

Women Delivering Change



Women's Regional
Consortium

Annual Report 2025

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Our Key Areas of Work

The 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. The Consortium ensures that there is a continuous two-way flow of information between government and the sector. It also ensures that organisations/centres and groups are made aware of consultations, government planning and policy implementation. In turn, the Consortium ascertains the views, needs and aspirations of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and takes these views forward to influence policy development and future government planning, which ultimately results in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities.

We organise our work across five key areas;

Advocacy and Leadership

Policy

Research

Service Support

Engagement



Working together in partnership to empower local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities

The established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas

Lead Partner Report

It is hard to believe that the Consortium has been in existence now for almost 12 years; as we enter the 12th year; we have seen real-time reductions in budgets, but the standard of work and commitment continues to grow.

Whilst the Consortium has done amazing work; it is quite possible that 2025/26 will be the last year of its existence in its present form. Going forward, I hope that whatever the outcome of the recent consultation will not detract or remove much of the vial work that is being done and still needs to be done in the future.

The work of the cliff-edge coalition has been amazing being to the forefront around the need to extend the benefit cap mitigation and their input has helped to secure an extension for a further 3 years.

I also must commend the work of WRDA's Policy Group in bringing many of the issues affecting women to all Ministers and Depts across NI. The research carried out throughout the year and the briefings carried out by the WPG and Siobhan Harding from WSN both in person and as part of the WPG. Many of our Ministers, politicians and Depts are aware of the valuable work that the Consortium does through the research that is conducted and published such as the recent research on women, skills, and barriers to work.

The work of Women's Centre Derry presentations by Rayna Downey was particularly important making sure that many agencies and individuals listen to and learn about the impact that poverty has on women and children including the impact of winter fuel cuts on older women.

Some partners within the Consortium also took part in the second Women's Parliament again bringing nine key issues that women had highlighted through research to the fore.

WOMEN'STEC managed the work undertaken by the Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group. It was a busy year of civic and political engagement for the group who have been advocating for the use of a gender responsive budgeting approach in public expenditure.

NIRWN were able to support several of their rural women to attend and highlight the needs of rural women.

Foyle Women's Information Network have worked tirelessly to keep the voices of women in the Northwest at the forefront engaging recently with local Councils to ensure VAWG remain a priority on the political agenda.



TWN's role remains one of support and monitoring across all Consortium members.

I applaud the work being done across the Consortium partners and whilst I have only been able to give a snapshot of the importance of the work, you can see that much has been done by all the partners involved to make sure that the needs and issues that affect women in the Northern Ireland are kept high on the political agenda, the annual report details all the workshops, training, research that the Members have been involved in throughout the year.

I would like to take this opportunity thank all the partners and the staff of DfC. The Consortium will continue to represent the needs and interests of women by continuing to campaign for equality, empowering women, raising aspirations, developing confidence, access to enterprise, education, training and employment to all women of all ages across NI.

The Partners

The Women's Regional Consortium is a coalition of seven women's organisations working together to empower local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities. Our members are:

Training for Women Network (Lead Partner)

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Support Network

Women'sTec

Foyle Women's Information Network

Women's Centre Derry

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Advocacy and Leadership

The Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas. In this capacity we advocate for the changes women want, represent women on various fora, and provide leadership to the sector.

Campaigns

The Consortium is involved in several campaigns supporting and providing leadership on issues including poverty, benefits reform, and functioning political institutions.

Cliff Edge

The Consortium is part of the Cliff Edge Coalition which is working to strengthen the welfare mitigations package for Northern Ireland. As a member of the Cliff Edge Working Group, Siobhán has undertaken a range of activities in the last year to support the work of the Coalition. This included making representations at a Communities Committee meeting on the need to take action on the Universal Credit five-week wait which is causing increased food bank use and debt. Siobhán was able to share results from Consortium research with women on the impact of Universal Credit.



Cliff Edge Working Group members attending Communities Committee Meeting, June 2024

The Working Group also carried out a significant piece of campaigning around the need to extend the Benefit Cap mitigation (due to run out in April 2025). The Working Group met with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Communities Committee, wrote to all MLAs about the Benefit Cap cliff edge and carried out a social media campaign highlighting the impacts of the loss of this payment. Women were more likely to be impacted by the loss of this vital mitigation and as part of the Working Group Siobhán highlighted the statistics which showed that 86% of the Benefit Cap mitigation payments were made to women. Lobbying work by the Coalition on this issue helped to secure an extension to the Benefit Cap mitigation for three years, announced by the Communities Minister in December 2024.

Where's Our Democracy?

In February 2024, when the Northern Ireland Assembly returned, the Women's Policy Group produced 15 high-priority requests referred to as the "Day 1 Asks". These were followed up with more detailed briefings, personalised to each Department and sent to each Minister along with a request to meet. One year on, the WPG compiled a report assessing progress against the Day 1 Asks and against the priorities identified in the Briefings. The *One Year On: Is the Assembly Working for Women?* report also assesses whether Ministers or their staff have met with the sector to hear our concerns and answer our questions in person. You can find the full report on WRDA's website.

Advocacy and Leadership



Members of the Women's Regional Consortium attending the launch of the EVAWG Strategy Launch

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

In September 2024, the Lobbyist was invited to see the launch of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which also has been recognised as one of the major priorities of the new Programme for Government. NIRWN was a member of the co design panel supporting The Executive Office with the development of the EVAWG Strategy & Framework and ensuring that it takes account of the needs of rural women. The WSL also continues to be a strong voice in the media on the issue of VAWG and misogyny more broadly, with dozens of radio pieces and print pieces this year.

FWIN has been engaging with Derry City and Strabane District Council on tackling VAWG. This includes pushing forward 10 key recommendations to improve women's safety, public awareness, and support services. FWIN has worked closely with key statutory bodies such as the PSNI and other women's groups to present a united front in advocating for meaningful change. FWIN has also participated in VAWG strategy discussions to ensure policies and funding reflect the needs of women in the North West.



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Representation and Meetings with Politicians

The Assembly returned in early February, and the Women's Sector Lobbyist was ready. On their first working day as Ministers, they were sent a full briefing from the WRDA's Women's Policy Group, as well as a request to meet. A separate briefing was also prepared and sent to the Leader of the Opposition. In the months since then, the WPG has met with the Justice Minister, the Finance Minister, officials from the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Junior Ministers from The Executive Office, and the Economy Minister. In addition, we have continued lobbying NIO and have met their Permanent Secretary and their new NI Minister Fleur Anderson.

All Party Groups (APG) have gathered pace, and the Lobbyist has continued attending these and added the APG on LGBTQIA Equality to the roster, and the WSL continues to be involved in the group shaping the forthcoming Childcare Strategy. The Lobbyist has also presented evidence on the VAWG Co-Design process to the Committee for the Executive Office, and to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in Dublin.

During the course of the year WSN's Policy Worker, Siobhán Harding has met with a number of politicians individually or part of the Women's Policy Group (WPG) to discuss various aspects of the Consortium's research and policy work. This included a WPG meeting with the Junior Ministers Pam Cameron MLA and Aisling Reilly MLA in which Siobhán highlighted the Consortium's research work around the impact of poverty on women. As part of the WPG Siobhán met with Conor Murphy MLA in his role as Minister for the Economy in which she highlighted Consortium research published during the year on Women, Skills & Barriers to Work. The full range of Consortium research was discussed in a meeting with Fleur Anderson MP particularly in the area of women's poverty, unpaid care, barriers to work and access to childcare.



Meeting with Chair and Deputy Chair of Communities Committee about Benefit Cap cliff edge, November 2024

Advocacy and Leadership



WPG Meeting with Conor Murphy, Minister for the Economy discussing Consortium research on Women, Skills & Barriers to Work

The NIWBG, which is managed by WOMEN'STEC, has also had high-level engagement with key stakeholders such as the Finance Minister, who has shown a particular interest in gender budgeting. The gender budgeting project team has met twice with the Minister, once in May 2024 and once in March 2025 following on from the gender budgeting motion passed in the Assembly in January 2025. Results from the first meeting are evident, with gender budgeting featuring in the Department's [Budget Sustainability Plan](#) report in October 2024. We have also met with Fleur Anderson in October 2024 to talk about her previous work in gender budgeting, provide an update on the status of gender budgeting in Northern Ireland, and have a wider discussion on gender equality issues in Northern Ireland. We also provided [oral evidence](#) to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 'funding and delivery of public services', following on from an informational conversation members of the NIWBG had with the Committee in December 2024.

Rayna Downey, Regional Outreach Development Worker for Women's Centre Derry, gave a presentation at the NIAPN "Women in Poverty a Priority" Event on 11th June 2024 to show the impact of poverty that women and children from the North-west are still currently facing and how Women's Centre Derry is supporting these women. Rayna gave a speech at the People before Profit Winter Fuel Cuts Rally on 12th Sept 2024 expressing concerns on how the recently announced Winter Fuels Cuts are going to impact on the older generation of women. Rayna Attended the launch for the Community Foundations Women's Health Findings report on 21st October at Stormont Hotel.

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The Women's Parliament

The original Women's Parliament was organised by the Women's Sector Lobbyist based at WRDA. This vital work has now been taken on by the Assembly Engagement Team as one of the inclusion parliaments. The Assembly Engagement Team based the nine topics chosen for the day on the outcomes of a public survey; these were the top choices made by members of the public.

Consortium Partners Women's Support Network, Women's Resource and Development Agency, and NIRWN were delighted to take part in the second Women's Parliament at the NI Assembly. Elaine Crory, the Women's Sector Lobbyist, introduced the session and thanked the Assembly Engagement Team for organising the day and thanked the hundreds of women who responded to the survey and outlined their priority issues. The delegation from the Women's Resource and Development Agency spoke on the topics of Access to Health Services and Affordable Childcare. Two participants from WRDA's Maternal Advocacy and Support Project spoke passionately about their lived experience of these issues.



Women's Parliament Speakers and Intervenors with the Speaker and Deputy First Ministers at the Women's Parliament Event, February 2025

WSN spoke on the topic of Unpaid Care. This followed Consortium research which was carried out in partnership with Carers NI on Women, Unpaid Care and Employment. We discussed the gendered nature of care, the low value placed on this work and the low value of Government support through Carer's Allowance. We also highlighted details from the research which showed that while many women providing unpaid care want to enter or remain in the workplace alongside their caring responsibilities, a lack of workplace protections and support from the health, social care, childcare and education systems often means leaving employment, reducing their working hours or facing a daily struggle trying to balance caring with work. We were pleased to have Natasha McClelland, an unpaid carer, who balances working full time with the care of her two severely disabled adult children speak alongside WSN and give voice to her experiences and the changes she would like to see.

Advocacy and Leadership

NIRWN was delighted to be able to support three of their members to represent the voice of rural women at the Women's Parliament. NIRWN members Edel Gribbin, Denise Kelso and Barbara Campbell had the opportunity to speak on issues affecting rural women in their areas. One of the NIRWN speakers remarked after the event *"Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of the Women's Parliament. It was really special to listen to all those women in the chamber - together we could push for some things!!"* The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir MLA, the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA and Junior Ministers, Aisling Reilly MLA and Pam Cameron MLA were also present to respond to the motion.

Political Advocacy

Leadership in the Sector

The WPG continues to grow in size and in stature, becoming a focal point for shared work and community building in policy spheres in Northern Ireland. In the past year we have led groups of women to meetings with the NIO, with Ministers and with Departmental staff.

The WSL is part of the [All Island Women's Forum](#) run by the National Women's Council of Ireland, and its sub-group on North South Relations. The WSL has also recently joined the NI UK-EU Civil Society Working Group, designed to flag issues around Brexit and the NI Protocol as they pertain to women.

Women's Manifesto & Hustings

Following the calling of a snap election in May, the WPG worked at pace to produce a [Women's Manifesto](#) for the July Election, and did so successfully covering a wide range of policy issues,. The Manifesto was launched in June with an event incorporating a Hustings event, attended by six political parties. Our plans are to continue to lobby at Westminster and in local Councils as well as at Stormont



Politicians speaking at the Women's Policy Group Hustings in June 2024.

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Building Capacity

WRDA delivered two Community Campaigners Courses, both in-person and online. The Community Campaigners is designed to equip women with the skills to campaign and lobby on issues which matter to them. The course modules cover critical thinking, communication skills, strategic planning, media training and how to write a campaign about an issue you are interested in. To provide equality of access participants do not need prior knowledge, education or training, just an interest in developing their campaigning skills for the good of the community



“The Community Campaigners course exceeded my expectations in so many ways. From the start, the accessibility of the course being held online made it extremely inclusive. The fact that all information was sent directly to me, either before or after each session, was a huge help in understanding and processing everything as I went along over the four weeks. The course was fantastically structured, with each topic presented in a clear and engaging way, which allowed me to build a solid foundation of knowledge.

One of the aspects that really stood out to me was how the course provided me with invaluable skills. I learned how to create engaging social media content, gained insight into essential online design tools, and picked up techniques for managing digital campaigns—skills that have been so useful in my current efforts, and feedback was, as always, excellent.”

WRDA delivered two Women in Leadership courses to Greenway Women’s Centre and Teach Eilis. This is a very practical course, with a focus on existing skills and how to use them to create positive change, delivered over four half days. The aim of the course is to give women the confidence to challenge themselves to reach their full potential and use their skills to make a meaningful difference to their lives and communities. It approaches leadership through a



Advocacy and Leadership

Gender Budgeting

The NIWBG's joint gender budgeting project with researchers at Ulster University (funded by JRCT) has been busy over the past year as interest in gender budgeting grows across sectors. Work has continued with Derry City and Strabane District Council following the 2023 gender budgeting motion; members of the team presented to the Senior Leadership Team in October 2024 and the Chief Executive approved the development of a gender budgeting pilot in the area of leisure. Since then, a working group has formed and the team is working closely with those key stakeholders on a data scoping exercise. The gender budgeting project also held three 'train-the-trainer' sessions over summer 2024. These sessions, held in Derry~Londonderry, Cookstown, and Belfast, saw participants from our previous gender budgeting training sessions undergoing training to deliver their own gender budgeting training sessions to groups of their choice.

In September, the NIWBG hosted the first in-person 4 Nations Conference alongside the Wales Women's Budget Group (WWBG), the Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG), and the UK Women's Budget Group (UKWBG). The conference, titled *4 Nations Perspectives: Care, Women and a New Economy*, brought together experts, policymakers, and advocates from across the UK to reflect on the status of women's economic inequality and explore the effective policy tools needed to drive transformational change. The Finance Minister, Dr. Caoimhe Archibald, opened the two-day event and the first day was closed by the Head of the Civil Service, Jayne Brady, MBE. One session reflected on the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy's Report, [*Creating a Caring Economy – A Call to Action*](#), five years on from its publication. Another panel session explored gender budgeting advancements across the 5 nations. Three breakout sessions focused on childcare, unpaid care, and adult social care. Additionally, keynote speeches from Professor Diane Elson and Scherie Nicol from the OECD summed up both days with informative presentations and discussions. Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, and each nation has reported positive engagement with key stakeholders following on from the conference.

In June 2024 the NIWBG and NIAPN organised an event in Derry~Londonderry which looked at the cost of living crisis in the city and explored how gender budgeting could be an anti-poverty tool. Another event held online in November 2024, was a 4 nations response to the Autumn Budget Statement. Attendees from across the 4 nations heard what the announcements from the Chancellor would mean for women in each nation, and what the devolved nations aspired to see in their own budgets.

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Policy

The Consortium ensures that there is a continuous two-way flow of information between government and the sector. We ensure that organisations, centres, and groups are made aware of consultations, government planning and policy implementation. We also provide a route for women to participate in this process.

The work of the Consortium aims to connect grassroots women with decision makers and ensure the views of women are taken into account when decisions are being made that impact on women's lives. The volume of consultations from the NI Assembly continues to grow and the Consortium has undertaken significant work in this area during the year. WSN submitted 22 responses to consultations from both the NI Assembly and from Westminster Government across a range of issues as follows:

- ⇒ **The Health & Disability Green Paper (DWP, Westminster)** – the Consortium response focused on the impact any likely changes to PIP would have in Northern Ireland where there are more PIP claimants. We advocated for a cash-first approach for payment of PIP to provide dignity, choice and control for disabled people.
- ⇒ **Department for Infrastructure Budget EQIA (letter response)** – the Consortium made a short response to this consultation welcoming the inclusion of Consortium research in the consideration of available data and research. We highlighted that proposed reductions in funding for Translink would have greater impacts for women who are more likely to rely on public transport and could have adverse impacts for women's participation in society especially for rural women.
- ⇒ **Department for Communities Budget EQIA** – the Consortium made a significant response to this consultation as one of the Departments which is most closely aligned to the work of the Consortium through its work with women in disadvantaged and rural areas of Northern Ireland. We raised concerns about proposals for budget cuts which would impact on those on the lowest incomes many of whom will be women and stated that the gendered impacts were not sufficiently addressed within the consultation
- ⇒ **Department of Health Budget EQIA (letter response)** – the Consortium response focused on the lack of gender data considered within the EQIA and provided a list of useful data, including research from the Consortium, which were relevant to the consultation
- ⇒ **Engagement on Welfare Supplementary Payments** – the Consortium response highlighted the value of the mitigations payments particularly to women and called for them to be continued and further strengthened to address rising poverty levels in Northern Ireland.
- ⇒ **Help with Health Costs** – the Consortium response focused on the importance of this scheme to those on low incomes and called for all those on Universal Credit to be automatically passported to this help.

Policy

- ⇒ **Gaps in Equality Legislation** – the Consortium response highlighted the lack of harmonisation of equality legislation, better implementation of Section 75, the need to end gender neutral policy making and the need to progress the full suite of Social Inclusion Strategies including the Gender Equality Strategy.
- ⇒ **Domestic Abuse Safe Leave** – the Consortium response called for the right to access Safe Leave to be provided following a single incident of domestic abuse, any guidance to be developed in conjunction with those with lived experience and Trade Unions, flexible notice requirements and the ability to take Safe Leave in periods shorter than one day if required.
- ⇒ **School Uniform Policy** – the Consortium response focused on the need to address the rising costs of school uniform including PE gear and highlighted that these costs are often borne by women. We called for a school uniform policy that puts affordability at its core and raised the findings from the Consortium’s Cost-of-Living research which showed how women struggled to meet school uniform costs.
- ⇒ **The ‘Good Jobs’ Employment Rights Bill** – this was a huge consultation and the Consortium’s response highlighted the interim findings from Consortium research on Women, Skills & Barriers to Work. The response called for the introduction of paid Carer’s Leave as a day one right, the banning of zero-hour contracts, fair and transparent allocation of tips, gratuities and service charges, a day one right to request flexible working, a right to neonatal care leave and pay and an extension to paternity leave.
- ⇒ **Eligibility for Healthy Start for groups who have no recourse to public funds or are subject to immigration controls (Department of Health & Social Care, Westminster)** – the Consortium response highlighted the Consortium’s research with women on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis which showed that awareness levels for Healthy Start in Northern Ireland were low and that it provided important help in accessing formula milk and fruit and vegetables which many women were really struggling to afford.
- ⇒ **Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most (Programme for Government)** – the Consortium response focused on the need to expand the 9 key priority areas in the draft plan to include the urgent need to address poverty.

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- ⇒ **TEO Budget EQIA (letter response)** – the Consortium response raised concerns about the Department’s budget shortfall and how this might impact limit the ambitions of the Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Framework. We raised the need for the Department to expand the range of data and research they considered to include research from the community and voluntary sector.
- ⇒ **Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay (DWP, Westminster)** – the Consortium response welcomed proposals to strengthen SSP as part of a package of measures which will help to address gender inequality as well as enhancing workers’ rights. We called for the abolition of the earnings threshold in SSP, the removal of the waiting period for sick pay, an increase in sick pay to at least the Real Living wage, payment of sick pay from day one of sickness absence and extending sick pay to the self-employed.
- ⇒ **Programme for Government EQIA** – the Consortium response criticised the EQIA for not considering a more complete range of data, including Consortium research, which can often provide missing qualitative data which would be invaluable in formulating the Programme for Government and assessing the equality impacts. The response also highlighted our concerns about the draft Programme for Government in terms of being weak on actions, timescales and outcomes and this can only result in a weak EQIA.
- ⇒ **Consultation on the establishment of a Just Transition Commission** – the Consortium’s response welcomed the establishment of a Just Transition Commission and called for specific inclusion of a women’s sector representative on the Commission.
- ⇒ **Review of Free School Meals and Uniform Grant Eligibility Criteria** – the Consortium’s response stressed the need for increasing free school meals provision and specifically highlighted the issues that self-employed people, including farming families, face in accessing Universal Credit and therefore help with the costs of school meals and uniforms.
- ⇒ **Gender Pay Gap Reporting Regulations** – the Consortium response supported the introduction of these Regulations but suggested that the threshold of 250 employees was much too high given that Northern Ireland is a small business economy.
- ⇒ **Holiday Hunger Survey** – the Consortium response to this Private Members Bill by Danny Baker of Sinn Féin gave strong support for the re-introduction of Holiday Hunger payments but stressed the problems with the existing eligibility criteria for Free School Meals as an effective targeting mechanism for these payments.

Policy

- ⇒ **Gaps in Equality Legislation** – the Consortium response highlighted the lack of harmonisation of equality legislation, better implementation of Section 75, the need to end gender neutral policy making and the need to progress the full suite of Social Inclusion Strategies including the Gender Equality Strategy.
- ⇒ **Consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland** – the Consortium response welcomed the development of a Fuel Poverty Strategy but stressed that it needed to be adequately funded and have specific, measurable targets for reducing fuel poverty.
- ⇒ **Consultation of policy changes to the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment** – the Consortium response focused on how the decision to means test the Winter Fuel Payment will have a greater impact on women and pointed to issues with uptake rates for Pension Credit meaning that many who would be eligible could miss out on this payment.
- ⇒ **Draft Budget 2025-26 Consultation (letter response)** – the Consortium response focused on the flaws in the consultation process with a limited amount of time to respond, problems with the questions asked and the vagueness of the consultation.

The Women's Budget Group Group submitted 11 responses to consultations and calls for evidence during the year as follows

- ⇒ **Department for Infrastructure Budget EQIA**
- ⇒ **Department for Communities Budget EQIA**
- ⇒ **Department of Health Budget EQIA**
- ⇒ **The Executive Office Budget EQIA**
- ⇒ **Department of Education Budget EQIA**
- ⇒ **Department for Economy Good Jobs Bill**
- ⇒ **The Northern Ireland Executive Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027.**
- ⇒ **DAERA Establishment of a Just Transition Commission**
- ⇒ **Equality Commission NI Draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028**
- ⇒ **Department for Communities Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations**
- ⇒ **Department of Finance Draft Budget 2025-2026**

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WRDA and the Women's Policy Group submitted 34 responses to consultations and calls for evidence during the year as follows:

- ⇒ WPG NI Response to United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Obligation on Public Authorities) Bill - March 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Draft Budget 2025/26 Consultation - March 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Help With Health Costs consultation - March 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Consultation on Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy - March 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Scheme - March 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill Consultation - February 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Holiday Hunger Survey - February 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations - February 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Free School Meals and Uniform Grant Eligibility - February 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the PMB: Peoples Housing Bill Consultation - January 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Just Transition Commission Consultation - January 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Department of Education Budget EQIA 2024-25 - January 2025
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Draft Equality Impact Assessments on the Programme for Government December 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the PSNI Race and Ethnicity Action Plan 2025-27 Consultation - December 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay - December 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to The Executive Office Budget EqlA 2024-25 - November 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Draft Programme for Government - November 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Department of Justice Call for Views on a Victim and Witness Strategy - November 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Eligibility for Healthy Start - October 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Evidence Submission to Education Committee's Inquiry into Relationships & Sexuality Education in Northern Ireland - October 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Evidence Submission to TEO Committee Inquiry on Gaps in Equality Legislation - September 2024
- ⇒

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- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Truth Recovery - Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses - September 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Consultation on the PPS Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Stalking - September 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Good Jobs Employment Rights Consultation - September 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Domestic Abuse Safe Leave Consultation - September 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to School Uniform Consultation - September 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Department for Communities Budget EQIA 2024-25 - August 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Department of Infrastructure Budget EQIA 2024-25 - August 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Department of Health's Budget EQIA 2024-25 - August 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Modernising support for independent living: the health and disability green paper - July 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Foundational Review of Civil Legal Services - June 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to Rethinking Our Resources: Measures for Climate Action and a Circular Economy in NI - June 2024
- ⇒ WPG NI Response to the Department for the Economy's consultation on Onshore Petroleum Licensing Policy – April 2024

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Research

The Consortium conducts wide-ranging research into areas of relevance to women in disadvantaged and rural areas. The Consortium ascertains the views, needs, and aspirations of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and takes these views forward to influence policy development and future government planning, which ultimately results in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities.

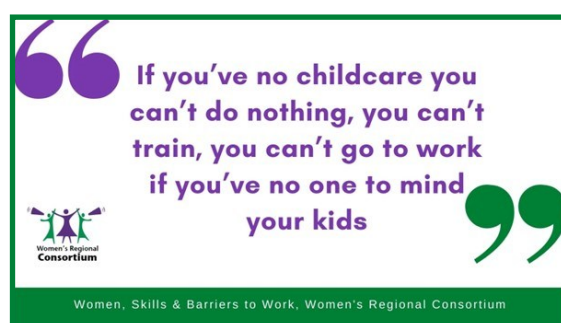
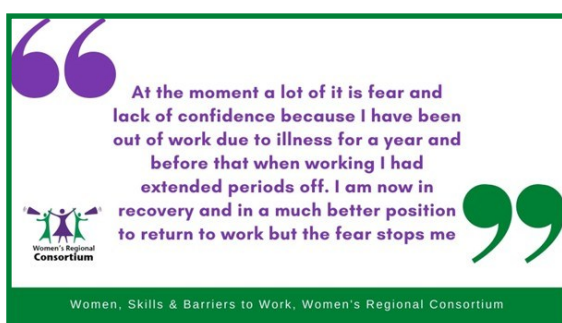
Women, Skills & Barriers to Work

In December 2024 the Consortium published a research paper on Women, Skills and Barriers to Work. This followed a series of focus group discussions in Women's Centres and groups across NI to gather the experiences of 60 women on the reasons why women are out of work, the barriers to their participation in the workforce and in education and training and the skills and jobs they most want to do.

The findings in this research show that women face multiple barriers to employment, most commonly their own illness and/or disability, childcare needs and unpaid care responsibilities. Being out of work or under-employed caused women to experience other barriers including lack of confidence/self-esteem issues and a need for training and education to enable them to get into work or to gain appropriate skills to access better-quality work. Issues of low pay, inflexible and insecure work, which are particularly relevant for women, lead to a fear of moving into work and losing social security benefits which could make them worse off.

It was clear from the research that most of the women wanted to work but needed supports to be able to achieve this. The report recommended actions to help women address the barriers they face including 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' and long-term sustainable funding for community education.

Addressing the barriers women face in accessing and staying in the labour market is critical for ensuring women's economic participation, tackling labour shortages and supporting economic growth. The ability to access 'good jobs' is equally as important for women's personal and financial wellbeing. The report stressed that work to remove the barriers faced by women and investing in the creation of 'good jobs' would have significant benefits for women, their families, communities and the economy as a whole.



Research

The connection between domestic violence and homelessness in Northern Ireland

The Women's Resource and Development Agency has continued the work of our Research Hub by published a new research paper as part of our work on Violence Against Women and Girls. The connection between domestic violence and homelessness in Northern Ireland was originally presented as a thesis as part of an MSc in Social Policy in 2024.

The research identifies 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.

The core of the research is an intersectional feminist policy analysis of documents from the Health and Social Care Trusts, Housing Executive, and Stormont Departments. This analysis has identified three major barriers to better policy making; funding, gender neutrality, and a misunderstanding of Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 which places a legal duty on anyone who knows or believes that a serious criminal offence has been committed to report this to the police. The research contends that these barriers are ideological and reflect misogynistic choices.

The Bordex Project

Women's Centre Derry continues to engage with various organisations throughout the north-west and with the WSN Policy worker in research consultations and reports, hearing about the experiences of the women from Derry~Londonderry. Rayna and Catherine participated in a piece of research 'Community Practices in Everyday Safety & Security on the Island of Ireland', by the Bordex project. The aim of the project was to produce new knowledge on the development and management of (in)security at the local level, investigating community resilience and the role of grass-root institutions in maintaining peace and security, to create accessible outputs aimed at civil, policy and political actors to inform debate and develop the post-Brexit security field on the Island.

At A Glance

**Centering
women's
experience
in our
research**

**Working in
partnerships
to deliver
outstanding
research**

**Developing
researcher
skills**

Service Support & Engagement

The Consortium has links with hundreds of organisations across Northern Ireland, including networks, women's groups and community organisations. Through our membership networks we provide support, signposting and guidance to aid the strategic development and delivery of services for women in disadvantaged and rural areas. We also promote the work and services of local women's organisations, centres and groups. When surveyed in January 2025 92% of Consortium members rated the services they receive from the WRC as excellent or good. This demonstrates the quality of work done by the Consortium partners.

The Consortium aims to empower local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities. Engagement with individual women and organisations relating to their needs through our social media, information distribution, events, and individual outreach is a key aspect of achieving this aim.

Child Poverty Taskforce

In November 2024 Atlas Women's Centre in Lisburn hosted the UK Government's Child Poverty Taskforce. Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson MP and Fleur Anderson MP met with a group of women from Atlas Women's Centre to discuss the poverty they experience and hear their views on what needs to change. After this meeting the MPs met with a number of policy workers to discuss ways to tackle child poverty in Northern Ireland. Siobhán spoke to them about research work on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on women as well as issues around the burden of unpaid care, childcare and the barriers to work women face which are all subjects of Consortium research papers.



Members of the Child Poverty Taskforce including Bridget Phillipson MP and Fleur Anderson MP meeting with staff from Atlas Women's Centre in Lisburn and policy workers on poverty

2024 Christmas Appeal

This Christmas period, Foyle Women's Information Network expanded our Christmas Appeal supporting over 320 children from families in need. The campaign saw a significant increase in donations from both local businesses and community supporters. FWIN continued to prioritize supporting vulnerable families facing financial hardship during the holiday season.

Service Support & Engagement

Royal College of Midwives – Healthy Start

Consortium research on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Women found there were issues with awareness of the NHS Healthy Start Scheme which provides help for those on a low income who are pregnant or who have young children to buy milk, fruit and vegetables. Following this research the Consortium partnered with Ulster University and Atlas Women's Centre in Lisburn to create a short animation about the scheme to help raise awareness in Northern Ireland. In June 2024 as part of this work Siobhán and Dr Alexandra Chapman from Ulster University met with the Royal College of Midwives to highlight this work and encourage dissemination of the video.



Royal College of Midwives representatives meeting with Siobhán Hardin, WSN and Dr Alexandra Chapman, Ulster University to raise awareness of Healthy Start Scheme.

Events and Community Engagement

FWIN provides a diverse range of events throughout the year to foster community engagement, empowerment, and social connection. Events held this year include, Bingo nights, Bus trips, Quiz nights, Craft & Networking Events, Health fairs, Inspirational Women Panels. FWIN also celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2024.

The Cost of Living Crisis, Poverty and the Benefit System are at the forefront of the consortiums work this past year and their impact on women and families. Rayna has attended, hosted and participated in various panels and research gathering sessions to ensure the voices of women from WCD are heard. Rayna Attended the launch of the Barrier to Work Research by Siobhan Harding and provided organised various Focus Groups throughout the year at WCD gathering information for various consultations and reports. Rayna also attends meetings with the Equality Commission, Cliff edge Coalition, National Women's Council, Local Politicians & MLA's and various other engagement agencies to ensure that the needs of women in the north-west are being met.

WCD also organised and facilitated the International Women's Day "Under one Roof" event on 7th March 2025 at the Guildhall. The event hosted 32 Organisations from throughout the North-west and was attended by over 200 women from the city. The theme for this year's event was Violence against women and Girls.

At A Glance

92% of Consortium members rated the services they receive from the WRC as excellent or good

90% of Consortium members rated the level of information provided by the WRC as excellent or good

Service Support & Engagement

Women's Education

Women's Centre Derry provided 1605 course places to 897 individual women throughout the year 24/25. To enable access for women to attend these courses 429 individual children were provided with Free childcare in our onsite creche. A variety of courses were provided for example employability, accredited education, child development support, parenting workshop, wellbeing programmes advocacy support, peace and integration programmes etc. This year 246 Women gained accredited Qualifications 26 women gained employment and 17 women received 1-1 Counselling Support. The centre supported many families living in high deprivation by assisting with food poverty, clothing, winter fuel etc.

FWIN delivered crochet and craft classes providing a relaxing, intergenerational space for women to learn new skills and connect. FWIN also delivered a Six-week 'Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls' programme. This programme provides education, awareness, and empowerment for women to navigate and challenge gender-based violence.

In response to demand for more information on climate change and the environment evidenced in the membership survey we delivered another session of our Feminist Responses to Climate Change Discussion Group. This new group was planned, designed, and delivered by the WRDA Communications and Membership Worker for the WRC utilising reading and visual material available for free. The group met for six weekly sessions in October and November 2024 and looked at climate change as a form of gender-based violence. As part of our commitment to our key area of work on Engagement and Service Support the Feminist Responses to Climate Change Group Guide has been made publicly available on the WRC website. This allows any feminist group to run the sessions.

Rural

Craft Workshops with NIRWN

In April Ardstraw Women's Group held a Fused Glass Workshop in Newtownstewart. Some beautiful creations were produced by the group with the assistance of facilitator Natasha Duddy. We hosted an online Watercolour Pencil Workshop in August at which participants produced some beautiful cards. The workshop was facilitated by



Kelli Johnston from Lets Craft NI. Both of these workshops were delivered as part of a programme of activity to address social isolation and promote inclusion and culminated in a Celebration Event at the Hill of the O'Neill, Dungannon in August for all programme participants.

Service Support & Engagement

Epilogues Celebration Event

NIRWN along members who previously participated in the Epilogues Good Relations, peace and reconciliation Programme attended a Celebration Event of the Programme at St Comgall's Conference Centre, Belfast in June. 'Epilogues' is a workshop based education



programme using TV drama and filmed testimony to engage people in the everyday work of peace-building and responsible citizenship. This was achieved through direct engagement from both sides of the community through workshops and residential.

Information Stands

NIRWN hosted information stands at the following events where the work of the Consortium was promoted and shared:

- ⇒ Rural Conference, Ballymena April 2024
- ⇒ EAWWG Event - Glenavon Hotel on October 2024
- ⇒ Health Fayre - Ballinderry Community Hub October 2024

Omagh and Fermanagh Pride

NIRWN attended the first of the 2024 Rural Pride events in Omagh in June 2024 and were proud to display our 'Big Quilt'. The quilt was created by NIRWN members. We also brought it along to the very first Fermanagh Pride event in September.

Bespoke Training & Workshops

- ⇒ 2 x Smartphone Photography sessions delivered to Chatty Chicks group in Coleraine in Oct 2024
- ⇒ Scam Awareness Training delivered online to rural women in October 2024
- ⇒ Two Online Safety Sessions for Parents in rural areas delivered online in November and December 2024

IDRW October 2024

To celebrate International Day of Rural Women NIRWN hosted a series of online training and events as selected by members:

- ⇒ Seasonal Reset-wellbeing; how to tackle overwhelm and manage expectations of self and others
- ⇒ Cookalong-Autumnal Favourites
- ⇒ Yoga and guided meditation-physical activity to promote wellbeing

At A Glance

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90% of Consortium members rated the level of information provided by the WRC as excellent or good

Service Support & Engagement



Social Media and Communications

When surveyed in January 2025 90% of Consortium members rated the level of information provided by the WRC as excellent or good. This indicates the WRC is continuing to provide useful information. The core of information provided by the WRC is disseminated via email updates and social media by the WRDA Communications and Membership Worker. The WRC publishes a general Ezine every month which covers the work of all seven Partners with a focus on upcoming events, training and funding news. A separate monthly Lobbying, Policy and Research Bulletin is also issued to our membership. This update focusses on consultation responses, lobbying campaigns and primary research produced by WRC Partners.

The Consortium also publishes a quarterly magazine taking a more in depth look at issues that matter to women in NI. Each edition of the WRC Quarterly Zine focuses on one of the Consortium's Key Areas of Work.

WRDA distributes a monthly ezine and bi-monthly newsletter to over 1,500 women and organisations. WRDA's social media accounts include Facebook, X, Instagram, Bluesky and the oldest community based E-group in Ireland, WomensLink. Through our wide range of channels we reach 7,386 women and organisations.

Service Support & Engagement

Social Media and Communications continued

FWIN issues weekly e-bulletins to 1,000 women across the region and our monthly newsletters are distributed via post, ensuring those not connected to the internet remain well-informed on upcoming events, opportunities, and key issues. FWIN's social media reach has grown to 6,500 women across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

The Consortium's social media channels are used to raise awareness of the work of the partners and so operate as a booster for their social media presence. The Consortium X account has 1,960 followers and has published over 1000 tweets. We posted to Facebook over 500 times. The website is updated monthly and has a large resources section, 195 new pieces of content have been added in 2024/5.

Over the next twelve months the Consortium will continue to offer a wide range of reliable information across all our channels.

At A Glance

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90% of Consortium members rated the level of information provided by the WRC as excellent or good

Women Delivering Change



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