

## NIWEP statement to CSW66

Climate change is no longer a distant potential threat; it is an emergency acutely felt by people across the world. The situation must be addressed with the same urgency as the COVID-19 crisis, but learning from the pandemic is vital to ensure the global response includes women and girls, as well as people from Indigenous, minoritised and racialised communities and avoids rolling back progress on human rights and poverty reduction further.

Multilateral international action is critical to avert catastrophic climate change and further roll back of rights, as the impacts of climate change affect people's livelihoods and life opportunities across borders, and will fundamentally reshape societies across the globe, beyond its impact on individual people, families and communities. Collaboration with civil society is equally crucial to address the indirect, social, cultural and economic impacts of climate change and environmental disasters, which threaten to reverse all gains made on poverty reduction and addressing global inequalities.

It is particularly vital that the response, globally and nationally, is gender responsive. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental disasters, due to patriarchal practices limiting their rights to property, finance and political participation and prioritising women's role as carers, which prevents many women and girls from making genuine choices about participating in the public life of their communities and working outside the home. As a result, women are more vulnerable than men to losing livelihoods, both directly and through being expected to focus on family responsibilities in a crisis. Women and girls also lack representation in fora developing responses, which therefore rarely meet the needs of women and in many cases deepen gender inequalities by prioritising male interests. This has been seen worldwide in the COVID-19 crisis, which underlines the life threatening shortcomings of this male dominated approach and the need for change.

Women are also directly and disproportionately at risk of increased violence, both from intimate partners and from conflict, which is increasingly linked to impacts of climate change. Displacement also increases the risk of violence, trafficking and forced labour. Current evidence collated by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre shows that 90 per cent of internal displacement over the period 2008-20 was caused by weather and climate change related events and led to almost 300 million new displacements, which often become long term. Displaced people and migrants, especially women and girls, experience significant intersectional discrimination, which goes largely unaddressed in global and national policy.

In a Northern Ireland context, climate change is manifesting as an increase in extreme weather events and more unpredictable weather patterns, including a greater risk of localised flooding. Longer term, drought in summer is expected in parts of the region, alongside warmer and wetter winter seasons, leading to challenges for infrastructure and service provision, as well as economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism. These are currently significant areas for investment in Northern Ireland, and billed as future economic drivers for the substantial rural parts of the region. Rural development planning is not directly connected to any other policy development, although the same Department deals with agriculture, environment and rural affairs.

There is a significant delay in climate change legislation and policy making in Northern Ireland, as the resistance to the concept of human driven climate change remains strong within some political parties and movements. Until very recently, policy focused purely on adaptation, and took account primarily of energy and transport related issues. A proposal for climate legislation is currently being considered; however, this focuses on limiting emissions targets and prioritises United Kingdom based evidence, rather than evidence and recommendations made by the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change.

Gender has been largely absent from all debate on climate change in Northern Ireland. However, existing inequalities are highly likely to be deepened by climate change, although the impacts are less severe than those already affecting many other regions. Northern Ireland lacks a gender sensitive employment strategy, and has never had a childcare strategy. Care is significantly underfunded, with over 335,000 people (17 per cent of the population) waiting for first specialist appointments in June 2021 and the wait for many appointments and routine procedures up to five, in some cases seven years. Organisations representing nurses report that the overwhelmingly female care workforce is burnt out to the point of being unable to continue working. A draft skills strategy, meanwhile, is proposing investment in science, mathematics and engineering subjects, with a reduction in state funded higher education places in other areas. Public transport outside the main conurbation of Belfast is very limited and transport policy remains private car oriented.

The implication of these gender blind policies is that women and girls have limited options and agency in their own lives, as well as in their communities. Climate change is likely to exacerbate this, through restricting economic opportunities particularly in rural areas and, without intervention, reinforcing the roles of women as carers and homemakers. This has been demonstrated in extreme weather events to date, where communities have been cut off from services due to flooding and women have had to shoulder additional care burdens, in some cases at the expense of their own work outside the home. From the early stages of the pandemic, women have led support within communities, and the women's sector has continued to provide additional services throughout the crisis. However, lack of data and evidence makes it difficult to estimate impacts of future climate change accurately, and therefore a gender analysis of climate change impacts is a crucial first step. Action on all these issues is, in addition, vital and urgent from an overall gender equality perspective, and climate proofing should be developed as an additional tool.

A key issue that has emerged in the Northern Ireland context of climate change action, and has been mirrored worldwide in the COVID-19 response, is the crucial importance of political commitment to action and engaging communities and civil society in shaping policy and legislation. The exclusion of women and girls and women's organisations from COVID-19 response taskforces has led to gender blind recovery plans that far from 'building back better', may roll back gender equality long term. Lack of commitment to climate action, and a focus on traditional economic growth models, has delayed meaningful action and contributed to the irreversible climate change that has already occurred.

Multilateral and comprehensive action that addresses both the sources of climate change and seeks to mitigate impacts across the social, environmental and economic pillars is now urgent. The evidence is available, through the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change and reports from academia and civil society. Women's organisations and organisations representing Indigenous, racialised and minoritised communities have strong evidence of both climate change impacts, and solutions that meet the needs of women and girls, in particular those marginalised through intersectional discrimination and disadvantage.

Crucially, leadership is required at the global as well as national and local levels. While the Paris Agreement provides a basis for this, it is clear that more needs to be done to promote decisive solutions based on inclusive processes. In particular, the Paris Agreement has to date had a limited impact on the growth and profit driven economic models that also drive environmental pollution, degradation and climate change, or to reduce global inequalities caused by these models, which build on colonial practices and integrate patriarchal norms and misogyny as well as racism and class based discrimination.

The Paris Agreement marked its fifth anniversary in 2020. Building on the learning from COVID-19, as well as the expertise of people and communities in regions experiencing

accelerating climate change and environmental degradation, there is now a critical window of opportunity to strengthen the Agreement before its tenth anniversary in 2025 and maximise its potential to avert catastrophic climate change and concretely tackle inequalities. This is also an opportunity to create and galvanise global commitment and avoid fragmentation into nationally disparate, protectionist approaches. Key principles of a review should include fossil fuel phase out and one planet economics, solidarity and multilateralism, and equality and human rights based on the United Nations international treaty framework.

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform support the aims for a future based on care for people and planet outlined by the Women's Gender Constituency to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. As an organisation focused on promoting implementation of the international human rights treaty framework locally, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform also advocates for collaborative action based on the fundamental principles embodied in this framework. However, bolder action is now necessary, and time is running out. Therefore, new and strengthened international mechanisms are critical to protect the rights of all, including women and girls both now and in the future.