for migrant and minority ethnic victims, which is significant as migrant and ethnic minority victims of domestic abuse may be subject to coercive control based on immigration status⁴⁹, and are more likely to have language barriers and lack of knowledge of the system. No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a major barrier to accessing support and safety.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has increased violence. Ten women have been murdered since March 2020, more than twice as many as in the preceding 12 months and all except one by a male partner or family member⁵⁰.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) recorded consistently higher numbers of domestic incident calls since lockdown began, with a 10% increase in the first three weeks of lockdown in March-April 2020. In total 19,000 domestic abuse crimes - almost 20% of total recorded crime - were recorded in the year to December 2020, the highest total since recording began⁵¹.

Care and education

There has been no progress on a childcare strategy, despite commitment in the New Decade, New Approach agreement⁵², co-ordinated civil society campaigning⁵³ and establishment of an All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare⁵⁴. Costs remain high, with the average cost of a full-time place at £169 per week. Parents continue to report difficulties in accessing childcare^{55,56}. A support package introduced in summer 2020 has been insufficient to address these.

There has been no movement on the CEDAW Inquiry recommendation to implement standardised, age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education (RSE), widening the

⁴⁸ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (November 2020) [Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland: Statistical Bulletin: Cases Involving Sexual Offences 2019/20](#); the statistics also show the time required for a prosecution decision for sexual violence cases has increased from 447 to 666 days

⁴⁹ Specific issues for migrant and ethnic minority women include threats related to immigration status and deportation, and spiritual abuse

⁵⁰ *Belfast Telegraph* 13 July 2021 '[10 women murdered in Northern Ireland during pandemic after Limavady stabbing](#)'

⁵¹ Police Service of Northern Ireland (February 2021) [Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland](#); An increase in harassment, including malicious communications, has emerged as a specific issue. Data collection remains limited with no breakdown of relationship of perpetrator to victim by gender, and there is no official systematic recording of violence against women and girls, including femicide.

⁵² A Strategic Insight Lab, to inform a new Childcare Strategy, is due to take place in Autumn 2021 (Hansard of Education Committee meeting 23 June 2021) though here is no certainty that policy change will be the outcome

⁵³ Further information is available on the [Childcare for All](#) campaign website

⁵⁴ [Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare](#)

⁵⁵ Employers For Childcare (November 2020) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2020](#)

⁵⁶ Employers For Childcare (November 2020) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2020](#); Almost three quarters of parents reported being unable to access childcare for some or all of the time between April and August 2020; four in five families reported that at least one parent had to manage childcare responsibilities while working, with significant mental and physical health impacts. Women and lone parents were particularly affected

gap with Great Britain⁵⁷. Schools take responsibility, with no systematic guidance⁵⁸ and require parental consent⁵⁹. The curriculum excludes the experiences of LGBTQI+ pupils, and pupils with disabilities may be withdrawn from lessons⁶⁰. Young people report that current RSE is 'useless' and 'biased', but feel school is the best place for RSE⁶¹.

Health care

Abortion was decriminalised in October 2019⁶², and the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020⁶³ came into force in March 2020⁶⁴. However, the Regulations have not been implemented, and no action has followed^{65,66} legislation introduced at Westminster to force implementation in July 2021^{67,68}.

Early medical abortions are only provided for up to 9 weeks' 6 days' gestation. Telemedicine is not permitted, further widening the gap to England and Wales⁶⁹, Scotland⁷⁰ as well as Ireland⁷¹.

Trans healthcare is in crisis. The adult Gender Identity Service has not accepted new patients since the first quarter of 2018, while the review of these services and the commissioning of new ones has been severely delayed⁷², leading to deteriorating community health.

⁵⁷ CEDAW Committee (2018) [Inquiry into abortion legislation in Northern Ireland under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW](#)

⁵⁸ Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2019) [Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance: Post-Primary](#); Teachers report feeling ill-equipped to deliver RSE.

⁵⁹ Lessons are often based on religious concepts, the charity [Love for Life](#) reports that as many as 70 per cent of post primary schools engage its services

⁶⁰ In particular LGBTQI+ pupils report poor experiences with bullying and harassment in school, including lack of expertise handling issues. New legislation in autumn 2021 provided a legal definition of bullying and strengthened duties of schools (Department of 4 March 2021 '[Weir announces new legislation to address bullying in schools](#)'). Legislation on issues such as upskirting is not yet in place - Department of Justice 5 July 2021 '[Long introduces legislation to strengthen law on sexual offences and trafficking](#)'.

⁶¹ Belfast Youth Forum, Common Youth and Queen's University Belfast (2019) [Any Use?](#)

⁶² The Inquiry into abortion legislation in Northern Ireland under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW directly contributed to the decriminalisation of abortion through an amendment to the [Northern Ireland \(Executive Formation etc\) Act 2019](#) passed by the Westminster Parliament in July 2021

⁶³ [Abortion \(Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2020](#)

⁶⁴ The Regulations provide for abortions up to 12 weeks' gestation without a specific reason, and beyond this time period in specific circumstances including fatal foetal abnormality

⁶⁵ No services have been commissioned by the Department of Health, and there has been no training, funding or staff resources, resulting in a postcode lottery for abortion access. Surgical abortions are not being performed, and the Health and Social Care Trusts authorised to perform these are interpreting available guidance in a manner where each case is adjudicated on individually by the Trust Board. The Department of Health has confirmed no communication campaign is planned, and no central information source is available. There is anecdotal evidence from Doctors and from Alliance for Choice⁶⁵ of women being delayed past ten weeks, following contact with healthcare providers opposed to abortion, funded by American fundamentalist organisations, which feature prominently in online searches for emergency pregnancy services.

⁶⁶ For further information see eg. Alliance for Choice (21 October 2020) [Open Letter to Robin Swann, Health Minister for Northern Ireland](#): abortion has been added to the existing sexual and reproductive health service with no additional funding resulting in abortions not being performed.

⁶⁷ [The Abortion \(Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2021](#);

⁶⁸ House of Commons (22 July 2021) [Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made on 22 July 2021: The Abortion Services Directions 2021](#)

⁶⁹ Department of Health (30 March 2020) [Temporary approval of home use for both stages of early medical abortion](#)

⁷⁰ Scottish Government (31 Mar 2020) [Abortion – Covid-19 – approval for mifepristone to be taken at home and other contingency measures](#).

⁷¹ *Irish Medical Times*, 27 March 2020 '[Telemedicine abortion consultations permitted — Health Minister](#)'

⁷² Health and Social Care Board -[Review of the Gender Service Identity pathway](#), The review has failed to adequately consult with the groups primarily affected. There have been no interim measures to support trans communities.

Impact of COVID-19

The additional care burden during the pandemic⁷³ has disproportionately affected women^{74,75,76}. The female dominated care workforce was unable to access adequate Personal Protective Equipment in the early stages of the pandemic⁷⁷. There is no reference to care in recovery plans⁷⁸.

Recommendation: Urgent clarification is needed on the lack of action, in particular the lack of focus on gender in COVID-19 response.

Impact of Brexit: Response to Recommendation 21 (a) and (b)

No impact assessment of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU has been undertaken^{79,80 81} and there is no reference to gender in the Withdrawal Agreement⁸². However, the Northern Ireland Protocol to the Agreement commits to non diminution of existing rights set out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which include gender^{84 85}.

⁷³ See eg. [Women's Regional Consortium consultation response to the Carer's Leave consultation by the Dept for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#)

⁷⁴ Carers UK (June 2020) [Carers Week 2020 Research Report: The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#); over half of survey respondents said caring responsibilities had impacted on their ability to work, while three quarters reported additional expenses during the pandemic.

⁷⁵ [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2020](#); over half of mothers reported working from home during the pandemic, compared to 40% of fathers; mothers were more likely than fathers to work around childcare needs, including cutting hours or working earlier and later in the day, with lone parents particularly affected.

⁷⁶ Purdy, N (2020) ['Bridging the lockdown learning gap'](#); Schools and women's groups shared evidence of mothers trying to home school children with a mobile device, with teenagers struggling to complete schoolwork. Mothers were more likely to take responsibility for home schooling, with many facing challenges due to a lack of access to online technology, resulting from poor digital infrastructure, low income, or both.

⁷⁷ PPE suitable for female physiques was very difficult if not impossible to obtain; Women's Policy Group (March 2020) [Statement by the Women's Policy Group on the gendered impact of COVID-19](#);

⁷⁸ NI Executive (August 2021) [Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#)

⁷⁹ In relation to a separate question by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee regarding an equality impact assessment on the early COVID-19 response, the UK Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss responded that such an assessment could not be published even if it was undertaken

⁸⁰ [Women and Equalities Committee evidence session with Rt Hon Liz Truss MP](#) (22 April 2020)

⁸¹ Written Parliamentary Question [UIN 129151](#)

⁸² UK government (2017) [Equality Analysis European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill](#); this assessment conducted before withdrawal in 2017 makes only technical reference to equality and rights and neither recognises the concerns about reduction in equality and human rights nor anticipates the need to establish a dedicated mechanism to monitor and protect equality and rights.

⁸³ [Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration](#) (October 2019)

⁸⁴ The European Charter of Fundamental Rights was not incorporated in UK domestic law, creating the basis for diversion with regard to human rights and equality legislation (Sturgeon, K [Rights after Brexit: What will change?](#) London: Brexit Civil Society Alliance).

⁸⁵ There remains concern over undocumented EU/EEA nationals, who will become subject to NRPf. Over 80,000 applicants were granted regularised immigration status (Home Office (June 2021) [EU Settlement Scheme quarterly statistics](#)) under the EU Settlement scheme, which required all EU/EEA citizens planning to continue living in the UK to apply for regularised immigration status by 30 June 2021 and provides successful applicants with 'settled status', comparable to indefinite leave to remain, securing rights such as access to healthcare and education (EU Settlement Scheme [application portal](#)). It is not known how many people have missed the deadline or how they will be treated; late applications were recently enabled but must demonstrate 'reasonable grounds'. It is not yet known how settled status will operate in practice (see eg. *The Guardian* 26 September 2020 ['Brexit: EU citizens in UK could be shut out of vital services'](#)). In addition, Universal Credit applications from those with pending EU Settlement Scheme applications are not accepted. Anecdotally, there is evidence of poor information and digital exclusion leading to delay, and difficulties for people with limited English skills. Lack of information is also creating difficulties for those requiring a Frontier Worker Permit. Frontier workers are individuals living outside the UK but working in the UK, including EU citizens living in Ireland and working in Northern Ireland (for further detail see eg. HM Government, [Frontier worker permit for EU citizens guidance](#))

The commitment to non-diminution of rights in Northern will be overseen by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland⁸⁶ via a dedicated mechanism. Gender equality forms part of the remit of this mechanism, which can address issues of individuals and inform policy making.

The Northern Ireland Protocol is designed to ensure an open border with Ireland in line with the Good Friday Agreement. However, the Protocol has proven controversial and its impact is unclear at the time of writing.

Recommendation: Clarification is needed from the State Party on the lack of impact assessment, proposals for monitoring outcomes for EU/EEA citizens and commitment to equality and human rights domestically

Participation in decision making: Response to Recommendation 25 (b)

There has been no progress on an oversight mechanism. The All Party Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security^{87 88} has created space for women's organisations to engage with elected representatives and policy makers, but All Party Groups do not have formal powers.

There is no evidence of gender mainstreaming and there have been repeated instances where policy makers have emphasised that considering impacts of women specifically would breach Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998^{89 90}.

Recommendation: Clarification is needed from the State Party on measures proposed to ensure strengthened mechanisms, implemented in an equitable manner across the four devolved nations.

⁸⁶ [Northern Ireland Protocol](#) to the [Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration](#) (October 2019)

⁸⁷ [Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security](#) 0

⁸⁸ Northern Ireland Assembly [information page on All Party Groups](#)

⁸⁹ [Northern Ireland Act 1998](#)

⁹⁰ See eg. response by Justice Minister of Northern Ireland to written Assembly Question [AQW 13950/17-22](#) on timescale for a strategy on addressing violence against women and girls.