

Introduction

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The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform is an umbrella body of groups with a primary interest in matters of importance to women. It has membership of national and local organisations and generalist and specific bodies. NIWEP aims to facilitate and increase women's contribution to the social, economic and political agendas both domestically and internationally. The organisation was established in 1988. It takes its action at a strategic level, ensuring that women in Northern Ireland participate in and contribute to the debate of women's concerns integrating domestic, European and international agendas. NIWEP facilitates participation in networking, information sharing and policy development.

The main aims of the Platform are:

- To ensure that the women in Northern Ireland have a platform through which their concerns can be expressed and through which they can help shape and develop social, economic and political policies at a local, national, European and international level;
- To ensure that women in Northern Ireland understand the work of the United Nations, the European Union and national and local government in formulating gender equality policy and legislation through training and information;
- To consult with women at a local level and to prepare recommendations for debate and discussion with government and other institutions and statutory agencies at local, national, European and international level.

In 1999 as part of the international agenda the Platform applied for, and was awarded, Special United Nations Consultative Status by the Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) which gives the organisation the opportunity to attend and contribute to debates on critical issues at the United Nations. NIWEP is the only NGO in Northern Ireland to hold this status.

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In consultation the Platform would like to take this opportunity to thank the following organisations that participated in providing information and consultation for this report.

Age Concern Northern Ireland
Alliance Party Northern Ireland
Children's Law Centre
Save the Children Northern Ireland
Committee on the Administration of Justice

Democratic Dialogue
Equality Commission Northern Ireland
Family Planning Association in Northern Ireland
Foyle Rural Women's Network
Homestart Supporting Families
Human Rights Commission Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network
Northern Ireland Irish Congress of Trade Unions
The Male Link
Queen's University Legal Department
Women's Support Network
NI Women's Aid – Belfast
NI Women's Aid – Coleraine
Youth Action Northern Ireland
Women into Politics
Women's Support Network
Foyle Women's Network
NI Rural Women's Network
NI Women's Aid Federation
Northern Ireland Women's Forum
List to be completed.....

Principal areas of concern identified by CEDAW Committee in 1999:

1. Concern that protection of women's human rights would be uneven across the devolved regions of the United Kingdom
2. the number and percentage of women in public and political life, in the judiciary and in professions
3. the disadvantaged position of women belonging to ethnic minorities
4. the pay gap between men and women
5. levels of teenage conception
6. high rates of sexually transmitted diseases
7. the failure to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland
8. the absence of a national strategy on violence against women
9. aspects of the criminal justice system – including high rates of female imprisonment for minor offences, young female offenders in adult prisons, low levels of convictions for rape and sexual violence
10. issues relating to the situation of older women – including health, poverty and pension entitlements
11. female poverty

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 2-4 Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination; Development and Advancement of Women; Acceleration of Equality between Women and Men
Devolution	§ Devolution in Northern Ireland has been intermittent. The latest period of devolution resumed in May 2007. Experience of devolution to date has not been favourable to women and there is concern that gender equality is not a priority for the local assembly and that there is an increasing gap in relation to a number of aspects of equality (including public and political representation, childcare, anti-poverty measures) between women in Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK.
UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security	§ As the UK Government has noted in its report to CEDAW it has worked to promote UN Resolution 1325 internationally. However, the government has not met its obligations in relation to the resolution in Northern Ireland. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in key institutions, including many of those set up directly as a result of the peace negotiations.

<p>Gender Equality Strategy</p>	<p>§ We welcome the publication of a Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2006. The process of developing the strategy did give rise to concerns. Government struggled to acknowledge the root causes of women’s inequality and was constrained by a belief that advancing women’s equality could not be done without also giving something to men. The women’s sector worked closely with government to address the most serious deficiencies but there is currently concern about the delay in implementing the Departmental Action Plans which are to be the key mechanism for achieving the goals set out in the strategy. There are a number of problems including the lack of gender awareness and expertise within departments and the lack of resources within the Equality Directorate of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister for this work. The government must demonstrate a commitment to equality by ensuring that adequate resources are made available for the implementation of the strategy and that there are time set targets for the completion, introduction and monitoring of the Departmental Action Plans.</p>
<p>Support for the Women’s Sector</p> <p>Section 75</p>	<p>§ For many years the women’s sector in Northern Ireland has been a vibrant source of support for women and has assisted in addressing economic and social disadvantage and encouraged the participation of women in public life. As a society emerging from conflict it is vital that there is a thriving women’s sector and that within the sector there is the capacity for the development of a vibrant policy community. However, the sector is inadequately funded and there is concern about long term sustainability. While the funding made available under the Direct Rule government was welcomed it was limited and targeted at particular areas, to the exclusion of many groups focusing on policy work. There is a need for a comprehensive needs analysis of the women’s sector and a strategy for the financial support of the sector, particularly given major changes in EU funding.</p> <p>§ The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement included a radical proposal which required all public bodies to promote equality of opportunity across a range of constituencies, including explicitly gender. The subsequent Northern Ireland Act (Section 75) requires that detailed arrangements be put in place to ensure that equality of opportunity is given due regard in all statutory policy formulation and delivery. Policies must be subjected to an impact assessment to assure that equality is promoted for women and men, people of differing religious and political affiliations, different racial or ethnic backgrounds, different sexual orientations, different ages, different marital status, whether or not they have dependants, and whether or not they have a disability. The experiences of disadvantage and discrimination for women are compounded if they are disabled, of a different race, sexual orientation or religion, hold different political opinions or have dependents, are young or old, married or not, coupled with the legacy of the conflict.</p> <p>§ Effective implementation of Section 75 is the means to identify and seek to address these inequalities. The Equality Commission has undertaken an Effectiveness Review of Section 75 and it is imperative that the recommendations are followed with a view to maximise compliance with the legislation and thus ensure the benefits are realised.</p>

Failure to Integrate Equality Strategies in Northern Ireland	§ We welcome the drawing up of a number of strategies aimed at tackling discrimination and inequality in Northern Ireland – including an anti-poverty strategy, a gender equality strategy and a sexual orientation strategy. It is disappointing however that these have been developed in isolation and the opportunity has not been taken to effectively integrate them, reducing the potential effectiveness of each.
Single Equality Act	§ Single Equality Bill – to be added
Administration	§ The structure of the NI government is not conducive to promoting gender equality. Gender Equality is one of a substantive set of responsibilities (which also include age, disability, sexual orientation, and EU Affairs) carried by the Committee of the Centre – linked to the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. There needs to be a committee or sub-committee specifically devoted to gender equality to ensure that it does not continue to be neglected.
Compensation data	§ Data on payments to men and women

No.

Questions Relating to Articles 2-4

- 1** § **What steps will government take to ensure the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland?**
- 2** § **What steps will government take to ensure that devolution strengthens women's rights?**
- 3** § **What steps will government take to support the women's sector achieves long term sustainability?**
- 4** § **Will officials within departments receive more training on gender mainstreaming and gender equality?**
- 5** § **Will the government ensure that the recommendations of the Effectiveness Review of Section 75 are implemented to ensure compliance with the legislation and its full potential is realised?**

	Questions Relating to Article 6
1.	§ Will the government ensure that there is a full investigation of child prostitution in Northern Ireland and take steps to protect and support children being exploited?
2.	§ What steps will the government take to ensure there is a comprehensive investigation into trafficking in Northern Ireland and make a commitment to provide greater support to victims of trafficking and grant residence to victims who are at further risk by being deported?
3.	§ When will legislation criminalising kerb crawling be introduced in Northern Ireland?

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 7: Politics and Public Life in Northern Ireland
Electoral Politics	<p>§ Women continue to be seriously under-represented in electoral politics. In the latest elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly women won 18 out of 108 seats, the same number as in the previous election. At local government level 22% of councillors are women. Little has been done by political parties to address this. None of the political parties have used provision under the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 to take positive action to address this. A welcome development has been the N.I Local Government Association initiative to appoint gender champions in each council area to help promote the advancement of women in local politics. There is an urgency to address these problems. The reduction in the number of local councils proposed under the Review of Public Administration could have very negative consequences for the number of women councillors and women holding senior paid positions in local government.⁴</p>
Women and Public Bodies in Northern Ireland	<p>§ Women continue to be under-represented on public bodies with women holding 32% of public appointments. This number has remained fairly static since the early 1990s. This has even more negative implications in N.I than elsewhere in the UK as public bodies in N.I hold responsibility for major services – such as health and education. Analysis of yearly appointments made since 1996 show that the number of women peaked in 2002/03 at 42% but dropped again to 32% in 2003/04. Women are also much less likely to be appointed to the chairs of boards and to posts attracting remuneration⁵. While the implementation of the Code of Practice for Public Appointments has increased transparency and ensured some scrutiny over appointments, a number of important bodies in N.I do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner. This includes a number related to the process of peace building and conflict resolution. A Working Party on diversity in public appointments reported in July 2005⁶ but the recommendations have yet to be implemented. It is recommended that all public bodies need to be governed by the Code of Practice and come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.</p>

Questions Relating to Article 7

- 1. Will the new Code of Practice being introduced for Public Bodies be applied to ALL public bodies in N.I and therefore bring ALL appointed bodies under the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments?**
- 2. What positive action will government take to ensure that the target of 45% for women's representation on public bodies will be met?**
- 3. What will government do to ensure that political parties take measures to address the under-representation of women on candidate lists?**
- 4. Will the government introduce quotas for public appointments given the consistent failure to reach previously set targets?**

Northern Ireland Issues	Article 8: Women as International Representatives
Northern Ireland Government Officials attending the United Nations	<p>§ Although Northern Ireland has devolved government, much of the international diplomatic representation comes from Westminster. The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform can confirm that at Beijing+5 in New York in 2000 no members of the new Northern Ireland Assembly secretariat, or any of the government departments, female or male, participated in negotiations, nor has there ever been NI government officials acting as representatives at any CSW. The implementation of international conventions and treaties and the advancement of women's equality would be enhanced through officials playing a central role in such negotiations and feeding back to government departments in NI.</p> <p>§ Women's organisations in Northern Ireland have limited capacity to engage with international work. Organisations have struggled to prepare for and have a presence at CSW and other relevant discussions and events. As noted previously, government financial support for the women's sector excluded organisations working specifically on policy, including international policy. Yet it is vital that NI women can use the international instruments effectively. When NGOs do attend negotiations they are not a part of the official government delegation as is the case for some countries.</p>
The Involvement of Northern Ireland Women in international work on conflict prevention and resolution	<p>§ There is generally a lack of women in senior positions in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Women in Northern Ireland have contributed much to peace building in the region and have developed models of working which could be usefully applied elsewhere, yet they have been consistently absent from peace building and post conflict initiatives.</p>

Question Relating to Article 8

- 1. What steps will the government take to do to facilitate the inclusion of NGOs attending as specialists in negotiations at UN/European level? It is important that there should be NGO representation from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and that the NGOs should have an international background.**
- 2. Will government commit to ensuring representation across the countries of the UK at international negotiations?**

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 10: Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the Field of Education
Subject choice and career's guidance	<p>§ Research has identified that young women in Northern Ireland suffer as a result of stereotypical attitudes to gender roles and to careers⁷. Government statistics show that within vocational training programmes young women continue to be enrolled on courses in traditionally female dominated areas such as hairdressing, hospitality and caring services. The report of the Women and Work Commission 'Shaping a Fairer Future' made a number of recommendations relating to careers advice, training and the employment of women in non-traditional areas. We are disappointed at the failure to urgently address these issues and implement the recommendations in Northern Ireland.</p>
Tackling inequality through education	<p>§ Recent research on young women has pointed to the persistence of gender inequalities in Northern Ireland⁸ yet challenging gender discrimination has not been a feature of education in Northern Ireland. Indeed it is not a strong component of teacher training. The recently developed citizenship curriculum in N.I focuses mainly on issues relating to political and religious tolerance and understanding and addressing the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland. However, schools have a major role to play in addressing discrimination and promoting gender equality.</p>

School Age Mothers	§ There continues to be a lack of provision and support for school age mothers. These include difficulties relation to childcare; access to specialist units and support to return to school or further education or training. The impact of this is lack of qualifications and difficulty in getting and progressing in employment, resulting in a high risk of poverty and social exclusion. The School Age Mother's Project ⁹ is limited to particular geographical areas and apart from isolated voluntary sector programme enabling young mothers in the 18-25 age group to access vocational training there are few services targeted at this group of young mothers.
Sex Education	§ Rates of teenage pregnancy in N.I remain much higher than the EU average and rates of STI infections are growing. Research has identified that young people in Northern Ireland feel they are poorly informed about sex and sexual health and the standard of sex education received in schools is generally perceived to be poor with schools taking a very biologically approach to sex and relationships education. ¹⁰ While the Department of Education has issues guidelines for sex education these are not uniformly applied and schools have discretion over curriculum and delivery. Good practice has been identified, particularly where schools bring in external organisations with the appropriate expertise to deliver sex education thus ensuring that students receive a broad and inclusive approach to the topic. It is strongly recommended that a comprehensive sex education curriculum for primary and secondary schools should be mandatory and be delivered by those with appropriate expertise.
Education and Employment for Women in a post-conflict Society	§ For many women in Northern Ireland their education and employment has been interrupted by the conflict and this has had a negative economic impact on women. The government needs to explicitly acknowledge this and support specific measures to address this disadvantage. Community education has been shown to be effective in supporting women and equipping them with the skills and confidence to enter further education and employment. Women's community education and training organisations have fulfilled an important role but this work has been threatened by lack of funding and by government policy increasingly focusing on a narrower level of vocational qualifications.
Restrictions on student numbers in Northern Ireland Universities	§ In Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning places restrictions on full-time student numbers. This creates disadvantage especially for low income and mature students.

Question Relating to Article 10

- 1. What is the government plans for enhancing access to education and training provision for school age and young mothers in N.I?**

- 2. What is the government going to do to ensure more effective teaching of sex and relationship education in Northern Ireland and to ensure that ALL young people have access to it?**

- 3. What steps will the government take to ensure that there is a strong gender aspect in citizenship education and that schools promote gender equality?**

- 4. What steps will government take to ensure that teachers are equipped through graduate and in-service training to understand discrimination against women and promote gender equality?**

- 5. What steps will the government take to ensure that stereotyping in subject choice and training courses is addressed and that the failure of previous initiatives does not go unchecked through rigorous monitoring?**

- What steps will the government take to ensure that the recommendations put forward in Shaping a Fairer Future are implemented in Northern Ireland?**

§ Since April 2003, under the Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, many working parents and parents-to-be have been able to claim improved maternity pay and leave, paid paternity leave and paid adoption leave. Working parents also have the right to request to work flexible hours. While the provisions are a welcome step we are concerned that they do not go far enough to be of real practical benefits to working parents, and women in particular. Most provisions are restricted to those who meet the employment definition of employee and specified qualifying service conditions, which means that significant categories and numbers of workers (many of them women) do not enjoy any enhanced protection or benefit. The individual right to request flexible working patterns is a weak policy instrument relative to comparable legislation in many continental European countries ¹¹

§ For lone parents the government has set an employment target of 70 % by 2010. The main measures introduced to achieve this have been the New Deal for Lone Parents, a government training and employment programme and expansion of childcare and extended schools. Childcare developments in N.I have not kept pace with the rest of the UK. Extended schools have recently been introduced in four pilot areas but schools have a high level of discretion over time and nature of provision so this is unlikely to have a significant impact on childcare difficulties. Without detracting from the benefits and support provided by New Deal for Lone Parents key problems identified with this policy are that lone parents often enter insecure, low paid employment resulting in cycling between benefits and work; many struggle to be financially better off, particularly when housing costs are taken into account and training options in N.I have been very gendered and pitched at too low a level to ensure entry to better paid work ¹². The Freud Review on reducing welfare dependency and the future of Welfare to Work published in May 2007 ¹³ adopts a ‘work first’ approach which has given rise to some concerns. These include a failure to acknowledge and deal with the problem of welfare to work programmes shifting families from workless poverty to in-work poverty, the lack of attention to adequacy of benefits for those unable to work and the feasibility of some of the proposals to contract out welfare to work programmes. The Freud report also recommended greater conditionality attached to benefits for lone parents and government policy has decided to limit claims for Income Support to lone parents who have children under 11. As government has, rightly argued, the majority of lone parents would like to work there seems little reason to increase compulsion. We are extremely concerned that extending conditions on lone parents is a simplistic measure which could increase lone parents’ vulnerability to poverty. Employment targets could be better addressed through other positive measures to improve the health of

lone parents, improve childcare and by improving labour market conditions.

Work Life Balance

§ Much sex inequality stems from society's failure to recognise and accommodate the fact that women continue to bear the main responsibility for childcare and the care of elderly and other dependents¹⁴. Also, traditional attitudes of employers and some employment practices impact on the opportunities available to women. Measures such as the right to request to flexible working are important but are restricted to certain groups of parents (limited by age and/or disability of child). It is also dependant on favourable employer attitudes, which cannot be assumed¹⁵. Government needs to take additional and effective measures to encourage and support businesses (especially small businesses which predominate in Northern Ireland) to implement family friendly practices.

§ The enhanced access to parental leave is welcome. However, the provision of unpaid leave will restrict the number of parents who can avail of these measures.

Childcare

§ Childcare is often cited as the most important factor in enabling mothers to work. It should be noted that substantive developments discussed in the UK government report relating to childcare provision refer to England and progress in Northern Ireland has been very much more limited. Northern Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of childcare provision within the UK and Europe. The number of registered childminder places in N.I equates to 1 place for every 6.4 children under four, almost half of provision in England¹⁶. For many mothers, and lone mothers in particular, affordability of childcare is still the main barrier for women entering the labour market. The NI Childcare Strategy, Children First (2000) has not achieved significant improvements. In fact a government review of the strategy in 2005 recommended a re-shaping of the childcare vision for Northern Ireland – including the allocation of mainstream funding¹⁷. Labour market trends in N.I have seen growth in the service and retail sector. Many of these jobs are part-time and targeted at women. Yet, they often require employees to work unsociable and flexible hours and existing childcare simply does not meet these requirements. The recent Children and Young Person's strategy for N.I (2006) does allocate additional funding for early years provision and for an expansion of SureStart in N.I. This is very welcome. However, it is very important to stress that early years provision is not the same as childcare for working parents. Very often these services are available for very few hours per week when parents require reliable, accessible and affordable childcare. We recommend urgent measures including the establishment of integrated children's centres across Northern Ireland.

§ The Working Tax Credit (WTC) has created some incentive for people to a move from non-earner to one-earner households; it is much less an incentive for second earners to enter the labour market.

However, this in-work benefit may also act to trap women in low paid employment because of the relationship between earnings and benefit withdrawal. Many lone mothers in minimum wage jobs for example end up cycling between benefits and work and find it extremely difficult to progress in employment¹⁸. This raises issues of adequacy of the minimum wage and unequal pay.

Low and Unequal Pay

- § Current legislation on equal pay has proven ineffective in tackling the problems of low and unequal pay. Women's pay still lags behind that of men perpetuating gender stereotyping by valuing the work that women typically do less than men. While women remain unpaid for work in the home and frequently take part-time paid work, social and cultural patterns that leave women in an inferior or stereotyped role persist.
- § While we recognise that some progress has been made, nonetheless there remains the question of why, some 32 years after the introduction of the Equal Pay Act and over a quarter of a century since the 1976 Sex Discrimination Order it is still the case that full-time women employees earn substantially less than men, particularly striking for women in part-time work. The economy will benefit from the removal of the pay gap which is to the ongoing detriment of women Government should take and promote specific action to remove the gap including action on job status and occupational segregation, committing to pay audits and follow up action.

Self Employment

Lack of women in senior levels in professions and business

Questions Relating to Article 11

- 1 What steps will the government take to ensure that all employees benefit from access to more family friendly working conditions?
- 2 What steps government take to ensure that access to and affordability of childcare provision in Northern Ireland is significantly improved?
- 3 Given the nature of the labour market in N.I and the growth in part-time, often minimum wage work, how will the government ensure that families are not more vulnerable to poverty by being compelled to come off benefits?
- 4 What action will be taken by government to address and remove the pay gap between men and women? Will this include action on occupational segregation and pay audits?

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 12: Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the Field of Health Care
Reproductive Rights in Northern Ireland	<p>§ There are three key concerns (a fuller statement is attached as Appendix x)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. highly restrictive access to abortion and aftercare for abortion; 2. inadequate provision of emergency contraception; 3. intimidation of providers of family planning and sexual health information and advice. <p>1. The 1967 Abortion Act does not extend to Northern Ireland and therefore women in Northern Ireland are generally denied access to a service which is provided under the NHS to women living in other parts of the United Kingdom. Over 2000 women per year travel from N.I to other parts of the UK to obtain an abortion. Because of the logistical difficulties and expense involved in making this journey women from N.I obtain abortions later in pregnancy¹⁹. The UK Government report to CEDAW notes considerable investment to improve early access to abortion services in Britain. Research by Marie Stopes International highlighted the anxiety and immense difficulty experienced by women in Northern Ireland who had terminations in England and confirmed that most of the women surveyed would have preferred to have been able to access services in Northern Ireland²⁰. Under Northern Ireland law abortion is permitted where it is necessary to save the life of the mother or where continuation of the pregnancy would involve risk of serious injury to her physical or mental health. Foetal abnormality is not grounds for abortion yet research among healthcare professionals has shown that the one situation in which terminations have been readily available is in the case of foetal abnormality²¹. In 2004 the N.I Court of Appeal ordered the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider what steps it should take to inquire into the adequacy of pregnancy services in Northern Ireland and, after consultation with concerned organisations, issue appropriate guidance. Draft guidance on Termination of Pregnancy in Northern Ireland was issued in January 2007 to ‘interested’ parties for comment. Two points should be made in relation to the guidelines: they make no reference to the state’s human rights obligations concerning the provision of reproductive health services; the guidelines were not issued for public consultation (although several anti-choice</p>

organisations were invited to respond).

The CEDAW response to the UK government report in 1999 included a recommendation that the government initiate a process of public consultation on reform of the abortion law. This has not happened.

2. Provision of emergency contraception in N.I is restricted by cost and availability. Despite DHSSPS guidance that emergency contraception should be available at no cost to users in Accident and Emergency Departments, few observe this guidance. Emergency contraception is available free of charge from family planning clinics but these have limited opening hours and are confined to larger urban areas. Emergency contraception is available from pharmacies but this has to be paid for and the cost discriminates against young women and women on low incomes, nor can it be obtained in this way by young women under 16.
3. Provision of non-directive information and advice on healthcare is integral to Article 12 but there are serious concerns about the availability of such services in Northern Ireland. One NGO, the (Brook Advisory Clinic) provides a part-time free confidential contraception and sexual health service for young people. It does not provide information or a referral service for obtaining an abortion elsewhere in the UK. Nevertheless, its office is frequently picketed by anti-abortion campaigners, as are some offices of the Family Planning Association resulting in harassment and intimidation of women staffing and accessing these services.

Teenage Pregnancy in Northern Ireland

§ In its response to the UK report to CEDAW in 1999 the committee expressed concern at the high level of teenage pregnancy in N.I. Northern Ireland continues to have one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe. The restrictions discussed in the previous section are major contributing factors to this. Young women have a right to access sexual health services that are appropriate to their needs.

§ The Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety published its *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy and Action Plan* which was developed by an inter-sectoral working group.

	<p>This publication sets out the aims of the Strategy and the actions associated with it. The strategy was taken forward by a Multi-Agency Implementation Group set up at the beginning of 2003. However the resources allocated are extremely limited. The main concerns with respect to the strategy and action plan is the delay in progress, it covers 2002-2007 but only got underway in early March 2003. Adequate funding is critical to the success of this strategy and its implementation</p>
Health problems of travelling women	§
Mental Health	<p>§ There is an excessively high level of the use of prescription drugs in Northern Ireland. Whilst more research needs to be conducted on the impact of the conflict on mental health a number of studies have indicated that the higher levels of poor mental health²². Of great concern is the increasing suicide rate in Northern Ireland and the need for inter-agency action to improve mental health and self esteem – especially among young people.</p> <p>§ The deficiency of provision for adolescents with mental health problems has been identified in a review of mental health and learning disability commissioned by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety²³. Urgent action needs to be taken to address this including</p>

Questions Relating to Article 12

- 1 **What is the government planning to do, at both central and regional level, to ensure that women in Northern Ireland can also secure early access to abortion services? Will the state ensure that, at a minimum, the legal regulation of abortion in Northern Ireland acknowledges and is compliant with the state's international human rights obligations?**

What steps will the state take to ensure that consultation in decision-making around healthcare provision for women is wide spread and not confined to narrow interest groups (including conservative or religious organisations) and that the human rights of women are respected as a matter of priority?

2 Will the state commit to investigating the specific difficulties faced by teenage girls in N.I in accessing sexual health and information services? Will it develop a comprehensive inter-departmental strategy to address the difficulties and ensure that young women in Northern Ireland have access to sexual health services, including Emergency contraception?

3 What commitment will government make to ensuring that the strategy on teenage pregnancy and early parenthood is adequately resourced, fully implemented and monitored for effectiveness?

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 13: Economic , Social and Cultural Life
Women in Business in Northern Ireland	§ In Northern Ireland in 2002 it is estimated that 17.8% of males in employment were self-employed, while the corresponding self-employment figure for women was 4.2%. While male self-employment in Northern Ireland is the highest of all in the UK regions the self-employment rate for females in Northern

	<p>Ireland is the second lowest.</p> <p>§ (Source: Dept of Enterprise Trade and Investment, NI Labour Force Survey Women in Northern Ireland January 2003) NEEDS TO BE UPDATED</p>
<p>Women and Pensions in Northern Ireland</p>	<p>§ Gender differences in the labour market have an impact on women's economic situation in later life particularly in relation to their access to pensions. This is significant for women in Northern Ireland as they are less likely to be in paid employment than in any other UK region, less likely to be in occupational pension schemes and have lower average earnings. Pension provision still does not take into consideration that women are the major carers and often give up employment to do this. Government's pension policy has failed to address these substantive gender inequalities. It is estimated that women in Northern Ireland receive just over 75% of the income that men receive from the state pension ²⁴.</p> <p>§ We are disappointed that pension policy has not taken into account the particular life patterns and circumstances of women. Nor does it take into account work done in the home. Relying on means-tested benefits rather than increasing the basic state pension will reinforce women's dependency on the state and further reduce their capacity to secure an independent income in their own right. The increasing reliance on private pension provision in the UK has seriously disadvantaged women. The government should increase the value of the state pension and take steps to ensure that all women are entitled to a state pension.</p>
<p>Women and Poverty in Northern Ireland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has consistently shown that women in Northern Ireland are vulnerable to poverty, as lone mothers, as lower earners, as carers and in old age ²⁵. A wide range of measures of economic inequality in N.I concluded that lone mothers were by far the most deprived group ²⁶. This has a detrimental impact on physical and mental health ²⁷ and impacts on ability to work and on future health and well-being. Action needs to be taken in a number of areas to address economic and health disadvantages. The Northern Ireland anti-poverty strategy focuses on employment and employability as the main route out of poverty. To do so prevents it from being a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy and fails to acknowledge the government's own research on the extent and impact of low pay in Northern Ireland ²⁸. To effectively reduce working poverty and reduce benefit dependence the minimum wage needs to be increased, benefit levels need to be reviewed in line with the real cost of living so that those unable to work have a real opportunity of being lifted out of poverty. The setting up of Poverty and Social

	Working Group on lone parents is welcome but we are concerned at the lack of progress on this since the establishment of the regional Assembly in Northern Ireland.
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Questions Relating to Article 13

- 1. What steps will be taken to ensure that data on gender and poverty in Northern Ireland is collected and monitored?**
- 2. What steps will government take to ensure that women receive a fair and adequate state pension?**
- 3. What will government do to ensure that policy is more effective through the integration of the various equality strategies?**
- 4. Will the UK government set targets to gender proof and gender budget all policies?**
- 5. Will the government ensure that there is a time frame for reviewing, implementing and monitoring the measures contained in the anti-poverty strategy?**

Northern Ireland Issues	Article 14: Rural Women
Rural Women in Northern Ireland	<p>§ Women living in rural areas of Northern Ireland experience double and sometimes multiple discriminations across a range of issues. The isolation perpetuated by the lack of transport infrastructure and the lack for provision of range of services. Research has shown that that women in NI do play a vital role in maintaining agriculture through their off-farm work²⁹. However socio-cultural patterns of land transfer and the organisational culture of the agricultural establishment continues to frustrate the greater participation of women in the industry and the recognition of their role in a sustainable agriculture and rural development.</p> <p>§ Consultations with young women in the age group of 18-25 confirms the lack of involvement in community development in rural areas.</p> <p>ADDITIONAL INFO OBTAINED IN CONSULTATIONS TO BE INSERTED</p>

Questions Relating to Article 14

1. **What can government do to ensure more inclusive and contemporary definitions of farm work are needed in order to make women's farm work visible and provide statistical categories to ensure they do not inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities?**
2. **Will government ensure that the agricultural establishment reflects on organisational practices that discriminate against women, and put in place strategies to redress discriminatory practice?**

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 15: Equality before the Law and Civil Matters
Judicial Appointments in	§ The Committee should take into account that serious under-representation of women

Northern Ireland	in the judiciary. The Criminal Justice Review () put forward recommendations regarding equality monitoring and the development of an effective workforce strategy. There has been only limited development in both these areas. It is recommended that government ensures a timetable is in place for implementation of these measures.
Gender Issues relating to the Police Service for Northern Ireland	§ Retention issues § Career and progression issues
Women Prisoners in Northern Ireland	§ Research into women in prison in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission highlighted fundamental concerns about the abuses of human rights and the lack of compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights ³⁰ Mental health services for women detained

Questions Relating to Article 15

- 1 **Will government commit to establishing the recommendations made by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the rights for women prisons in Northern Ireland? Need to check progress on this... ..**

- 2 **Will the government impose a timetable for the implementation of the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review relating to equality**

monitoring and the development of an effective workforce strategy?

3

PSNI - gender

Northern Ireland Issue	Article 16: Equality in Marriage and Family Law
The Law and Domestic Violence	<p>§ BEING UPDATED BY NIWAF</p> <p>Some 7,814 domestic violence incidents recorded represent an increase of 7.7% on the previous year. This was accompanied by a rise of 75 in the number of persons arrested for these crimes to 1,671 (4.7%).</p> <p>§ A recent survey carried out by NI Women’s Aid Federation showed clearly that there is no consistency in Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) response across NI. It is hoped that the new PSNI policy will introduce appropriate systems of monitoring that will rectify this.</p> <p>§ Recent consultations in Northern Ireland, with women survivors of Domestic Violence highlighted a deep sense of dissatisfaction by many women with the way in which they had been treated by many personnel connected with the justice system.</p> <p>§ Sentencing is currently inconsistent. The fact that the violence is located within the home is still frequently viewed as a mitigating rather than an aggravating factor.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § There are grave concerns over the delay between orders being made and being served and the lack of a consistent approach to serving orders across the jurisdiction. Police are also frequently failing to take alleged breaches of orders seriously or do not do so unless pressed to do so by a solicitor. § Non-eligibility for legal aid is having serious implications on women accessing civil orders. The means test places women in considerable financial hardship or forces them to give up their employment. The protection of women is a public safety issue and should not be the personal responsibility of individual women. Many women are left without access to legal protection. § Perpetrator programmes: In conjunction with strong prosecution and appropriate sentencing of offenders, perpetrator programmes are recognised as contributing to the prevention of re-offending. However, if the safety of women and children is to be ensured while men participate in these programmes, it is essential that parallel support is made available for women partners and their children. § Current contact provision does not offer adequate protection to vulnerable children. Current research findings show that 76% of children who were ordered by courts to have contact with a violent parent have been further abused as a result of contact being set up. The issue of child contact in domestic violence cases is complex and warrants informed consideration. While there are mechanisms in place in public law proceedings re child contact to take account of domestic violence, these are missing in private law proceedings
Physical punishment of children	§

Recommendations Relating to Article 16

- § **a strong pro-prosecution policy to reinforce a pro-arrest and pro-charge policy**
- § **domestic violence should be prosecuted as an aggravated offence**
- § **guidelines to ensure consistency in sentencing across all courts in Northern Ireland. These should be reviewed and monitored regularly.**
- § **training in domestic violence for all court staff**
- § **that the Police Service Northern Ireland adopt a standard and consistent approach when serving orders**
- § **that non molestation and occupation orders should be strictly enforced and any breach should be treated severely both by police and the courts**
- § **That women are kept fully informed at all stages**
- § **That systems are in place to ensure the safety and protection of the woman and her children during this high risk period.**
- § **That the means test for legal aid should not be applied in these cases.**
- § **Where there are allegations of domestic violence in private law proceedings re contact, the court**

must apply a mandatory risk assessment checklist focussing specifically on the violence and its effect.

- § In cases of domestic violence, the court should not grant residence or unsupervised contact to the violent parent unless it is satisfied that this is what the child wants and it can be arranged safely.**
- § Where contact progresses to an unsupervised status, it should be closely monitored with a view to withdrawal, if any threat is made and/or the woman or child shows distress.**
- § Perpetrator programmes to adhere to the minimum standards and principles set out by RESPECT.**
- § That the UK Government should press for a review of The Hague Convention and that it should be amended to ensure the safety of children fleeing domestic violence.**

