



Brexit Impacts



Quarterly Zine
Quarter 1
2023



INTRODUCING OUR QUARTERLY ZINE BREXIT IMPACTS EDITION

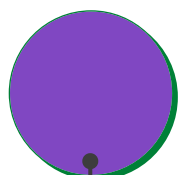
By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

The UK voted to leave the European Union in 2016 and seven years later the impact on Northern Ireland has been significant. Women were already the 'shock absorbers of poverty' and so Brexit has had additional adverse impacts. As another round of negotiations comes to a close the Women's Regional Consortium has decided to dedicate this edition of our quarterly Zine to looking at those impacts and how we can mitigate them.

Our first piece looks at how the Stormont Shutdown has resulted in the loss of the vital Holiday Hunger Payment and what you can do about that. Women's Support Network discussed upcoming Consortium research and looks at how the Cost of Living Crisis has been left unmitigated by Stormont. Finally, the Women's Resource and Development Agency launches a new campaign to get Stormont back on a stable basis.

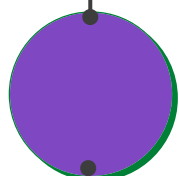
We hope you find the information contained in this edition useful as we continue to ensure a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas.

IN THIS EDITION



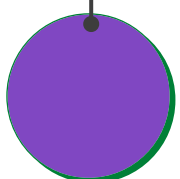
Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Movement Outraged by loss of holiday
hunger payment



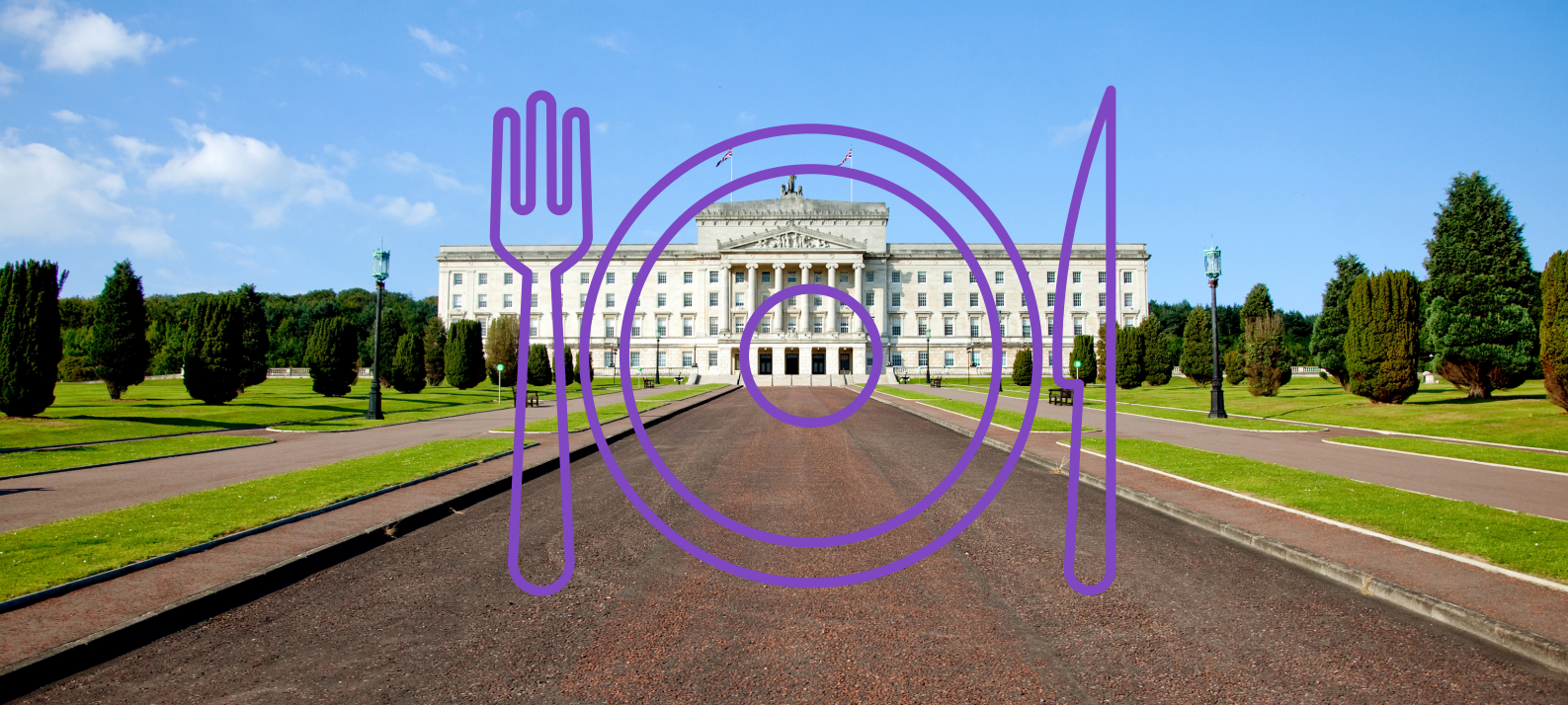
Women's Support Network

Women Struggling to feed their children and heat
their homes - demand Stormont helps



Women's Resource and Development Agency

Where's Our Democracy? Campaign Launched



WOMEN'S MOVEMENT OUTRAGED BY LOSS OF HOLIDAY HUNGER PAYMENT: WE DEMAND STABLE INSTITUTIONS NOW

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

It is an understatement to say that the women's movement is outraged by the ending of the Holiday Hunger payments. The payments will end on Monday 3rd April as the Department of Education no longer has the funding to deliver to the scheme. **This is because of the lack of a budget due to the Stormont Shut Down.**

What losing the Holiday Hunger Payment means:

- 96,000 eligible children (30% of the entire school population) lose £27 fortnightly payment
- Easter holiday hunger for many families
- Foodbanks put under strain
- Women will go into debt to feed their children

Any outstanding issues with the Westminster Framework can be resolved through negotiation with the EU and Westminster governments informed by input from NI political and civic representatives. Holding Stormont to ransom achieves nothing for anyone in NI. The Holiday Hunger scandal is just the latest example of what having such unstable institutions costs all the people of NI. The 'Where's Our Democracy?' campaign is calling for the urgent re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and long-term stability for our democratic institutions, in the spirit of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. You can read more about this campaign in the article by Aoife Mallon in this issue.

Holding Stormont to ransom achieves nothing for anyone in NI.

What you can do

- **Call Employers for Childcare on 0800 028 3008 to make sure you are receiving any financial support you are entitled**
- **Sign the [petition](#) to call for the urgent reinstating of the Holiday Hunger Payment**
- **If you are an organisation consider signing up to the [Where's Our Democracy Campaign](#) to push for stable institutions**



WOMEN ARE STRUGGLING TO FEED THEIR CHILDREN AND HEAT THEIR HOMES - DEMAND STORMONT GETS BACK TO WORK TO HELP

By Siobhán Harding | Women's Support Network

Over the last few weeks Women's Support Network on behalf of the Women's Regional Consortium have been carrying out research with women across Northern Ireland on the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis. We have talked to around 250 local women about the impact of rising prices on them personally, their children and families. We asked them about the bills they were finding most difficult to pay, their debts, their ability to save and how they are coping with the Crisis. The results are devastating and show the real life hardship and distress caused by rising prices for the most necessary of items including energy and food.

Initial results from the Cost of Living focus groups have shown that 91% of the women said that they were having difficulty paying their bills as a result of Cost of Living increases.

In terms of the bills they are finding it the most difficult to pay the top five were:

1. Food Shopping
2. Electricity
3. Gas
4. Travel (car, public transport)
5. Broadband/Internet bills.

Results from the new research:

- Of the 56% of women who were in debt, 82% said they had to borrow as a result of Cost of Living increases and the borrowing was just for essential bills.
- 62% reported that they had not been able to save recently and 31% said their savings had decreased. This has implications for their financial resilience to income shocks such as a cooker or washing machine breaking down or to cope with increases in interest rates if they are paying a mortgage.
- 90% felt that Cost of Living increases had impacted on their physical or mental health or both. It was clear from talking to women the very obvious connections between Cost of Living increases, debt and mental health issues.
- Of those who had children 78% felt that Cost of Living increases had negatively impacted on their children in terms of activities they were able to do with their children, extra-curricular activities/clubs they are able to be involved in, buying clothing, keeping them warm and getting them treats. Many of the women reported that their children were aware of the Crisis and the lack of money in the house. Some women reported that their children had actually offered them their own money (sometimes from a piggy bank) to try and help with bills.
- 92% of the women felt that Cost of Living increases had impacted on their ability to take part in social activities. Many reported they could have no treats of any kind which had significant impacts for them in terms of their wellbeing and mental health.

The top five ways that women reported coping with rising prices were:

1. Buying Cheaper Products
 2. Cutting energy use
 3. Using charity shops/second hand websites
 4. Reducing the use of car/public transport
 5. Relying on family/friends for help
- 78% reported that they felt cold or hungry or both because of Cost of Living increases.
 - 41% had to use a Foodbank or other charitable help because of rising prices.

When asked what would help them cope better with Cost of Living increases the top 5 answers were:

1. Increased help with energy bills
2. Cheaper public transport/help with fuel costs
3. Increases in the value of social security benefits
4. Better paid work
5. Increased help with housing costs.

Participant Quotes

"Inflation says 10% but everything has at least doubled. Everything is going up more than that. Gas is the same – I just can't get out of the emergency these days."

"The extras are all gone now, going out is a luxury, we hardly had it in the first place. Even the special occasion treats are gone now like for birthdays, etc. There's no spare income for it now."

"We're not living, we're just existing."

When asked about what needed to be done to make things better the women were incensed about the obscene profits made by the energy companies while they struggled to heat their homes. They were vocal about the need for energy prices to be capped. They wanted to see more support for those on benefits and in low-paid work so that benefits and wages were in line with the actual cost of essentials. Childcare was also raised as a major issue for women, with the costs preventing many women from working or

making women who were working feel like they were only working to pay a childcare bill.

When asked about what they think politicians should do to help them many of the women were adamant that our local politicians needed to get back to work to help people navigate their way through this Crisis. In the words of one of the women they felt that local politicians needed to “help their people!”

“Our Government need to get back on the hill to do more for NI. Your people are struggling, on our knees, starving, cold – why are you not up there fighting our corner? Why are they drawing a salary and expenses for not doing their jobs.”

Participant Quotes

“There is no give anymore – this time last year with my earnings I had a wee bit of money set aside if something breaks down or the car needs repaired. But I don’t have that now and it’s worrying. Anything breaks down I just don’t know what to do – it will have to go on a credit card but in the long run that just makes it worse.”

“We don’t put the heating on now we just use wee plug in heaters. I’ve been trying to top up the gas but it just keeps running out all the time so I’ve given up putting it on and I’m just using the wee electric heaters but that’s going to put my electric up.”

“I feel like I’m not doing enough for the kids and that makes me feel like I’m letting them down. I shouldn’t have to be going to my parents like a wee girl and asking them for money. I can’t get my head above water.”

“Heat, electricity and food the things you need to survive are literally like luxuries now. You’re having to make decisions if my child wants to eat and be warm what am I going to have to do without.”

“My wee one is on Aptamil formula it’s £16 a tin now. I was going without food to make sure she had it. I was eating dry cereal just so she could get the formula she needed. The stress of getting down to the bottom of her milk tin and thinking will I have enough to get her her milk.”



WHERE'S OUR DEMOCRACY?



‘WHERE’S OUR DEMOCRACY?’ CAMPAIGN

By Aoife Mallon | WRDA

In February 2023, the Women’s Policy Group launched the ‘Where’s Our Democracy?’ campaign, which is a campaign focused on improving the quality of democracy in Northern Ireland by restoring the spirit of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement and achieving stable, functioning government in the long term. Currently, Northern Ireland does not have a stable, functioning government. Rather, the people of Northern Ireland have been stuck in a perpetual cycle of political collapse and are frequently without democratic representation, due to political decisions that they have no control over.

In 1998, 71% of people in Northern Ireland voted in favour of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement and expressed their support for the establishment of a devolved power-sharing government in Stormont. 2023 marks the 25th Anniversary of the Agreement, and yet, 25 years on, many of the commitments made in the Agreement are outstanding. For example:

- Bill of Rights
- NI Civic Forum
- The right of women to full and equal political participation
- The protection and vindication of human rights for all
- A democratically elected Assembly capable of exercising executive and legislative authority

The 'Where's Our Democracy?' campaign is calling for the urgent re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and long-term stability for our democratic institutions, in the spirit of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. This includes ensuring that the people of Northern

Ireland have stable democratic representation and government institutions that actively work to uphold the principles and values of democracy. This includes upholding and strengthening human rights and equality protections for all people.

The 'Where's Our Democracy?' campaign is calling for the urgent re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and long-term stability for our democratic institutions

This campaign was established in February 2023, approximately a year after the most recent government collapse, following disagreements over the Northern Ireland Protocol. The DUP called for a renegotiation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, which came in the form of the Windsor Framework in March 2023. However, despite addressing several issues relating to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the Windsor Framework will pass through the Houses of Parliament without the DUP's support, as the Framework was not enough to convince them to go back into government. This means that the people of Northern Ireland will remain without democratic representation, with no indication of when the Executive might be re-established.

As the Windsor Framework is soon to become law and take effect in Northern Ireland, it is worth analysing the Framework for potential impacts on our society. To date, there has been much analysis of the promises and pitfalls of the Framework, including the issue of the Stormont Brake. The Stormont Brake was seemingly included in the Framework as a way to reassure the Northern Ireland parties that they will still have a say over whether new or updated EU laws will apply in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the existing 'petition of concern' mechanism; to use it, 30 MLAs must demonstrate that the law change in question will have a serious and lasting impact on the community they represent, and that they are working in good faith towards the maintenance of the devolved institutions. Additionally, the Stormont Brake cannot be used as a veto. Rather, where concerns are raised by 30 MLAs, this mechanism refers the issue to the British government who must then decide on the validity of the issue and negotiate with Brussels to find a resolution.

From the perspective of the 'Where's Our Democracy?' campaign, this is reassuring as it means the Stormont Brake cannot be used frivolously and cause constant delay and frustration within our government institutions. It also means that parties have a meaningful way to signal and address serious issues that may arise out of the democratic deficit we will experience now that the UK has left the EU. This reassurance, however, does not mean that the institutions will be restored, nor indeed do we know how stable the institutions will be if and when they are restored.

For this reason, the 'Where's Our Democracy?' campaign extends beyond simply calling for the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive. Even if the Assembly is restored, we must maintain pressure on our elected officials to ensure that the institutions are reformed to ensure stability and meaningful accountability for citizens.

The Women's Policy Group have established a working sub-group to co-ordinate the campaign and held an online launch event on 27th February 2023. As part of this launch, the Women's Policy Group published a 'Where's Our Democracy?' Charter which aims to gather signatures of those who agree with the key aims of the campaign and our vision for improving the state of democracy in Northern Ireland.

The 'Where's Our Democracy?' Charter can be accessed on the [WRDA website](#).

If you agree with the objectives of our campaign, you can sign the ['Where's Our Democracy?' Charter](#).

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The Cost of Living Crisis



**Women's Regional
Consortium**

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