

Submission by Northern Ireland Women's European Platform to Unequal Impact? Coronavirus, disability and access to services and Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and BAME people by the Women and Equalities Committee

July 2020

Introduction

This submission is a brief complement to a submission made to the sub inquiry on gender and economic impact. The latter, in turn, is an update to a submission made previously in April, in response to the main inquiry.

It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has had different impacts on different population groups. BAME people have experienced greater mortality, people with disabilities have been isolated and found access to virtually all services severely limited. Women have been economically sidelined, while taking on increasing unpaid care; women in paid care work have taken on additional work under severe pressure. Intersectional impacts mean that people with intersecting identities have experienced multiple disadvantages, which often compound each other. For example, women with disabilities are among those least able to seek help if they are experiencing violence, while BAME women have both shouldered greater care burdens and found it harder than other population groups to make ends meet. NIWEP welcomes these sub inquiries, which are important for highlighting these intersectional impacts and can contribute to ensuring an appropriate policy response in the recovery period.

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform is a membership organisation working to ensure the voice of women in Northern Ireland is heard at the national and international level. We work with our members and partners to collate the views and evidence of women, and represent Northern Ireland at the UN as well as at the European Women's Lobby. Our core role is to ensure effective engagement with international human rights processes, including coordinating reporting to CEDAW in particular. At the local level, our work focuses on sharing information and building capacity on international human rights instruments and mechanisms for gender equality, in order to support advocacy for gender equality. We also work with policy makers to inform gender responsive policy making. During the COVID-19 crisis, a specific role of NIWEP has been to share information, evidence and examples of a gender responsive approach to COVID-19, to support and inform a domestic response and highlight the experience in Northern Ireland.

Key message: Lack of data in Northern Ireland makes evidence based analysis virtually impossible

The central message from Northern Ireland that NIWEP would like to highlight is that limitations in data collection mean that there is no formal or official data or evidence on how the crisis has impacted on people with disabilities and BAME people in Northern Ireland.

Data in Northern Ireland is collected primarily at population level, with only very limited breakdowns, normally by age and in some limited instances by gender. Where breakdowns are available, these are no longer routinely published, and therefore access is a significant issue, as well as highlighting messages arising from available data. For example, data on COVID-19 diagnoses and deaths has been available by gender and broad age categories¹,

¹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [Dashboard of registered deaths](#), accessed 7.7.20

and there is some data on the gender breakdown of Universal Credit claimants². Breakdowns by race or disability are very limited and almost never published; the rationale for this is concern about reliability and privacy due to often small sample sizes in surveys. However, in particular statutory agencies are likely to have some data, and it is equally important that available data are used effectively to develop policies and initiatives that appropriately support all population groups.

While there is no reason to believe the impacts are different from those highlighted by for example Sisters of Frida in relation to women with disabilities³ or Fawcett Society and the Women's Budget Group in relation to BAME people⁴, the lack of data means the validity of these findings in Northern Ireland cannot be confirmed. In particular, Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of people with disabilities than elsewhere in the UK, while the profile of BAME communities is different.

Measures to address inequalities

Fundamentally, the crisis is highlighting and deepening existing structural inequalities, and urgent action is needed to ensure equality and human rights are not fully taken account of and not subsumed under the guise of prioritising economic recovery. The evidence gaps and intersectional inequalities for women with multiple identities have been highlighted repeatedly by NIWEP and others in shadow reports to CEDAW, including in particular in the shadow report to the examination of the UK under CEDAW in 2013. In July 2020, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland also called for strengthened data in relation to all groups with protected characteristics, in order to secure effective and evidence based policy and response to COVID-19.⁵

The Concluding Observations from the CEDAW Committee in its examination of the UK in 2019 also highlight the need to strengthen the voice and visibility of women with multiple identities. The Concluding Observations make specific recommendations with regard to BAME women in public life, protecting women who are refugees, asylum seekers or have insecure immigration status and ensuring social protection for everyone. The Concluding Observations also highlighted the critical importance of a gender sensitive approach to policy making, based on appropriate data and evidence.⁶ These recommendations remain relevant as a roadmap to recovery. In addition, NIWEP would like to highlight the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which are binding on the UK as a UN member state and are the UN's priority framework for ensuring recovery that leaves no one behind and adequately supports vulnerable and specifically affected population groups.⁷

The indicators developed to support monitoring of progress on the SDGs provide a relevant and validated indicator set, that can inform effective and inclusive policy making in the UK to secure equality objectives. NIWEP would recommend the development of a dashboard for monitoring how COVID-19 is impacting on 'women and men, girls and boys taking account of other characteristics such as disabilities, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This dashboard

² Department of the Economy (July 2020) [COVID-19 and the Northern Ireland economy](#)

³ Sisters of Frida (April 2020) [The Impact of COVID 19 on Disabled Women from Sisters of Frida](#)

⁴ Fawcett Society and Women's Budget Group (June 2020) [New data reveals "crisis of support" for BAME women](#)

⁵ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland press release 7 July 2020 '[Data is a vital component in tackling the impacts of COVID 19 pandemic](#)'

⁶ CEDAW Committee (2019) [Concluding Observations on the 8th periodic report of the United Kingdom](#)

⁷ UN Secretary-General (March 2020) [Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#)

could effectively be based on indicators currently used to monitor the SDGs, many of which are already being collected by the Office for National Statistics. However, it is critical that data collection is uniform across the UK. We would encourage and urge the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to develop effective data collection and indicators, and engage with both ONS and local stakeholders as part of the process.

NIWEP would welcome the support of the Women and Equalities Committee in ensuring that all of the devolved administrations are fully aware of their obligations under international law, and effectively implement the CEDAW recommendation and secure the SDGs.