

Research



Quarterly Zine
Quarter 4
2025



INTRODUCING OUR QUARTERLY ZINE RESEARCH EDITION

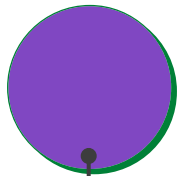
By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

The Consortium and many of the Consortium partners produce primary research as part of our work. In this edition of our quarterly zine we take an in-depth look at that research in action.

Our first piece by the Women's Budget Group looks at steps the government could take to address women's underemployment without punishing the vulnerable. This is followed by a summary of the Consortium's latest research paper 'Women, Skills & Barriers to Work'. This paper showed that women often face multiple barriers to getting work and in trying to access the education and skills they need to get 'good jobs'. Our third piece looks at new research from WRDA exploring the connection between domestic violence and homelessness in Northern Ireland. Our final piece by Women's Centre Derry looks at the overall impact and importance of the Consortium's research.

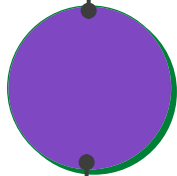
We hope you find the information contained in this edition useful as we continue to ensure a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas.

IN THIS EDITION



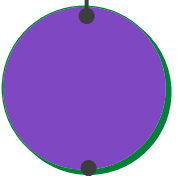
NIWBG

Reduce unemployment by removing barriers that keep women out of work



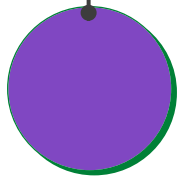
Women's Support Network

Consortium Research finds women need greater support to access training and work



WRDA

The connection between domestic violence and homelessness



Women's Centre Derry

Consortium research: connecting your voice with policy makers



**NI
WOMEN'S
BUDGET
GROUP**

REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT BARRIERS THAT KEEP WOMEN OUT OF WORK

By Alexandra Brennan | NIWBG

One of the main messages to come out of Draft Budget 2025-26 was around the current situation of the labour market. At the moment, we have the lowest unemployment rate out of the 12 UK regions, yet we have the 4th lowest employment rate and the highest rate of economic inactivity at 28.5%. Therefore, to make up for our low employment rate, Government and businesses will have to tap into those that are 'economically inactive'.

For both men and women, the primary reason for being 'economically inactive' was due to long-term illness or disability. During the Spring Statement, the UK Government announced changes to disability benefits in an effort to get more people who are 'economically inactive' due to long-term illness or disability into work, despite the absence of a smoothly-functioning healthcare system to provide the support that is needed. While this did not feature in the Northern Ireland Draft Budget 2025-26, the Department did recognise that long-term illness and disability rates contributed to low employment.

The second highest reason given for 'economic inactivity' amongst women was family/home responsibilities (25% or one in four women). Common barriers to women entering the labour market with family/home responsibilities are lack of and/or unaffordability of childcare, gaps in adult social care provision, and unreliability/infrequency of public transport. These are not insignificant issues, but they are key pieces of infrastructure that, if implemented/fixed, would allow many women to look for work or begin training/upskilling.

With the problem of low employment and high economic inactivity, it would seem that investment in care (both childcare and adult social care), transport, and training pathway programmes through community organisations and women's centres would feature heavily in the narrative of the Draft Budget and receive ring-fenced funding. However, the barriers listed above that keep many women out of work were relatively absent from the document. There was £50 million assigned to the Childcare Strategy, but that money will not go far without ring-fenced funding aimed at increasing development and investment in skills associated with care.

The NIWBG recommends that career pathways and pay progression are put in place for low-paid, precarious work like care, and that funding is increased for apprenticeships that are considered highly skilled yet require low-level qualifications, such as social care apprenticeships. Additionally, women's centres and community organisations must be included in funding arrangements aimed at reducing economic inactivity, as they are supportive lifelong learning environments, based in and trusted by local communities, offer childcare, and reach the most marginalised women.

Gaps in infrastructure will continue to keep women from getting into work/training, whether they are out of work due to long-term illness/disability or due to family/home responsibilities. To properly tackle the issue of low employment, low unemployment, and high economic inactivity, the barriers that keep women out of work must be a funding priority at both the devolved and UK-wide level.



CONSORTIUM RESEARCH FINDS WOMEN NEED GREATER SUPPORT TO ACCESS TRAINING AND WORK



By Siobhán Harding | Women's Support Network

The Consortium's latest research paper 'Women, Skills & Barriers to Work' showed that women often face multiple barriers to getting work and in trying to access the education and skills they need to get 'good jobs'.

Women's experiences of the labour market vary widely based on the impact of having dependent children, unpaid care responsibilities and existing gender stereotypes around education, training and employment. Addressing the barriers women face in accessing and staying in the labour market is critical for ensuring women's economic participation and financial wellbeing, tackling labour shortages and supporting economic growth.

Over half of the women surveyed by the Consortium about the barriers to work they faced said it was due to childcare related issues - 45% said they were out of work because they're looking after children and 17% said the cost and availability of childcare was the main barrier for them. Other barriers that emerged that prevented women from getting the jobs they really wanted to do were:

- **43% reported sickness/ill health/disability;**
- 38% said they needed education/training/skills;
- **30% reported a lack of confidence;**
- 30% said a lack of flexible working opportunities;
- **22% reported unpaid care responsibilities;**
- 25% said there weren't enough suitable jobs;
- **20% said a fear of coming off benefits and being worse off in low-paid work;**
- 20% reported the cost/availability of transport.

Sara from Atlas Women's Centre who took part in the research talked about the barriers she faced getting back to work and the support she received from Atlas:

"Although I had a good CV and work history, I faced real barriers to work because of prolonged sickness absence over the previous two years due to significantly struggling with my mental health and addiction. When I found recovery and sobriety, I had been isolated and shut off from the world for so long I really felt like I was starting again from nothing, that I had no value and had completely lost all my confidence and self-esteem. I didn't know how to even consider looking for a job, felt like a burden and that I was no longer employable."

"Atlas was a lifeline and a safe haven in early recovery, a place that helped me to feel worthy and find my value again, and a vital ongoing support to rebuild my confidence, self-esteem and nurture me to redevelop and refresh my skill set. Taking part in the Women Breaking Barriers 'Discover You' programme and CV and interview skills sessions were really transformative in helping me find myself and find the courage to start applying for jobs. I am now employed part-time in a role that uses my strengths and experiences, and is enabling me to gradually transition back to the world of work, as well as support my continuing recovery. Through Women Breaking Barriers I am also studying for my Level 2 in Counselling Skills, something I never thought possible – the course has reignited my love for learning and I am developing new and transferable skills to apply to my current (and hopefully future) job roles!"

A key finding from the research was the huge value that women placed on the community education available through Women's Centres and groups which was so critical to addressing the barriers they face. This community-based education and training is delivered based on local community needs and takes account of the complexity of women's lives and the barriers they face such as education, childcare, course fees and the academic environment. It provides a fundamental building block in supporting women to rebuild their confidence and their capability to enter the workplace. Women's Centres and groups are able to reach and engage those who are the most marginalised and some of those most affected by the legacy of the Troubles, austerity/welfare reform policies and the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Rachel from Shankill Shared Women's Centre shared the supports she received from the Centre which helped her to get work:

"I first joined the Empowering Young Women's project as a young mum with one small daughter aged 6 months. My biggest barrier to learning at this stage was lack of childcare and a sense of self-belief in what I could do. I came to Shankill Women's Centre and got involved in as many things as I could including educational courses, personal development programmes and working with other women. I did a nail technician course while my daughter was in the creche at the Centre, which resulted in me being able to get a job with a local beauty therapist. But then Covid happened and that stopped."

“During 2021 I had another child, a little boy. After the pandemic I came back to Shankill Women’s Centre and joined the Empowering Young Women steering committee and completed courses in money management and mentoring. I went on and completed as many other courses as I possibly could and had the opportunity to volunteer to facilitate Shankill Women Centre’s Life Skills programme, delivering to other young women. I was delighted to be offered part time employment with Shankill Women’s Centre whereby I was able to continue in the role. Over the last number of years my confidence has really grown because of the supports I received in the Centre. I have built up a strong network within community development practice and a toolkit for working with young women like me, which is my passion.”

As part of the research the women were asked what was a ‘good job’. They were unanimous in their views that ‘good jobs’ were flexible, well paid and had good working conditions; including the availability of family friendly policies to allow them to juggle their work with their home lives. These asks are not excessive or unachievable with the provision of greater flexibility, more investment in skills, better pay and favourable conditions of work.

The Consortium’s report recommended a series of actions to help women address the barriers they face getting into education, training and work. These include:

- accessible, affordable childcare;
- improving access to education and learning opportunities for people with disabilities;
- improving access to mental health support services;
- actions by government and employers to provide ‘good jobs’;
- long-term sustainable funding for community education.

Work to remove the barriers faced by women, investing in the creation of ‘good jobs’ and investing in community education like that provided by Women’s Centres would have significant benefits for women, their families, communities and the economy.

You can read the full Women, Skills & Barriers to Work report and a shorter summary of the main report on the Consortium’s website here:

[Full Research Report](#)

[Executive Summary](#)



THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HOMELESSNESS

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

Recent research published by the Women's Resource and Development Agency has found that due to the issues of disjointed services, lack of housing, and gender inequality, **for women in Northern Ireland leaving a situation of domestic violence means becoming homeless and entering a prolonged period of housing insecurity.** The root cause of women's homelessness is insufficient housing supply and gender inequality as this causes women to occupy a precarious position economically and makes women vulnerable to homelessness. Introducing policies to promote coordination between domestic violence services and homelessness services will not solve the issue of a pathway to sustainable housing if these fundamental issues are not addressed. Improving interdepartmental coordination and interventions focused on individual perpetrators will be insufficient to solve the issue, **cultural change dismantling patriarchal structures is required.**

Examining the data through an intersectional lens reveals the multiplying impacts of different oppressions on vulnerability to domestic violence and related homelessness. Motherhood, being subject to migration controls, or being from the working class all increase vulnerability and that this vulnerability increases with each added oppression. **All sources of data concur that domestic violence and domestic violence related homelessness is an increasing issue in NI.**

Analysis of this data identified aspects of domestic violence in NI which are specific to the jurisdiction such as a high rate of co-occurrence of alcohol and domestic violence crimes, underreporting to the PSNI, and the influence of paramilitarism both as an additional threat to domestic violence victims and, to a lesser extent, as an alternative source of justice. These features demonstrate the shaping influence the Conflict still exerts on the nature of domestic violence in NI a generation after the signing of the Agreement.

Reducing domestic violence related homelessness requires a broad range of measures including fundamental cultural change. **Specific measures must include a funded commitment to expanding treatment for alcoholism and improving access to mental health services as research shows alcoholism in NI is driven by unmet mental health needs and is a major contributor to more severe domestic violence crimes.** Trust in policing must be addressed, especially in the Loyalist and ethnic minority communities (more information on this can be found in pages 26-28 of the report). This should be done in tandem with improved access to legal alternatives to the criminal justice system as a way of replacing the role of paramilitaries. Training on the application of Section 5 is urgently needed for Trust staff as is training on EQIAs for all relevant Trust and government department staff. **Crucially, all measures must have secured funding attached to them before they are launched.**

Existing good practice could be built upon. For example, the provision for paid leave and salary advances to help Trust staff affected by domestic violence secure alternative accommodation should be included in all staff domestic violence policies in government departments and associated bodies. The TEO's EVAWG Strategy demonstrates the transformative potential of gendered policy making and a similar process should be used to develop the next NIHE Homelessness Strategy. Ultimately housing supply and gender inequality must be addressed before domestic violence related homelessness will be eliminated.

Examples of Best Practice for Employers;

- Employers should implement provision for specific paid leave and salary advances to help workers who are victims/survivors of domestic violence secure alternative accommodation
- Facilitate workers to move workstation, for example to another office location or to a desk away from a window
- Set up call screening or email screening for workers impacted by harassment from their abuser
- Line managers should agree with the victim/survivor on what information to share with other staff members.
- Provide clarity to your employees on Section 5 of the Criminal Justice Act
- Frontline services should use professional interpreters trained in domestic violence awareness
- Interpreters should be of the same gender as the service user and never be a service user's friend, partner, child, or other relative



Women's Centre Derry
ACCESS & EMPOWERMENT

CONSORTIUM RESEARCH: CONNECTING YOUR VOICE WITH POLICY MAKERS

By Rayna Downey | Women's Centre Derry

Research and consultations are an enormous part of the consortiums work, engaging in these ensures that women's voices are being heard. You have to engage with people on a grassroots level to ensure that Government Agencies have a clear understanding that the changes they are planning on implementing are going to affect women.

Working with MLA's and Government bodies such as the Dept of Finance, Dept of Health, Dept of Education, Dept of Justice, Dept of Work & Pensions and Dept of Communities etc; gives us a seat in the room where the decisions are being made.

In this past year the Women's Regional Consortium has fed into 23 different consultations, we have worked closely with these departments and provided them with a Gendered Lens perspective and Lived Experience perspective on Holiday Hunger, Health Costs, Winter Fuel Scheme, Gender Pay Gap, Free School Meals & Uniforms, Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay, Welfare Supplementary Payment Schemes, Brexit, Equality Legislation Etc.

Giving women a voice and bridging the gap between Government and Community & Voluntary sector is essential, we have to ensure a greater level of support for women in disadvantaged and rural areas.

**c/o TWN
Suite 2, Elizabeth House
116-118 Hollywood Road
Belfast BT4 1NY**

**Tel: 028 9031 9888
Email: info@wrda.net**

© 2025 The Women's Regional Consortium

WRC is funded by the RISP programme

Research



**Quarterly Zine
Quarter 4
2025**