



## **Call for Evidence and Views on the Climate Change (No.2) Bill**

**Issued By: Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
Committee**

**September 2021**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This response has been made by The Women's Regional Consortium which is funded by the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Regional Consortium consists of seven established women's sector organisations that are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion. The seven groups are as follows:

- Training for Women Network (TWN)
- Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)

- Women's Support Network (WSN)
- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
- Women's TEC
- Women's Centre Derry
- Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN)

The Women's Regional Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas, including all groups, centres and organisations delivering essential frontline services, advice and support.

### **1.1 Women's Sector Support for Climate Change legislation**

The women's sector in Northern Ireland recognises climate change as one of the biggest issues of our generation and that women are often the first and worst affected by climate change. It is clear that communities are often on the frontline of the climate crisis. The Women's Sector has argued that we need robust legislation with ambitious targets given the existential threat of the climate emergency. We stress that any targets set by legislation should be based on the most up to date scientific evidence available rather than political opinion.

In July 2021 the Women's Policy Group relaunched a [Feminist Recovery Plan for Northern Ireland](#). The Women's Regional Consortium is represented on the WPG and we urge the Committee to take particular note of the issues raised within the Plan in relation to the need for a caring economy (which is a low emission and green sector) and the introduction of a Feminist Green New Deal. We also point the Committee to the [Climate Justice Key Briefing](#) issued as part of the Feminist Recovery Plan which contains evidence and recommendations for tackling climate change without exacerbating existing inequalities.

## 1.2 A Caring Economy

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy have proposed the creation of a 'Caring Economy'<sup>1</sup> based on gender equality, wellbeing and sustainability as a way to build back better after the Covid19 pandemic. This call to action highlights that central to feminist ecological economics is the principle that gender equality must not be achieved at the expense of ecological degradation, and at the same time, environmental sustainability must not be achieved by exploiting feminised labour, particularly unpaid care.

A Caring Economy would prioritise care for each other and for the environment in which we live. *“A caring economy simultaneously ensures achievement of gender equality, sustainability and wellbeing. While these three objectives can, to some extent, be achieved separately, a caring economy allows them to be achieved together. For example, investment in paid care services improves wellbeing through ensuring that people’s care needs are met; it improves gender equality because it raises the overall employment rate and reduces the gender employment gap (which are particularly crucial as we seek to counter the looming jobs crisis), and it is sustainable because care jobs are green.”*

The Women’s Budget Group (WBG) highlights that the narrow definition of green jobs as those in construction and technology can obscure the fact that the care industry is already a low carbon and high recompense sector. WBG research<sup>2</sup> found that a 2% GDP investment in care (for example, social care, childcare, parental leave and care leave) creates double the number of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction. Investment in free, universal childcare especially returns almost all of its initial investment. Eurostat data suggests that the care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of Greenhouse Gas emissions) than the construction industry and that the education industry is 62%

---

<sup>1</sup> Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action, Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, Women’s Budget Group, October 2020

<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries, International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016

[Investing in the Care Economy - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://www.ituc-csi.org/en/publications/investing-in-the-care-economy)

less polluting than the construction industry.<sup>3</sup> This makes investment in this type of social infrastructure economically, environmentally and equality sound.

If the recommendations around a Caring Economy were incorporated into a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland we believe that this could make significant progress in simultaneously tackling the climate emergency, recognising the essential nature of care and contributing towards gender equality. In taking this approach a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill could be locally-led and designed to meet the circumstances in Northern Ireland. It could take account of the lack of a government funded childcare provision (CEDAW has recommended action on accessible, affordable childcare particularly in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>), the greater gender segregation of labour markets in the social care sector and create unique approaches to boosting economic growth.

### **1.3 A Feminist Green New Deal**

The International Labour Organization (ILO)<sup>5</sup> has argued that without consistent gender mainstreaming, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable arguing that *“gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable.”*

The green economy and the creation of ‘green jobs’ offers the potential to pay higher wages and offers career paths to workers with the necessary skills and education. However, due to pre-existing gender inequalities there is concern that the green economy may not necessarily guarantee equal access to these green and decent jobs for women. Many of these jobs are expected to be concentrated in parts of the economy which are traditionally male dominated and women’s access may be further limited due to a lack of the necessary training and experience.

---

<sup>3</sup> WBG calculations from Eurostat data  
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

<sup>4</sup> Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, March 2019, Paragraph 46  
[Treaty bodies Download \(ohchr.org\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015  
[wcms\\_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

There is therefore a need to acknowledge existing gender imbalances to ensure that women and men can equally benefit from the opportunities the green economy can provide. A failure to do so will result in the continuation of existing gender inequalities and prevent the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>6</sup> The ILO recommends that *“all measures must be taken to ensure that pre-existing gender inequalities are not transferred to the emerging green economy and the opportunities for women in the changing labour market must be identified and grasped. Women and men must be encouraged and given the necessary support to enable equal access and benefit from green jobs.”*<sup>7</sup>

A paper from the UK WBG and the Women’s Environmental Network (WEN)<sup>8</sup> puts forward suggestions on what a Feminist Green New Deal would look like. It looks at a Green New Deal from an intersectional feminist perspective and makes recommendations under five broad themes:

1. **Investment in (social) infrastructure** - including transport, housing, agriculture and social infrastructure such as jobs and training for carers and educators.
2. **Green jobs** - emphasising the need to be aware of reproducing occupational gender segregation and take steps to enrol women in STEM jobs crucial to a green economy.
3. **Sharing Care** - recognising that paid care jobs are low carbon and redress gender inequality and women undertake the majority of unpaid care work.
4. **Democracy and Ownership** - encouraging women’s community involvement in governance, especially BAME and disabled women, as they are underrepresented in all areas of political life and this needs rectified to democratise the economy.
5. **(Inter)national responsibilities** - reducing and redressing international inequalities.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

<sup>7</sup> Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015 [wcms\\_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcms_360572.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like?, Briefing from the UK Women’s Budget Group and Women’s Environmental Network, May 2020 [A-Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/A-Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf)

We need systemic change. To quote V'cenza Cirefice, an ecofeminist researcher speaking at a Feminist Recovery Plan webinar<sup>9</sup> you “*can't just add women and stir*”. We need to address the inequalities built into current systems and take a gendered lens to climate change solutions.

#### **1.4 Declaration of a Climate Emergency in Northern Ireland**

The current economic model is unsustainable leading to high levels of carbon emissions and global temperatures which continue to increase at unsustainable rates. The damage to the environment as a result of the way the economy is organised has resulted in increasing air pollution, extreme weather and devastating floods at both local, national and global levels. Northern Ireland is lagging behind in climate action and is the only nation in the UK without its own climate change law.

The impacts of this climate emergency are not equally felt with socially vulnerable groups such as older people, the very young, people in poor health and people in low incomes tending to be the worst affected.<sup>10</sup>

The current Assembly's declaration of a Climate Emergency will lapse when the next Assembly is elected. It is important that into the future the Northern Ireland Assembly continues to have a responsibility to act on this climate emergency. We therefore believe that this Bill should include a declaration of a Climate Emergency.

#### **1.5 Net Zero Target**

As previously stated the Women's Regional Consortium supports a strong climate change bill for Northern Ireland but we do not believe that the Climate Change (No.2) Bill is strong enough.

Northern Ireland accounted for 4% of UK greenhouse gas emissions which is slightly higher than our population share of 3%.<sup>11</sup> Northern Ireland has a poor record of

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vbM3GipR90>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.climatejust.org.uk/socially-vulnerable-groups-sensitive-climate-impacts#:~:text=Older%20people,%20the%20very%20young,to%20others%20in%20the%20populati>  
[on](https://www.climatejust.org.uk/socially-vulnerable-groups-sensitive-climate-impacts#:~:text=Older%20people,%20the%20very%20young,to%20others%20in%20the%20populati)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>

performance on climate issues with our emissions not falling at anywhere near the same rate as those in the UK. We reduced emissions by only 18% between the base year and 2019 compared to 44% in England, 45% in Scotland and 31% in Wales.<sup>12</sup>

Northern Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are higher than the UK average and are falling more slowly. Despite this poor performance the level of public concern on environmental issues is high. In 2020/21 82% of households were very or fairly concerned about the environment.<sup>13</sup> We believe that this shows there is an appetite for action on climate change in Northern Ireland and that our politicians should be ambitious in their efforts to make progress in this area given the existential crisis it poses.

We believe that we need strong and ambitious climate change laws with legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets in order for Northern Ireland to make real progress and to contribute its fair share. Climate inaction is no longer an option and Northern Ireland must play its part in emission reductions rather than relying on other nations to take responsibility for our failures.

While this Bill contains interim targets we believe they do not go far enough. The proposed 82% reduction in emissions by 2050 does not reflect Northern Ireland's contribution to the climate emergency. In addition, it does not reflect more ambitious net-zero carbon targets set by our neighbours in the other UK regions and in the Republic of Ireland. The Bill must include a net-zero target for Northern Ireland based on the most up to date scientific evidence available rather than political opinion.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/NI%20Greenhouse%20Gas%20Statistics%201990-2019.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>

## **1.6 Carbon Budgets**

The Women's Regional Consortium supports the inclusion of Carbon Budgets in the Bill which set out emissions levels. However, we would argue however that without associated Climate Action Plans which set out where cuts should be made these will not be focused and have the potential to be ineffectual. Climate Action Plans provide guidance and focus for the response to the climate emergency and without these clear plans there is a real danger that Northern Ireland's response would fail to meet its net-zero target.

We believe it makes sense to target the sectors who are the most significant contributors to climate change. The largest sector in terms of greenhouse gas emissions was agriculture representing 27% of emissions with transport at 23% and energy supply at 15%.<sup>14</sup> Ensuring that emissions reductions for these sectors are built into Climate Action Plans would be an important way of monitoring progress and ensuring that improvements are made.

We also agree with our colleagues in Friends of the Earth that nitrogen levels, biodiversity, soil and air quality are also key indicators of climate change and should also be included in the Bill.

## **1.7 Independent Oversight and Compliance**

The Bill puts significant emphasis on the advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC). While we acknowledge that the CCC is a respected international body we echo the concerns of Friends of the Earth that its advice is limited and reflects wider UK ambition only. As previously stated we believe that Northern Ireland's contribution to global emissions must be taken into account as well as its unique position in sharing a land border with the Republic of Ireland. Climate change and environmental damage do not respect borders therefore these considerations must also be included.

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>



We believe that rather than relying on advice from the CCC alone an independent Climate Commissioner should be created which would take account of advice from a wide range of climate advisory bodies. This would help to ensure regular reporting on actions to address the climate crisis as well as reflecting the unique circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Regional Consortium would like to see provision for the establishment and powers of a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner and Northern Ireland Climate Office. We stress the need for robust oversight on mitigating the impacts of climate change and believe it is important to have an independent office to carry out this work. This office would take account of the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland as well as providing a watchdog function on whether the government is doing enough to address the climate crisis. The success or otherwise of this role would be dependent on it having the necessary access to information and powers to enforcement to be able to effect real change.

The Bill currently includes no clear enforcement mechanism. Northern Ireland's slow rate of emission reduction demonstrates the need for an independent body to push forward important environmental protections and improvements. The establishment of a Climate Commissioner would provide this important enforcement role and would ensure that ministers and departments introduce policies and plans to reduce emissions. Without the scrutiny of a Commissioner, it is likely Northern Ireland will continue to lag behind in climate action. We believe that an independent Climate Commissioner would ensure there was effective compliance with targets.

### **1.8 Principle of Just Transition**

The Paris Agreement requires parties to increase action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while taking into account *“the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs.”*<sup>15</sup> The principle of just transition should support jobs and the growth of jobs that are climate resilient and environmentally and socially sustainable, support net-zero carbon investment and

---

<sup>15</sup> [Just Transition in the Paris Climate Agreement - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://www.ituc-csi.org/)

infrastructure, create work which is high-value, fair and sustainable, reduce inequality as far as possible and reduce, with a view to eliminating, poverty and social deprivation.

The Bill does not include a commitment to a just transition or that any green policies must improve lives or address existing economic and social inequalities. We believe that Northern Ireland's transition to a low-carbon society must be fair. We suggest that gender-proofing measures should be included in the Bill. We believe there is a need for the just transition to include gender-proofing of the Bill to eliminate gender inequality and ensure men and women benefit equally.

### **1.9 Rural Impacts for Women**

We believe it is important to assess the impact on rural communities of the proposals provided for in the Bill. The CEDAW Committee recommends that the UK ensures the equal participation of rural women and girls in policymaking processes on disaster mitigation and climate change, in line with its general recommendation No. 37<sup>16</sup> on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.

Rural women play a vital role in farm families, businesses, as entrepreneurs and custodians of our rural environment. entrepreneurship, improving villages, contributing to the environment and developing sustainable rural tourism, but rural women must be recognised as a target group and actively sought to engage in the Climate Change Bill from development to delivery. At present this is not happening at the level that is needed.

Proposals to decarbonise transport will have a greater impact in rural communities as there are additional challenges in providing for public transport and active transport in rural communities due to the dispersed settlement pattern and longer travel distances. Women are much less likely to have access to their own private

---

<sup>16</sup> General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, CEDAW/C/GC/37, February 2018  
[CEDAW/C/GC/37 \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/cedaw/gc/37)

transport than men. This means that women depend much more on public transport and are at an economic disadvantage to men.

The lives of rural women are affected directly and indirectly by their access to transportation. The absence of public transport in most rural areas makes the majority of women dependent on private automotive transportation. Rural women, including younger and older women, are some of the groups that are most often 'transportation disadvantaged'. Research indicates that rural women have more limited access to family vehicles than men.

The disadvantage women face in accessing reliable transportation affects their livelihoods, access to social services and impairs their ability to undertake the role of caregiver to family members. Lower incomes for women in rural communities mean that maintaining a vehicle may be beyond the reach of individuals, even when they need one to get to work<sup>17</sup> or access childcare.

Research conducted by NIRWN<sup>18</sup> confirmed lack of access to transport as a major issue for rural women accessing education, training work and childcare. It was clear also that the picture regionally varies greatly depending on where you live; with West of the Bann having particularly poor infrastructure. Often provision is linked to the school terms, resulting in no service during holidays.

There is a need to consider how to reduce the need for rural citizens to travel. Remote working needs to be supported in a more systematic way and employers encouraged to allow employees to work from home at least for part of the week (the feasibility of many jobs to be done remotely has been demonstrated by the pandemic). Local businesses in rural communities could expand to provide more local employment opportunities if broadband and mobile phone networks were improved across rural Northern Ireland. This can be seen as an opportunity for sustainable development in rural communities.

---

<sup>17</sup> Winson and Leach: Contingent Work, Disrupted Lives: Labour and Community in the New Rural Economy

<sup>18</sup> NIRWN 'Rural Voices' Research Report 2018

Northern Ireland needs significant investment in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in rural communities as well as investment in public transport infrastructure. These issues are currently being considered by the Department for the Economy consultation on the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland. There is a need to ensure that the grid is upgraded to allow widespread home charging of electric vehicles across the network and also a need to expand the number of public charging points and facilitate the installation of rapid charging points. The higher purchase costs of electric vehicles is still a factor and most moderate/low income households will need support to transition from petrol/diesel vehicles to electric vehicles.

Active travel in rural communities needs to be considered in much more detail in partnership with rural citizens to understand how it can be redesigned to meet travel needs. The Department for Infrastructure and local Councils need to prioritise how they can extend active travel networks into rural communities. Public and active transport needs to be considered in much more detail so it can be better facilitated in rural communities with dispersed settlement patterns to reduce the mileage required for EVs and to connect in with public transport networks.

## **Conclusion**

We believe that Northern Ireland, though currently far behind on climate change legislation, has the opportunity to be ambitious in developing this legislation and can lead the way using a feminist approach as outlined in sections 1.1 and 1.3.

The Women's Regional Consortium supports the principles of a Caring Economy as outlined in section 1.2 and suggest that measures which support a Caring Economy should be included in the Bill. This should include specific measures to recognise and include the care sector as part of our essential infrastructure and an important part of addressing the climate crisis. As previously stated the care sector is less polluting and care jobs are green jobs. This makes investment in this type of social infrastructure economically, environmentally and equality sound.