

## **Written evidence submitted by Northern Ireland Women’s Budget Group (NIWBG), relating to the Investment in Northern Ireland inquiry (INI0029)**

The Northern Ireland Women’s Budget Group (NIWBG) is made up of organisations and individuals from the women’s sector, trade union movement, academia and wider civil society in Northern Ireland, with the aim of implementing a gender equal economy. The members of the NIWBG scrutinise policy and budgetary matters with a gendered lens to bring attention to the different ways in which women and men are affected by government-level decision-making. It aims to provide policy- and budget-makers with policy analysis to secure substantive equality for women and men through the assessment of gender impact.

The NIWBG works with a range of organisations in Northern Ireland on devolved issues and with sister organisations in Wales, Scotland, England and Ireland on East-West and North-South issues.

We hope that our response to the call for evidence will be useful to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (the Committee) in its Inquiry into Investment in Northern Ireland.

### ***Introduction***

The Northern Ireland Women’s Budget Group (NIWBG) welcomes the Committee’s inquiry into investment in Northern Ireland. The main issue that the Committee should consider further is that incoming investment does not have a gendered analysis applied to it. For investment to be effective in Northern Ireland, gender budgeting needs to be implemented at all levels of the process in order to recognise the historic and systemic disadvantages experienced by women, take them into consideration when developing policies and mitigate where necessary to promote gender equality.

The NIWBG welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee’s Inquiry into Investment in Northern Ireland. We note the Committee’s interest in evidence relating to:

- Maximising the impact and effective application of investment
- Education, skills, training and apprenticeships
- The context of post conflict reconstruction and leaving the European Union

Before addressing those areas, this evidence sets out the NIWBG vision of a ***Caring, Green Economy*** and outlines the importance of investing in care to secure such a successful, balanced and inclusive economy. As well, an NIWBG brief outlining the basics of gender budgeting has been included in this submission under **ANNEX 1**.

### ***Caring, Green Economy***

The NIWBG believes that the only way to recover from the current economic crisis, address gender inequality in the labour market and promote a sustainable and inclusive economy is

to implement a caring, green economy as outlined in the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy's (the Commission) report, *Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action*<sup>1</sup>.

Paid and unpaid carers are a crucial part of the economy – a 2015<sup>2</sup> report conducted by Carers UK and the University of Sheffield found that unpaid carers in Northern Ireland save the government £4.6 billion a year, or the cost of a second NHS. Additional investment in the entire care sector would both raise revenue and create jobs. The UKWBG found that a 2% investment of UK GDP in the care sector would create 1.5 million jobs, twice the amount that the same investment in the construction sector would produce, producing millions in tax revenue.

The investment in free, universal childcare would not only remove a significant barrier to women's participation in the labour market in Northern Ireland, but it can help raise revenue as well. In a UK Women's Budget Group (UKWBG) report to HM Treasury, their research found that free, universal childcare would create more jobs and as a result, generate additional tax revenue<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, it would alleviate the responsibility of childcare on mothers and would allow those who left the labour market for childcare reasons to return to the paid economy.

Northern Ireland must also play its part in achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In order to meet the targets, such as Good Health and Well-being (SDG3) and Gender Equality (SDG5), increasing investment in employment in low-carbon sectors like care is necessary. De Henau and Himmelweit outlined how an investment in care is three times less polluting per job than the same investment in construction<sup>4</sup>. As well, greater investment and valuation of care would help improve the precarious nature of the sector, making it a more attractive and secure career that would draw both women/girls and men/boys.

The Commission's report provides eight steps to securing a caring, green economy:

1. Re-envision what we mean by 'the economy' – The pandemic demonstrated how central care, both paid and unpaid, is to our economy. We need to reassess the economic value of care to reflect its importance to the maintenance of the economy.
2. Invest in social and physical infrastructure – It is crucial that investment social and physical infrastructure is cognizant of diverse needs, and promotes equality and sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission on a Gender Equal Economy (2020). *Creating a caring economy: a call to action*.

(<https://wbg.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Buckner, L. and Yeandle, S. (2015). *Valuing Carers 2015: The rising value of carers' support*. (file:///C:/Users/hkerr/Downloads/cuk-valuing-carers-2015-web%20(2).pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Women's Budget Group (WBG) (2020). *Budget representation to HM Treasury: invest in social infrastructure*. ([WBG Budget-2020-FINAL.pdf](#))

<sup>4</sup> Himmelweit, S. and J. De Henau (2020). *A Care-led recovery from coronavirus*. ([Care-led-recovery-final.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](#))

3. Transform the worlds of paid and unpaid work –The NIWBG would contend that ‘better jobs’ does not only mean jobs in STEM, but rather fixing the aspects that make certain jobs worse, such as precarity and low-pay. This would help correct gender inequalities in the labour market and gender imbalances the sharing of paid and unpaid work.
4. Invest in a caring social security system which is based on dignity and autonomy – This step must be addressed to alleviate pressure on paid and unpaid carers and mitigate an impending care crisis.
5. Transform the tax systems across the UK – While this step lies outside the remit of devolved powers, the NIWBG would advocate for progressive tax reform at the Westminster level to produce revenue to be invested in a stronger social security system as well as in social and physical infrastructure.
6. Refocus the overall fiscal and monetary policy framework to build a caring economy – The NIWBG would advocate for fiscal and monetary policy at the Westminster level that promotes gender equality, well-being and sustainability.
7. Work to develop a global trade system that is socially and environmentally sustainable – The NIWBG wants to ensure that post-Brexit trade does not cause a degradation of human rights, environmental and labour standards. Ensuring that public services are excluded from trade and investment deals is also crucial to securing a caring, green economy in Northern Ireland.
8. Work to transform the international economic and financial system – It is necessary that caring, green economies are adopted worldwide to achieve significant change regarding equality and sustainability.

The recommendations from the Commission’s report are echoed in the content of the Women’s Policy Group’s Feminist Recovery Plan<sup>5</sup>, which was fully updated and relaunched in July 2021. The NIWBG believes it is crucial that the content of the Commission’s report and the Feminist Recovery Plan inform the Committee’s inquiry into investment in Northern Ireland.

### ***Investing in Care***

Care is one of *the* most essential sectors of our economy – though undervalued long before the pandemic, the halting of paid and unpaid caring services due to the pandemic brought the economy to a stop in March 2020.

The paid care sector is generally low-paid, part-time, precarious work. Women disproportionately work in the care sector and/or deliver unpaid care in the home, which

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<sup>5</sup> Women’s Policy Group (WPG) (2021). *NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Relaunch – One Year On* ([WPG-COVID-19-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-Relaunch-One-Year-On.pdf](https://www.wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WPG-COVID-19-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-Relaunch-One-Year-On.pdf) ([wrda.net](https://www.wrda.net)))

contributes to many women's inability to access Statutory Sick Pay or proper employment contracts<sup>6</sup>. The unpaid care sector, due to lack of proper support, negatively impacts on the carers' ability to do paid work and can be an emotional burden on the carer<sup>7</sup>. The pandemic has only exacerbated these pre-existing conditions.

We would argue that, while skills and careers in STEM are important and deserving of investment, there should be just as big a focus on skills associated with care for this very reason. Care cannot be automated, and to properly prepare for the impending skills crisis in care, investment needs to be aimed at increasing development in skills associated with care. The NIWBG recommends that career pathways and pay progression are put in place for low-paid, precarious work like care, and that funding is increased for apprenticeships that are considered highly skilled yet require low-level qualifications, such as social care apprenticeships.

Without proper childcare provisions, many women will not be able to participate in skills attainment, upskilling, and/or reskilling schemes. Investment in childcare and early years development would ensure that women would not miss the opportunity to develop their skills due to the lack of accessible and affordable childcare, as this is already a barrier to women's education and employment.

### ***'Better' Jobs***

The NIWBG acknowledges the severe gender imbalance within STEM education and employment and appreciates investment aimed to tackle gender inequality within those sectors. However, moving more women into STEM careers as a solution to precarious, low-paid work is a partial, short-term solution to a larger issue that needs to be addressed.

While it is important to correct gender imbalances in STEM, pushing all women into those sectors is not a viable solution as:

- It does not address the barriers that keep women from entering those careers, ranging from gender stereotypes to availability of affordable childcare to digital poverty, particularly in rural areas.
- Not all women, men and gender minorities will want to enter STEM careers.
- Before improvement of digital literacy can begin, digital accessibility must be made widely available.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

- If the standard of other sectors such as care, hospitality, and the public sector worsens due to lack of investment, it will not make for an attractive, diverse society for current and potential investors.

The NIWBG agrees that development of digital skills is important for any sector, especially as our society moves towards a greater reliance on technology. However, there is disproportionate attention given to STEM skills and sectors in potential investment opportunities like City Deals. This is particularly an issue for a sector like social care, which is an essential part of the economy, despite being precarious and low-paid. Any incoming investment should focus not only on high-earning, low-precarity STEM sectors, but in improving sectors that are precarious and low-paid. It should not only be focused on moving people into 'better jobs,' but also making 'worse jobs,' better.

### ***Maximising the Impact and Effective Application of Investment***

At the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, governments made a commitment to investment in women's economic empowerment.

UK progress on this is examined, *inter alia*, under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW). The latest assessment of progress<sup>8</sup> by the CEDAW Committee finds that a number of the Committee's most recent recommendations have only partially been met and that a recommendation on the impact of Brexit on women has not been implemented.

Government also has committed in the SDGs to securing gender equality. This will require investment in both social and physical infrastructure, as recommended in the Commission's *Creating a Caring Economy* report.

In meeting its Section 75 requirements, the NIWBG would urge that gendered analyses and impact assessments are applied to any incoming investment in Northern Ireland. The use of gender budgeting tools, including analysis and assessment, can assist in identifying systemic gender inequalities and direct investment to supporting the development of budgets and policies that promote gender equality. The gendered impacts of spending and revenue raising decisions should be taken into account and the application of investment should encourage the use of mechanisms to bring about gender equality. Women's intersecting identities will also be included in this analysis and these areas of equality will therefore be promoted as well.

A scoping study (2013)<sup>9</sup> commissioned by the Equality Commission considers how gender budgeting tools can be used in meeting Section 75 requirements and how the international

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<sup>8</sup> Chalal, L. (25 November 2021). *Louiza Chalal, Rapporteur, assessment of progress on CEDAW, 25 November 2021* [Letter]. ([https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT\\_CEDAW\\_FUD\\_GBR\\_47245\\_E.doc](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT_CEDAW_FUD_GBR_47245_E.doc))

models have useful application in Northern Ireland. Quinn concludes that applying impact assessment processes to mainstream gender equality is ‘...a worthwhile enterprise, both in terms of the recognised demand for a deeper application of the Section 75 duties to the budget process but also in terms of the wealth of methodologies associated with gender responsive budgeting which are adaptable to the Northern Ireland context’ and ‘vital [at] all levels of government ... as a means of fulfilling Section 75 duties.’

EU money was proofed for equality, including gender equality, and meeting Section 75 obligations will require consideration of equality in delivery of the Sustainable Prosperity Fund.

Recent reviews, including by OECD and NIAO, as well as the Inquiry into RHI have led to opportunities in civil service reform and review of budgeting processes to ensure that public policy and spending are gender responsive.

We recommend that gender budgeting expertise be incorporated into any incoming investment to Northern Ireland in order to ensure that gender inequalities are not impacted. The NIWBG believes that gender budgeting is crucial to promoting gender equality and securing a caring, green economy.

We note that there is much good practice to be built on in Northern Ireland. We would recommend that public authorities, in meeting their Section 75 requirements and recognising that these obligations remain with the public authority in the delivery of investment<sup>10</sup>, ensure that procurement practice and contracting have equality as the subject matter of the contract and consider equality throughout the decision-making process<sup>11</sup>. In this way, contractors can maximise the equality impact of their investment.

## ***Education, Skills, Training and Apprenticeships***

Based on a working paper published by the Ulster University research team consisting of Prof. Ann Marie Gray, Prof. Joan Ballantine and Dr. Michelle Rouse, the Skills Barometer, which informed the Department for the Economy’s Skills Strategy<sup>12</sup> only considers economic value in terms of productivity and may assign lesser economic value to skills associated with social care. This could lead investment away from the care sector.

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<sup>9</sup> Sheila Quinn (2013). *Equality Responsive Budgeting* ([Equality Responsive Budgeting \(equalityni.org\)](http://equalityni.org))

<sup>10</sup> Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and The Central Procurement Directorate (2008). *Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement* ([ECNI \(2008\) Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement](#))

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Department for the Economy (DfE) (2021). *Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland* ([Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland - Skills for a 10x Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)).

The Barometer's inability to view economic value outside of productivity means that it "remains under responsive to an impending skills crisis in the social care sector". Even though a 2019 Skills Barometer report<sup>13</sup> indicated that 'Caring Personal Services' was going to be one of the largest contributors to job growth in the next decade, it is incapable of predicting the skills required to meet that demand.

An additional and significant blindspot in the Barometer's analysis is that upskilling is netted out of the forecast of future skills requirements. In a 2015 report on the Barometer<sup>14</sup>, it was mentioned that upskilling was not considered when predicting future skills requirements based on the belief that, "these individuals are already in the labour market, will remain with their current employers after training and do not represent additional supply to the labour market." Because upskilling is netted out of the forecast, the Barometer does not look at the benefits of increasing the skill set of those already in the workforce. Social care apprenticeships, though highly-skilled, need low levels of qualifications. The exclusion of upskilling from the Barometer's predictions means that women with low-level qualifications that need to upskill to perform their duties, like many in social care, are going to be disproportionately impacted.

## **STEM and Apprenticeships**

In STEM sectors, there is a great gender imbalance – the low representation of women in these positions can be traced back to a gender imbalance in attainment of STEM-based skills. For this reason, the NIWBG welcomes efforts to target gender inequality in STEM. STEM sectors are an important part of our current economy and will continue to be important in the future – for this reason, addressing gender imbalance is essential.

Gender segregation in the ApprenticeshipsNI and HLAs is a stark example of why it is important that concerted efforts are made to equalise STEM sectors. This is evident when looking at the estimated GVA for participants – for men, it is £78,400 per participant; for women, it is less than half of that amount at £35,900 per participant<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, the 'Engineering' ApprenticeshipsNI programme had a breakdown of 98% male participants versus 2% female participants, and the 'Engineering & manufacturing technologies' and 'Science & mathematics' HLAs have a breakdown of 90% male versus 10% female participants and 57% male versus 43% female participants, respectively<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2019). *NI Skills Barometer 2019* (<https://bit.ly/3joO7nv>)

<sup>14</sup> Ulster University Economic Policy Centre. (2015). *NI Skills Barometer Findings Report: "Skills in demand."* (<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/Skills%20Barometer%20-%20Findings%20Report%20-%20241115.pdf>)

<sup>15</sup> Ballantine, J., Rouse, M. and Gray, A.M. (2021). *Gender Budgeting: Working Paper 2: Case Study: Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.* ([Gender\\_Budgeting-2.pdf \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://www.ark.ac.uk/Gender_Budgeting-2.pdf))

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In addition to gender imbalances, there is a serious issue of low pay. The minimum wage for apprentices 19 and under and for apprentices over 19 in their first year of apprenticeship is £4.15. This is incredibly low and may prevent single parents, the majority of whom are women, and others that require a liveable wage from engaging with the scheme.

The NIWBG supports efforts to rectify gender imbalances in STEM, and we recommend that solving gender inequality and low pay in ApprenticeshipsNI and HLAs are the foundations of this work.

### ***The Context of Post-conflict Reconstruction and Leaving the European Union***

Evidence given to the Committee by representatives of the women's sector in Northern Ireland on 7 July 2021<sup>17</sup> shows the poor impact of any peace dividend for many people in Northern Ireland. While women's involvement is recognised as key to securing sustainable peace<sup>18</sup>, much is still to be done to build the mechanisms and develop the social and physical infrastructure for transformative impact. On the tenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the Secretary General committed the UN to allocating 15% of peacebuilding and recovery funds to gender equality and women's empowerment and to ensuring the remaining 85% had gender targets and applied gender mainstreaming.

*January 2022*

## **ANNEX 1**

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<sup>17</sup> Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (7 July 2021). *Formal meeting (oral evidence session): Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol* (<https://committees.parliament.uk/event/5027/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>)

<sup>18</sup> United Nations (UN). *Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding (A/65/354-S/2010/466)* ([Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding \(UNSCR 1889, OP 19\)](#)).



## BRIEF ON GENDER BUDGETING

Budgetary processes and spend are far from 'neutral' – policies emanating from the Programme for Government and budgetary decisions have gendered consequences, whether they be intended or not. By taking a 'gender neutral' stance, decision-makers are oblivious to the complexities between the experiences of women and men and reinforce systemic disadvantages faced by women and other groups.

### What is Gender Budgeting?

Gender budgeting is the tool that can help recognise systemic disadvantages and lead to budgets and policies that promote greater gender equality. If implemented, policy makers would consider the gendered impacts of spending and revenue raising decisions and how to use these mechanisms to bring about gender equality. Women's intersecting identities are also included in this analysis and policy makers are expected to promote these areas of equality as well.

In [Gender budgeting: Working paper 1](#), our partners Dr. Joan Ballantine, Dr. Michelle Rouse and Professor Ann Marie Gray highlight that, "*Northern Ireland lags significantly behind other devolved UK administrations and other OECD countries,*" where gender budgeting has "*made a significant contribution to addressing gender inequalities, the elimination of unequal outcomes and to increasing women's participation in civic and political life.*"<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that gender budgeting is not about allocating more funds to women but about making sure the available resources have maximum impact. The [European Women's Lobby](#) breaks down the realities and misconceptions about gender budgeting as follows<sup>20</sup>:

#### ***Gender budgeting is about:***

- *Including a gender perspective into budget planning and analysing budgets taking into account their impact on women and men, girls and boys.*
- *Introducing a gender perspective into the entire budget, including seemingly "gender-neutral" budget lines.*
- *Reprioritising and refocusing of spending and restructuring of taxation with a view to promote equality.*

#### ***Gender budgeting is not about:***

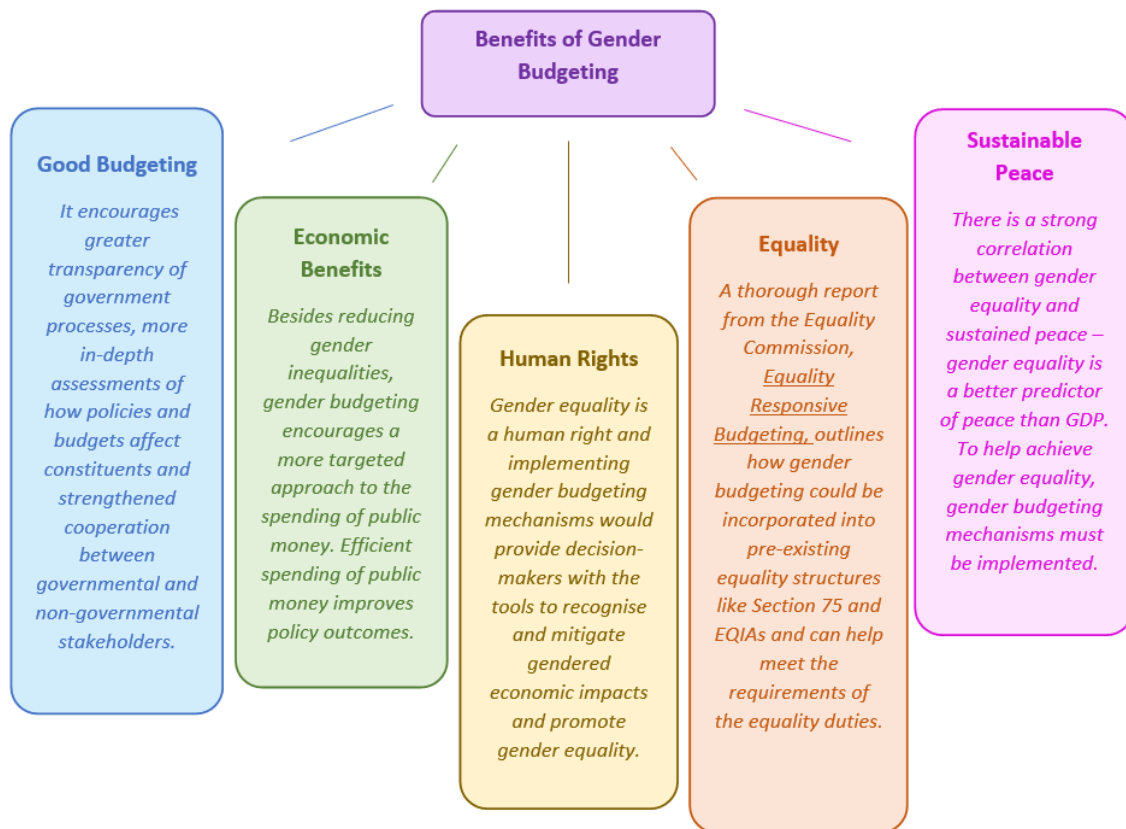
- *Creating separate budgets for women.*
- *Only looking at the parts of the budget which have a social content or that are explicitly gender-related.*
- *Demanding more spending.*

<sup>19</sup> Ballantine, J., Rouse, M. and Gray, A.M. (2021). *Gender Budgeting: Working Paper 1: What does the literature tell us? Lessons for Northern Ireland (NI)*. ([Gender Budgeting-1.pdf](#))

<sup>20</sup> European Women's Lobby. *What is Gender Budgeting?* ([What Is Gender Budgeting.pdf](#))

## Why implement Gender Budgeting?

Gender budgeting is transformative, enhances transparency and accountability, and is of value in delivering economic benefits<sup>21</sup>, rights and equality<sup>22</sup>, and securing sustainable peace<sup>23</sup>.



<sup>21</sup> Himmelweit, S. (2002). 'Making visible the hidden economy: the case for gender-impact analysis of economic policy,' *Feminist Economics*. 8 (1), 49-70.

<sup>22</sup> Quinn, S. (2013). *Equality responsive budgeting*. ([Equality Responsive Budgeting \(equalityni.org\)](http://equalityni.org))

<sup>23</sup> Fernanda Espinosa, M. (2020). *Peace Is Synonymous With Women's Rights*. (<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/peace-synonymous-women%E2%80%99s-rights>)