



Where are Women in the Programme for Government Consultation?

An initial summary of all references to women or gender inequality

28th October 2016

This short briefing is an initial summary of all the specific references to women and gender inequality contained in the Programme for Government Consultation. It is intended to provide a 'first glance' across the issues for women that the document addresses. **This is not a response to the Consultation by WRDA but simply an aid to others working in the area of gender policy or those with an interest in women and policy in Northern Ireland.**

I welcome feedback and comments about any inaccuracies or omissions to kellie.turtle@wrda.net

The first Draft Programme for Government Framework document notably did not contain the word 'women' anywhere within its 114 pages. The new document, agreed by the Executive this week and released for consultation ending on 23rd December, mentions women 3 times. There is some extra detail regarding baseline gender differences in health and well-being as well as planned actions to address gender inequality. As is common within government data, the gender disaggregated data contains only categories for 'male' and 'female' and does not include any outcomes measurements for transgender or gender non-binary people.

There is no overarching acknowledgement that women, as over half the population, are still experiencing inequality across all areas of life compared to men. However, the consultation document notes the need to equality impact assess all the delivery plans for the PfG and makes the following commitment:

'We want to make a clear commitment to addressing key inequalities, particularly those experienced by the Section 75 equality groups, through this Programme for Government, and to tracking progress for these groups in relevant PfG population indicators or associated performance indicators, wherever the data permits.'

There are 2 outcomes that return specifically to Section 75 and the need to have indicators and evidence that monitors the impact on each Section 75 characteristic, including gender. These are Outcome 3 (We have a more equal society) and Outcome 9 (We are a shared society that respects diversity).

The following issues are raised across a range of Outcomes that contain specific references to **women, 'females', girls, or gender inequality**:

- **Health inequality (Outcome 3)**

Women on average have a longer life expectancy than men. The document focuses on Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) as a measure of health outcomes. It notes that this is longer for women than men but that both these genders could expect to live in good health for around three-quarters of their lives.

The figures on HLE show that deprivation has more of an impact on women's health than it does on men's.

The gap in HLE between the most and least deprived is 14.6 years for women whereas it is only 12.2 years for men.

This tells us that poverty and disadvantage is hitting women harder than men and so interventions that tackle inequality in health outcomes should prioritise reaching women and meeting their needs.

- **Underemployment (Outcome 3)**

The document states **that women are more likely to be impacted by underemployment than men.**

It highlights that, 'for many people who are working part-time and who consider themselves underemployed there are structural barriers that can make it difficult to work full-time.'

- **Childcare (Outcome 3)**

Under Outcome 3 (we have a more equal society) childcare is mentioned in the following statement:

The particular **role of high quality childcare provision in supporting greater gender equality** and improving child development in support of long-term improvements in educational equality was also highlighted.

The **Childcare Strategy** is also mentioned as an action under Outcome 12 with reference to improving access to childcare for parents of children with disabilities and children of parents with disabilities.

- **Education (Outcome 3)**

The document states that at GCSE level **girls are more likely to attain level 2 qualifications than boys**. However, disadvantage has a much greater impact on attainment with the biggest gap being between young people receiving Free School Meal entitlement and those who do not receive this.

- **Criminal Justice: Reoffending Rates (Outcome 7)**

In both young people (under 18s) and adults, **reoffending rates are lower for women than for men**. 17.5% of young women reoffended within a year compared to 31.1% of young men. 11.1% of adult women reoffended within a year compared to 18.8% of men.

The document also notes that 'type of sentence' has an impact on reoffending rates with custodial sentences producing the highest rates of reoffending at 41.1%. However, **no detail is provided on the type of sentences that are most prevalent for women and men and so the information on what contributes to these gender differences is incomplete**.

- **Cultural Participation (Outcome 5)**

The document reports that men are less likely than women to attend arts events, museums or libraries and women are less likely to participate in sport.

The actions include a commitment to 'deliver a targeted programme to improve female participation in sport.'

- **Health in Pregnancy (Outcome 4)**

This new consultation document provides more detail in terms of the evidence base and actions than the previous Draft Programme for Government Framework. For example, a commitment is made to implement a Healthier Pregnancy Programme including a core pathway for antenatal care.

However it is extremely disappointing that this indicator still makes no acknowledgement of the impact of pregnancy and childbirth on women's physical and mental health. The only mention of maternal health is as a factor influencing the birth weight of babies.

In the face of growing public concern about women's reproductive health and rights in pregnancy, the lack of care options for women facing diagnoses of fatal foetal abnormalities, and the growing need for post-natal mental health services, this is a missed opportunity to address an area of women's lives that has a huge impact on our health and well-being.