



Northern Ireland  
Women's European Platform

## **Response to the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland consultation Department for the Economy**

**August 2021**

### **1. Introduction**

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Skills Strategy development process.

NIWEP is a membership organisation of women's NGOs in Northern Ireland. Established as the Northern Ireland link to the European Women's Lobby, the EU's expert body on women's rights and gender equality, NIWEP also has special consultative status with the UN. A key role for NIWEP is promoting gender responsive policy and decision making at local, regional and national level taking account of the state's international obligations, while also ensuring women and girls are engaged in policy and decision making. NIWEP also works to share information and good practice at international level with local members and stakeholders, and highlight local learning and good practice internationally.

NIWEP's core objectives involve raising awareness and promoting implementation of key international human rights treaties and initiatives, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). NIWEP views implementing the recommendations of CEDAW as a clear roadmap and mechanism to ensuring women's human rights are fully met and upheld in Northern Ireland, and the implementation of the UK's international obligations as a cornerstone of both upholding human rights domestically and taking a leading role in advocating for human rights internationally.

### **2. Endorsement**

NIWEP endorses the responses of Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group and Women's Regional Consortium to this consultation. In particular, NIWEP strongly endorses the analysis of Women's Regional Consortium in its response, specifically with regard to the experience and priorities of women from low income backgrounds.

### **3. Comment on the strategy**

#### **Key messages**

##### ***Gender lens***

NIWEP welcomes the recognition in the consultation document that women, people with long term health conditions and young people have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, as well as skills and adult education policy. The proposal to develop a Women in STEM action plan is also welcome; however, it is essential that it is linked to an analysis of how the wider education and

economic policies and infrastructure affect the choices of women and girls, and action is built on this wider analysis, rather than purely a narrow analysis of subject choices. This is developed in detail below.

### ***Policy coherence and global analysis across the economy: care as an essential element of a successful economy***

NIWEP also welcomes the focus on a coherent strategic approach, informed by the OECD analysis. It is important, however, to ensure policy coherence across sectors and Departments, as skills don't stand in isolation but are shaped by people's wider socioeconomic circumstances, as well as the physical, social and educational infrastructure available to them in their local area. Therefore, the Skills Strategy should be aligned with, or development in conjunction to, the suite of Social Inclusion Strategies being developed by the Department for Communities, as well as education strategy, rural development strategy and infrastructure strategy, as well as the City Deals for the Belfast and Derry city regions.

It is positive that the consultation document recognises the long term issues and challenges for people from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. These are persistent inequalities that reduce people's life opportunities and outcomes, and current education policy has been largely unsuccessful in addressing these, in part through preferential treatment for grammar education that benefits primarily children and young people from more affluent backgrounds. It is vital that the Skills Strategy builds on a comprehensive understanding of these inequalities, and aligns with strategies aimed at tackling disadvantage. Critically, the issue of financial support must be reflected: many people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds cannot afford training and/or retraining, and the benefit system does not allow for such personal investment. Women from low incomes backgrounds, in particular, can rarely afford time away from work or caring, which is a contributing factor to female poverty and the overrepresentation of women in the lowest income groups. This is particularly acute in the context of the low pay economy described in the consultation document, and ensuring education is affordable is an essential component alongside creating further opportunities and progression routes from low skilled jobs at risk of being taken over by automation.

In this context, it is concerning that there is an ongoing correlation of poor education with criminality, effectively stigmatising disadvantaged communities rather than fully analysing the evidence, which clearly show that poverty is the main driver of poor life outcomes, including low educational attainment and long term unemployment.<sup>1</sup> It is also vital that the additional barriers and challenges facing people from Black, minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds as well as LGBTQI+ communities are addressed to ensure a strategy fully consistent with S75 and fit for a modern Northern Ireland. Engagement with the relevant communities, and organisations representing them, is vital to ensure issues are reflected fully to enable the strategy to meaningfully address these persistent inequalities.

In addition, skills cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall social and economic needs of Northern Ireland as a whole. As noted in the consultation document, Northern Ireland has a growing older population, while poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with greater need for healthcare and other public services. The crisis in the health and care system is well documented, and the Department of Health is embarking on a major reform programme to address this, including seeking to fill persistent, major understaffing in the health service<sup>2,3</sup>. Therefore, it is of significant concern that the draft strategy makes no reference to health policy, or the future need for health,

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<sup>1</sup> See eg. Marmot, M et al (2020) [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#) for a comprehensive analysis of the social determinants of health and the links of educational attainment with socioeconomic status

<sup>2</sup> See eg. [Oral Statement to the Assembly by Health Minister Robin Swann, Tuesday 13 April 2021 on Trust Rebuilding Plans](#)

<sup>3</sup> See eg. Department of Health (June 2021) [Elective Care Framework - Restart, Recovery and Redesign](#)

care and social services and actively proposes to refocus resources away from essential sectors of the economy. Health, care and education, as core examples of areas related to 'social studies', are critical services for everyone in Northern Ireland, which are required to not only to secure the health and wellbeing of individuals, but the economy as a whole by creating the infrastructure enabling individuals to build skills and engage in the labour market. A high quality health and care system, alongside high quality education, is also vital to attract investment, and attract as well as retain talent in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the health and care sector can significantly contribute to the economy through the provision of green and sustainable jobs, which are regionally dispersed addressing sub regional inequalities and offer significant progression routes from entry level to the highest professional qualifications. This is particularly important from a gender equality perspective, and this discussion is developed further below under Skills development. It is particularly important to note that successful high skilled, innovative economies, such as those in northern Europe, are underpinned by high quality education and care infrastructure, including subsidised, widely accessible childcare provided by staff qualified to teacher level and supporting early years education. This culture of valuing education plays a vital role in instilling a culture of lifelong learning, while also giving all adults a genuine choice with regard to participation in the labour market.

Addressing the issues also requires comprehensive analysis of the situation and the underlying drivers. The analysis in the consultation document paints a clear picture of unemployment as well as the impact of COVID-19, but does little to highlight the core and long standing issues, including cultural stereotypes, biases in the education system that prioritise predominantly middle class, male and white occupations and ambitions, the previous focus put on securing (foreign) investment through offering a low cost workforce, and underinvestment in other areas of the economy that affect participation in society. Specifically, there is no analysis of how the lack of childcare and adult social care, including lack of strategic policy level direction, impact on women's labour market choices and participation<sup>4</sup>. While policies and strategies typically brush off the higher proportion of women working in low paid part time work as a 'choice', this fundamentally overlooks the dynamics of lack of childcare, cultural stereotypes and expectations, poor public transport infrastructure and individual qualifications and aptitudes that often make it virtually impossible for women to make genuine choices about labour market participation.

The Skills Barometer reflects the same gaps, and therefore cannot fully represent the issues, needs and priorities of the Northern Ireland population as a whole. However, this does emphasise the urgent need to align economic and skills policy, as well as wider social policies, to ensure the social and physical infrastructure required to support a modern economy is in place. Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK that has never had a childcare strategy, and the cost of childcare at £169 per week per child (on average) is prohibitive for most families, while others have no access at all due to lack of provision. The UN CEDAW Committee has highlighted this as an urgent area for action specifically in Northern Ireland, most recently in the 2019 Concluding Observations<sup>5</sup>.

NIWEP believes it is essential that a Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland builds on appropriate gender analysis, to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland can contribute to and benefit from a strengthened skills base and economy. The objectives of the strategy are appropriate and aligned with this, but the proposed implementation demonstrates an urgent need to strengthen a gender lens and focus on women and girls, as well as other underrepresented groups as outlined above. The Feminist Recovery Plan<sup>6</sup>, as well as the Expert Panel report prepared to underpin development

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<sup>4</sup> See eg. Harkness, S (2018) [Briefing on Female Employment and Child Inequality](#) for the [All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Science and Policy](#)

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW Committee (March 2019) [Concluding Observations on the 8<sup>th</sup> periodic report of the UK, recommendation 41\(a\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Women's Policy Group (July 2021) [Feminist Recovery Plan – one year on](#)

of the forthcoming Gender Equality Strategy<sup>7</sup>, provide a detailed overview of evidence on how the current situation affects women and girls, and can significantly inform the final strategy.

NIWEP would urge for the Skills Strategy to be aligned with not only the Gender Equality Strategy, but with the full suite of forthcoming Social Inclusion strategies, which include a strategy on tackling poverty, an LGBTQI+ strategy and a Disability Strategy.<sup>8</sup> This is essential to ensure the Skills Strategy contributes to policy coherence across Departments, but also to ensure that it can take account of the comprehensive evidence base developed to underpin all four strategies and thus meaningfully address the structural inequalities and factors that have created the current situation and have the maximum impact on creating a sustainable, modern economy. A comprehensive equality analysis is also essential to ensure the drive for high skilled, high paying jobs is implemented in a way that does not inadvertently deepen the divide between those with 'in demand' or desirable skills and those without, which is noted in the consultation document.

It should be noted that Northern Ireland has obligations under international treaties, as the UK has ratified the full framework of UN international human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Integrating a gender lens in skills development, education and employment policy is therefore entirely in line with international standards, and fully aligns with provisions of S75. The most recent recommendations of the CEDAW Committee (2019) emphasise the need to 'Strengthen efforts to encourage girls to pursue non-traditional subjects and take coordinated measures to encourage girls to take up courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics'<sup>9</sup>, and express concern about the ongoing gender gap in these fields. The Skills Strategy offers a critical opportunity to strengthen gender equality in line with this recommendation, but it is essential that this is implemented comprehensively from early education onwards. Such a focus can also contribute to addressing the socioeconomic gap in education and skills, encouraging and enabling all children from more disadvantaged backgrounds to explore sustainable skills development and careers across the economy.

### **Emphasis on STEM subjects**

The focus on STEM subjects is relevant, but must be implemented with care to ensure that there is balance across sectors and STEM subjects are not prioritised at the expense of other key areas of society and the economy. In particular, arts and humanities must be safeguarded and not inadvertently lost in the process. This is essential in particular to ensure that the creative talent required to underpin a successful economy in the modern era can be retained and developed in Northern Ireland; while STEM subjects are critical, innovation requires creative design skills in order to create the cutting edge economy described in the strategy. Without sufficient focus on creativity and innovation, there is a risk that the outcome is a skills base with limited potential and an economy losing the edge, focused on realising the ideas of others outside the region. This will not only minimise economic benefits, but will not contribute to creating the desired reputation for Northern Ireland. This is in a context where many arts and humanities subjects already are unavailable in Northern Ireland, driving talent out of the region.

For similar reasons, it is vital to build in flexibility particularly in the education system. The focus on 'in demand' subjects is of significant concern particularly from the perspective of education, as development in these fields is very rapid whereas the education system evolves very slowly. Modelling systems on current 'in demand' subjects risks leaving Northern Ireland behind as 'in demand' subjects change; focus should instead be on a broad and balanced STEM curriculum that

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<sup>7</sup> Department for Communities (March 2021) [Report from the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Timetable for development of Social Inclusion Strategies](#), Department for Communities website, last accessed 3 August 2021

<sup>9</sup> CEDAW Committee (March 2019) [Concluding Observations on the 8<sup>th</sup> periodic report of the UK, recommendation 41\(a\)](#)

allows pupils, students and ultimately graduates to pursue a wide range of careers in and associated with STEM subjects. Potential examples could be sought from northern Europe as well as South Asia, both regions that currently deliver a pool of talented and not only highly, but flexibly skilled individuals.

The focus on STEM subjects must also be implemented through an appropriate gender lens; it is vital, but not sufficient to only reform careers education. Women and girls are currently underrepresented in STEM areas, and specific focus is required on ensuring that women and girls have a genuine choice to engage with these subjects and develop successful careers in these fields. This requires action at all levels from the education system to employment practices, as the underrepresentation is associated primarily with stereotypes and gendered perceptions of STEM as being a male preserve. There is evidence that girls from a very early age believe that they are not good in mathematics, regardless of the objective evidence, while evidence from elsewhere in the UK indicate that girls experience gender based and sexual harassment in classes such as physics, which makes them avoid such subjects.<sup>10</sup>

The Department's (then DEL) own evidence from 2013 shows that at that time, men outnumbered women in STEM fields by 3:1, and only between quarter and a third of pupils studying subjects including physics, design and technology and computer sciences were girls. The difference in higher education was much more marked, with over 60 per cent of STEM subject enrolments male. This report emphasised the need for gender balance both to underpin gender equality, and to maximise Northern Ireland's economic potential, and recognised gender bias in both education and in recruitment and promotion within the wider STEM employment fields.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Digital divide***

The consultation document helpfully points out the vital importance of addressing the digital divide, which increasingly prevents people from more disadvantaged backgrounds from engaging effectively in society, including the labour market. It is critical to also integrate a gender lens in the proposed Digital Action Plan, as women are more likely to lack both the skills and concrete access to digital technology. During the first lockdown, there was anecdotal evidence of parents seeking to home school children on one device<sup>12</sup>, while there were many others who were unable to support their children due to a lack of digital literacy. This will not only underpin gender equality overall, but will also ensure access to the largest pool of talent.

Improving access to digital technology is also important for balanced regional development, and enabling all areas to maximise new economic, educational and social opportunities. In particular, digital connectivity can help create jobs outside the main hubs, increasing opportunities in the rural economy and also reducing the need for commuting, thus contributing to a green economy. This can also benefit women, as commuting and/or lack of access to transport and child and adult social care locally are main reasons why women in particular settle for lower qualified, lower paid jobs rurally. Increased disposable income through strengthened employment, meanwhile, further contributes to local economies and can drive further innovation and investment. Women tend to spend a greater proportion of income locally, and therefore addressing the digital divide can simultaneously address the shared goals of gender equality, rural development and tackling disadvantage.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Engender (2019) [Making Women Safer in Scotland: The Cause for a Standalone Misogyny Offence](#)

<sup>11</sup> Department of Employment and Learning (2013) [Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics \(STEM\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Purdy, N blog (10 June 2020) '[Bridging the lockdown learning gap](#)'

<sup>13</sup> Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (2018) [Rural women's voices](#)

## Skills development

NIWEP welcomes the proposals to reimagine skills development and reinforce investment across the education system. Education in Northern Ireland, in particular early years, primary and non grammar post primary education, has been underfunded and narrowly focused on limited core subjects for an extensive period, leading to the fall back in performance outlined in the consultation document. In addition, further education has been neglected, which has created barriers and contributed to unemployment for many young people and also those seeking training or retraining at an older age.

NIWEP would urge for investment particularly in early years and primary education, as a sustainable mechanism to create the best start in life for young people, and also investment in further education and apprenticeships for those currently furthest from the labour market, including the large number of people affected by the pandemic, a large proportion of whom are women due to the female dominated nature of the sectors hardest hit. It is critical, however, that investment in further education and apprenticeships goes beyond STEM subjects and is based on a wider analysis of the needs and priorities in the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. It is of significant concern that the consultation proposes a reduction in 'social studies', without clarifying this further or undertaking any analysis of the implications of an ageing society or the current crisis in healthcare. Therefore, the consultation document fundamentally overlooks the economic and social returns to be made from investment in care. For example, apprenticeships in the care sector offers a high impact 'quick win' that will support not only women, but the society and economy as a whole by increasing job opportunities and ensuring more people can access the care and support they need to live with dignity, more quickly.

From a women's perspective, the critical priorities in the Skills Strategy should include investment in care and skills related to care. An investment in care is essential above all to ensure the growing population of people in need of care can access the care and support they need to live with dignity and as independently as possible. It is also vital to reduce the burden of unpaid care, which falls disproportionately to women<sup>14</sup> and creates a situation where many women are unable to participate in the labour market, thus reducing their personal life opportunities as well as reducing revenue and economic potential. It would be helpful to explicitly recognise that economic inactivity due to family reasons affects in particular women; NISRA figures from 2019 show that over 85 per cent of people economically inactive due to family reasons are women, and that this reason is cited by a third of all economically inactive women, rising to half of women when students and retirees are excluded.<sup>15</sup> Lack of childcare, and adult social care, is therefore directly associated with female poverty, and lack of genuine economic choice among women that limits their potential, and the economic potential of Northern Ireland as a whole.

Investment in care – adult social care as well as childcare - enables women to participate in the labour force and generates revenue as disposable income rises, while reliance on benefits reduces. This is the core recommendation from the UK wide Commission on a Gender Equal Economy, which stresses that a caring economy is a response to structural inequality, as well as a means to realign the economy to support the overall aim of wellbeing in a sustainable way. Importantly, polling for the Commission highlights that over two thirds of respondents are willing to pay more tax to support well paid and secure jobs.<sup>16</sup>

A care economy will generate jobs, which are both green and sustainable jobs contributing to a resilient and sustainable economy<sup>17</sup>. A care economy has been highlighted as a vital element of a

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<sup>14</sup> See eg. Women's Budget Group (2020) [Spirals of Inequality: How unpaid care is at the heart of gender inequalities](#)

<sup>15</sup> NISRA (2019) [Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland](#)

<sup>16</sup> See further information on the Commission for a Gender Equal Economy and the Commission report at [WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy - Womens Budget Group](#)

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, M & McGregor, S (May 2020). [Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK](#). London: Women's Budget Group

resilient and sustainable future economy in a range of recent reports, which demonstrate that investment in care can generate significant numbers of jobs; at UK level, it has been estimated that investment bringing the care workforce to 10% of the population could create up to 2.5 million jobs, for men as well as women. This report by Women's Budget Group stresses that investing in care, rather than construction, would also allow for 50% more of investment to be recouped in direct and indirect tax revenue.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows how the persistent view of caring as 'women's work penalises all women in the workplace, and in particular women with children; the report indicates 60% of women in EU countries have experienced some change to employment conditions as a result of childcare needs and highlights how unpaid work and caring responsibilities drive the gender pay gap. The report emphasises that revaluing care is a basis for transforming policies on care and achieving greater investment in high quality, adequately paid professional care services.<sup>19</sup> This is further supported by policy at the UN and international levels, where investment in care, skills and social protection is underlined as cornerstones of sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>20</sup>

Investment in education and childcare is also essential as part of a caring economy to ensure all children can get the best start in life. This is in line with the Outcomes Framework for the PfG. and is critical both in itself as an investment in children and in the long term as an investment in a healthy, highly skilled Northern Ireland with low levels of poverty. NIWEP notes the findings of the new Ulster University report on education in Northern Ireland, and would stress the importance of developing new funding models that focus on supporting achievement for all pupils, with strengthened support for those at risk of low attainment and those with special educational needs. This is critical to ensure equality for all children and young people, and support those from more disadvantaged backgrounds to fulfil their potential. In this context, it is important to note that while 'year out' schemes in further and higher education courses are very beneficial, they can create barriers for students from lower income backgrounds, who have limited financial support and may be reluctant to accumulate additional student loans. Consideration should be given to subsidising such vital experience, for example through student loans, or bursary schemes. Paid placements may also have a place, but care must be taken to ensure that such placements are available equitably to students, and that small businesses with potentially valuable expertise, but limited resources, can participate in placement schemes.

Childcare also enables parents, in particular mothers, to participate in the labour market, as outlined above in relating to investing in care. Enabling all parents to have a genuine choice regarding participation in the labour force is important for wellbeing at individual level, and for maximising access to the widest talent pool available. Maternal employment is also a key factor in reducing and preventing child poverty, while maternal education is directly linked to improved outcomes both in educational attainment and health<sup>21</sup>. The Childcare for All campaign coordinated by Employers for Childcare highlights core elements of a high quality childcare system, which should have universality and accessibility at its heart.<sup>22</sup>

Further education and professional training, in turn, will be critical to enable and support the growing cohort of unemployed people to build new skills and identify new job opportunities. This will be particularly important to respond to the structural changes the Northern Ireland economy is likely to experience as a result of the pandemic and EU exit, including a contraction of the retail and hospitality sectors, potential changes in the agri food and associated sectors and growth in knowledge and skills intensive sectors. Women and young people are overrepresented in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, and it is therefore critical that this is considered when

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<sup>18</sup> de Henau J & Himmelweit, S (June 2020) [A care led recovery from coronavirus](#). London: Women's Budget Group

<sup>19</sup> EIGE (2021) [Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market](#)

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<sup>21</sup> See eg. Harkness, S (2018) [Briefing on Female Employment and Child Inequality](#) for the [All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Science and Policy](#)

<sup>22</sup> For further detail, see [Childcare campaign | Childcare For All | Northern Ireland \(childcareforallni.com\)](#)

designing and funding further education, including appropriate targeting and support for women and young people to engage with traditionally male dominated sectors.

### International policy drivers

The UN has called on member states to prioritise women and girls in both the immediate response and recovery.<sup>23,24</sup> This requires a gender lens in all decision making, which also forms part of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG5 gender equality.<sup>25</sup> The UN also emphasises the importance of comprehensive social protection systems, with targeted support for those on the lowest incomes and most at risk of marginalisation, ensuring gender equal COVID-19 taskforces and developing gender sensitive budgeting.<sup>26</sup> In short, there is an international mandate and urgent call to put women and girls at the centre of the COVID-19 response, to mitigate disproportionate harms on women and support new policies on gender equality in the post pandemic period.

While the global response to COVID-19 has fallen short of adequately supporting women, girls and minoritised groups, examples of approaches more supportive for women do exist. In Germany, the job support scheme is more generous to people with children, and increases over time, while in Norway, additional payments were made to the lowest paid workers, who are disproportionately female.<sup>27</sup> A number of countries have also improved access to childcare, including Czech Republic, where parents of children under 13 can take leave to look after children without losing pay.<sup>28</sup> In Luxembourg, parental leave on full pay is made available throughout the school closure period. In Belgium, parents can reduce their working time by 50 per cent on a higher rate of pay than they would usually get on parental leave.<sup>29</sup> Other countries, including Australia and several of the Nordic countries, have ensured childcare remains open throughout lockdowns.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.1 Equality and human rights

This submission is focused on highlighting the gender perspective on housing, which is not explicitly addressed in the consultation document. NIWEP welcomes, however, the recognition in this section that there are data gaps in relation to gender, and would welcome action to address these as a precondition for effective and efficient, evidence based decision making.

NIWEP also welcomes recognition that childcare is a key driver of economic inactivity. It would be helpful to explicitly recognise that economic inactivity due to family reasons affects in particular women; NISRA figures from 2019 show that over 85 per cent of people economically inactive due to family reasons are women, and that this reason is cited by a third of all economically inactive women, rising to half of women when students and retirees are excluded.<sup>31</sup> Lack of childcare, and adult social care, is therefore directly associated with female poverty, and lack of genuine economic choice among women, and is relevant to housing supply strategy. This emphasises the critical

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<sup>23</sup> UN (April 2020) [UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women](#)

<sup>24</sup> See eg. Khan, Z & K Gifford (March 2021) [COVID-19 and fiscal policy: Applying gender-responsive budgeting in support and recovery](#). New York: UN Women.

<sup>25</sup> See eg. [UN SDGs website](#)

<sup>26</sup> Freizer, S, G Azcona et al (June 2020) [COVID-19 and women's leadership: From an effective response to building back better](#)

<sup>27</sup> Cook, R (2021) Covid-19 has been a crisis for women – but some governments have recognised this better than others. In Global Institute of Women's Leadership (2021) [Essays on equality](#). London: King's College London.

<sup>28</sup> Eversheds-Sutherland (May 2021) [Coronavirus – a practical guide for employers in the Czech Republic](#)

<sup>29</sup> Cook, R (2021) Covid-19 has been a crisis for women – but some governments have recognised this better than others. In Global Institute of Women's Leadership (2021) [Essays on equality](#). London: King's College London.

<sup>30</sup> UN Women (November 2020) [Whose time to care?](#)

<sup>31</sup> NISRA (2019) [Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland](#)



importance of a whole system, cross Departmental approach to skills; the focus must be on enabling all residents of Northern Ireland to make genuine choices about their lives, including education and skills as a cornerstone of economic and social wellbeing.