

WOMEN'S
PLATFORM

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

WHO WE ARE

Women's Platform is a membership organisation that works to amplify the voices of women and girls in Northern Ireland at national and international levels, and build platforms for women and girls to share their priorities internationally through:

- ⇒ Acting as the Northern Ireland coordination to the European Women's Lobby
- ⇒ Working collaboratively in the UK, as part of the UK Joint Committee on Women
- ⇒ Representing Northern Ireland at the United Nations, as an NGO with Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC

Within Northern Ireland, Women's Platform works to

- 1) build capacity on international treaties and standards for gender equality
- 2) share learning from international agencies and networks
- 3) advocate for gender responsive policy and decision making

Aims and Objectives

Women's Platform exists to advance equality and human rights for women and girls and promote equality, diversity and community development, through mechanisms including:-

- the provision of a forum for women's organisations;
- international advocacy of human rights
- promoting respect for human rights and gender equality among individuals, governments, corporations and other institutions
- commenting on proposed gender discrimination legislation and providing technical and policy advice to statutory bodies and other agencies, organisations and institutions

CONTENTS

Chair's Report	4
Director's Report	6
CEDAW	7
Commission on the Status of Women	8
European collaboration and advocacy	9
Women, peace and security	10
Women's Spaces	10
Local alliance building and development	12
Our People	13
Accounts	14

CHAIR'S REPORT

I'm delighted to present this annual report, which concludes my first year as Chair of Women's Platform. The year has been characterised by change and development, in particular in modernising our governance and ways of working, which builds on our rebranding in 2022 and continues the process to develop Women's Platform as an organisation reflective of the diverse women and girls whose voices we seek to engage and amplify. This has been a positive process of exploring ideas and challenging existing practices, and I'm excited that we are now focused on strengthening diversity and embedding intersectional practice, in line with our strategic priorities 2022-25.



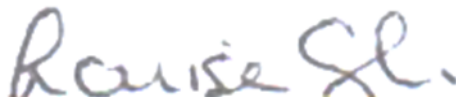
The year overall was positive for Women's Platform, with a focus on building new projects, focused in particular on women and peacebuilding and communications. The Women's Spaces project, delivered as a consortium with Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, Women's Resource and Development Agency and Women's Support Network was the key achievement, and in its first year engaged over 200 women across Northern Ireland in exploring how women can be better heard in peacebuilding and public life. Women's Spaces is designed to strengthen women's voice in decision making, and the demand for change was clear in the over 20 events held in project Year 1. Our focus is on enabling more women to engage in this dialogue, and this is very much the core of Year 2.

Women's Platform also successfully engaged in the process developing a new National Action Plan on women, peace and security for the UK, which for the first time includes reference to Northern Ireland. This is a major shift, and creates a new basis for engaging in policy making. Women's Platform will continue advocating for meaningful domestic implementation, including through engagement with UK decision makers and collaborating with organisations across the UK, as well as amplifying voices of women locally.

The role of Women's Platform as a bridge builder was further highlighted during the year, in particular through coordinating a women's sector visit to Brussels on the invitation of the UK Mission to the EU, which underlines the strong linking role Women's Platform has built over many years. This visit provided a vital opportunity to highlight women's perspectives on the post Brexit situation and sets a clear direction for the future: collaboration and multilateralism will be more important than ever to protect rights, locally and globally. Women's Platform is committed to continuing this work, in particular in engagement with the UN and international networks.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee for their commitment, leadership and support, and in particular vice Chair Emma Osborne, who has taken on an increasing role in supporting chairing and strategic leadership. The ongoing dedication and focus of the Committee is a cornerstone of successful delivery, and it has been a privilege to lead the Committee in building new approaches, with increasingly diverse perspectives. Our focus in the coming year is on further strengthening intersectional practice across all our work, and this will be a key indicator against which we assess operational delivery. I would also like to thank our funders for their continued support and confidence in Women's Platform, which is invaluable particularly in the current external circumstances, and provides a foundation that allows development and innovation despite the challenging external circumstances.

Finally, as Chair I would like to confirm that the Committee has given due consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit when setting organisational plans.

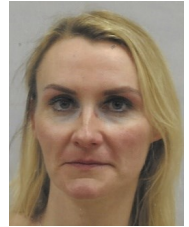


Louise Coyle
Chair

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I'm pleased to share this Annual Report , which highlights a year of development.

The year was the first of a new Committee, and I'm delighted that a focus on Committee development and governance with new members has enabled a revitalised, modernised approach to organisational delivery. New positions on key issues adopted during the year will help ensure that all members and partners can be clear on Women's Platform core values and working principles.



This is particularly helpful for developing communications, which will be a priority focus in 2024, with a particular emphasis on engaging a diversity of women and girls.

The Women's Spaces consortium has contributed significant learning on delivery mechanisms, and will enable more effective partnership working in the future. As an event in the Long Gallery in June clearly demonstrated, the project is meeting a significant demand among women to be heard in peacebuilding and public life, and the focus will be on further developing capacity to meet this demand. The Women's Vision for a Future Northern Ireland, launched early in the year, similarly emphasises women's equal role in decision making, and is informing development of future work.

The views of women also informed advocacy, which was a major focus and included building relationships at UK and Ireland government level as well as with local decision makers. This foundation in grassroots evidence enabled new conversations on women and equality in decision making, and the future focus will be on securing commitments to achieve this. These mechanisms also contribute to effective engagement with UN bodies, and Women's Platform is currently coordinating the civil society response to the baseline assessment under the Istanbul Convention.

I would like to thank the Chair and Vice Chair for their leadership and ongoing support, and all members of the Committee for continued guidance and strategic vision, which creates a clear framework for operational delivery. I would also like to express my thanks to all partners and members of Women's Platform, whose advice, support and engagement is what enables Women's Platform to successfully deliver and develop its role as a link to the national and international level. I look forward to further working with the Committee, members and partners to build platforms to make their voices heard, locally as well as at UK/Ireland and international level.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonna Monaghan".

Jonna Monaghan, Director

OUR WORK

CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is one of the core international human rights treaties, and sets an agenda for action to realise gender equality. Women’s Platform coordinates the civil society response to CEDAW, through preparing shadow reports, advocating for and monitoring implementation of CEDAW Concluding Observations and building capacity on international human rights in the sector.

Women’s Platform was invited to contribute evidence to a follow up review of the Inquiry into abortion legislation in Northern Ireland under the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which reported in 2018 and provided the substantial basis for legislation decriminalising abortion in Northern Ireland. Women’s Platform contributed to instigating the Inquiry, alongside Alliance for Choice and Informing Choices NI, and worked with partners to highlight in particular issues relating to governance and policy making used to prevent implementation of existing laws. Implementation of CEDAW provisions and recommendations was also core to advocacy work, including and supporting partners to highlight CEDAW requirements in their work. A capacity building programme was introduced and piloted at grassroots level, identifying positive feedback but also further development needs. This will be a priority in 2024, as the CEDAW reporting cycle is now expected to begin in late 2024. Data and evidence gathering for this reporting cycle has been initiated, and will be prioritised alongside capacity building in 2024 to ensure a meaningful participation process for organisations as well as grassroots groups.

Women’s Platform also submitted a shadow List of Issues report to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and is developing advocacy on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Updates on the UN Agenda 2030 and sustainable development form key content in the Women’s Platform newsletter and Women’s Platform contributed a statement to the UN High Level Political Forum that monitors progress on the SDGs.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

- First agreed Convention adopted in 1966
 - Focus on core human rights
 - Right to personal integrity
 - Equality before the law
 - Gender equality and minority rights
- Individual and political rights at centre
- Right to vote
 - Freedom of expression, assembly and association



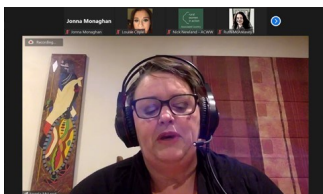
INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the UN’s intergovernmental body responsible for monitoring gender mainstreaming in the UN, including monitoring implementation of gender goals within the Agenda 2030, and progress on the Beijing Platform for Action. Operating through annual conferences, its key role is to assist the UN and member states in setting policy direction. Women’s Platform, as an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, is eligible to participate in CSW and submit evidence.



CSW67 in March 2023 took place in a hybrid format, including a hybrid parallel NGO Forum. While this affected the capacity of organisations worldwide to participate, Women’s Platform supported key local stakeholders to participate remotely, and provided daily updates with highlights throughout CSW67. Women’s Platform also engaged with the UK government negotiators at CSW67 and continued to highlight the importance of foreign and domestic policy coherence.



A side event was organised in collaboration with Associated Country Women of the World and Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network, focusing on rural women’s voices in decision making. This side event shared learning from Northern Ireland as well as New Zealand, where rural women’s voices are increasingly heard in national policy making. The event received very positive feedback as an informative and encouraging environment, and work is ongoing to develop new ways to share learning with women across the world.

Evaluation of CSW67 participation identified a need to engage in person with CSW to maximise the potential for learning and relationship building. The challenges of this in the current financial situation were also acknowledged, and focus over the year has been on exploring innovative mechanisms to secure participation and a platform for the women’s sector in Northern Ireland. This has included preparation for CSW68, including preparation of a side event and submitting a statement to CSW68, which will focus on poverty and social protection.

European collaboration and advocacy

European Women’s Lobby

The European Women’s Lobby is the umbrella network for women’s networks in Europe. Women’s Platform acts as the Northern Ireland coordination to the Lobby, and acted as the UK Board member until June 2023, when representation transferred to Wales in accordance with a long standing rotational arrangement. Women’s Platform continues to engage with the European Women’s Lobby through events and information sharing, and also supports the current Board representation, to coordinated the UK response to EWL policy and programme development.



UK Joint Committee on Women

Women’s Platform is a core member of the UK Joint Committee on Women (UKJCW), which acts as the coordination of the UK membership of the European Women’s Lobby, and rotates Board membership across the four nations. A need to review and development of this mechanism was identified during the year, and Women’s Platform has taken on a role in coordinating and supporting this process,.

Women’s sector visit to Brussels

Women’s Platform contributed to coordinating a visit of women’s sector representatives to Brussels, to highlight women’s perspectives on the situation post Brexit. This role followed an approach by the UK Mission to the EU, and involved liaising between the sector and the Mission to ensure a visit can be organised appropriately and meaningfully. The visit took place in March 2023 and involved a cross section of the women’s sector in Northern Ireland, with meetings involving Members of the European Parliament, EU officials, representatives of



international and the UK Mission to the EU as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU. The visit provided an opportunity to highlight a qualitative, detailed overview of women’s perspectives, and contributed to strengthening understanding of the specific issues for women in Northern Ireland. Opportunities to further develop relationships and engagement are being explored.

Women, Peace and Security

Women's Spaces

Women's Spaces is one of the Irish Government's Reconciliation Fund Strategic Partnerships, and is designed to build the capacity of women in Northern Ireland to engage with peacebuilding, ensure women's voices are better heard in peacebuilding, and strengthen women's leadership in peacebuilding. Women's Platform acts as the lead partner in the Women's Spaces consortium, which includes Women's Resource and Development Agency, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network and Women's Support Network. Two part time Project Coordinators, based in WRDA and NIRWN, lead operational delivery.



In its first year, the project engaged over 200 women through over 20 workshops and events, exceeding targets agreed with the funder and providing opportunities to explore women and peacebuilding, the Good Friday Agreement and its impact on women, as well as build initial understanding of key human rights and peacebuilding mechanisms and instruments. An

event to mark the God Friday Agreement at 25 was organised in collaboration with the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security, which highlighted grassroots' women's perspectives on how to build a future Northern Ireland, and underlined a strong demand among women to be better heard and engaged in decision making. The capacity building programme received very positive feedback and project communications, including a project website and bimonthly ezine, have shown wide interest among women across Northern Ireland to engage with Women's Spaces. Capacity building in year 2 will focus on creating progression routes for participants.



The consortium approach has provided significant opportunities for collaboration, and also enabled learning on relevant collaborative approaches, which will significantly assist project implementation in years 2 and 3. The project includes ongoing external evaluation, which in year 1 highlighted the overall success in engaging women, and also has provided recommendations for further strategic development, to ensure continued successful delivery of core content.

NI Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security

Women's Platform provides the secretariat for the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group (APG) on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security. The APG continued as an active mechanism throughout the year, and focused in particular on violence against women and girls. In June 2023, Sinéad McLaughlin MLA was re-elected as Chair and Emma Sheerin re-elected as vice chair, with Cara Hunter MLA elected as new secretary and Diane Forsythe MLA elected as new treasurer.

APG work also included gender budgeting as a mechanism to achieve change, and Departmental responses to the cost of living crisis and its disproportionate impact on women. The APG sponsored three events during the year,:

- the Good Friday Agreement at 25 event organised through the Women's Spaces project in June
- the launch of the Women's Vision for Northern Ireland project by Women's Platform in January 2023
- an event by the PSNI in January 2023 exploring violence against election candidates, in part informed by a presentation to the APG on experiences of violence by women candidates and elected representatives in Northern Ireland.



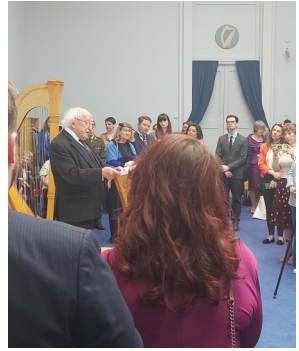
Work on engaging with Councils and developing international networks was initiated and will be developed in 2024.

Advocating for women, peace and security

Women's Platform participates in GAPS, the UK civil society network on women, peace and security, and contributed to the 2022 shadow report on the UK National Action Plan. Women's Platform also engaged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office on the UK National Action Plan for women, peace and security 2023-27, which for the first time includes reference to Northern Ireland and domestic implementation of UNSCR 1325. Focus in engagement with FCDO has been on highlighting the specific considerations in Northern Ireland, and stressed the need to engage with the women's sector in Northern Ireland and grassroots women's groups, to build relationships, trust and create a clear understanding of relevant ways of working in Northern Ireland. This work will continue in 2024, and will also be reflected in engagement on a new National Action Plan for Ireland.

LOCAL ALLIANCE BUILDING

Women’s Platform remains an active member of the Women’s Policy Group and is working closely with the Women’s Sector Lobbyist to develop advocacy for gender equality in policy and decision making. This focused on developing a more systematic approach to supporting WPG policy work, which identified a role for Women’s Platform in focusing on linking local evidence to international human rights and mechanisms for women’s rights. In addition, there was a strong focus on policy submissions to both the Northern Ireland Assembly and UK government, including several submissions to consultations on the Departmental budgets for 2023-24, and covering issues from the Strategy on violence against women and girls, the Domestic and sexual abuse strategy and PPS guidance on prosecuting domestic abuse to the Windsor Framework. Women’s Platform also participated in an advisory group for a Gender Equality Strategy, and contributed to ensuring a focus on international human rights standards in the group’s recommendations on the strategy.



Women’s Platform is also an active member of NI Women’s Budget group and participates in Reclaim the Agenda.

Linking the sector to international platforms and mechanisms

Strong local networks are crucial for Women’s Platform to effectively develop its role in amplifying the voices of women and girls in Northern Ireland internationally, and Women’s Platform will focus on further developing its role as a support for the sector in engaging with international networks and using international human rights mechanisms in organisations’ own work and advocacy.

Women’s Platform is coordinating the Northern Ireland civil society reporting to the baseline assessment of the UK under the Istanbul Convention on tackling violence against women and girls. This process will involve a visit of Council of Europe experts in early 2024 to assess the evidence, and will conclude in a set of recommendations to the UK. Women’s Platform hopes to coordinate the visit, highlighting the role developed in linking the local sector and international bodies.

OUR PEOPLE

Committee

Position	Name
Chair	Louise Coyle
Vice Chair	Emma Osborne
Treasurer	Jeanette Thornton
Secretary	Anne McVicker
EWL member	Karen Devlin
Member	Alexandra Brennan
Member	Siobhán Harding
Member	Alexa Moore

Staff

Director	Jonna Monaghan
----------	----------------

Charity Commission registration

Women's Platform was successfully registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in April 2022. Reporting to the Commission is beginning in 2023, and ensures a strong basis for development of the organisation. Women's Platform would like to confirm that the organisation has taken consideration of the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, when setting organisational plans and monitoring delivery.

ACCOUNTS

WOMEN'S PLATFORM LTD

(Private company limited by guarantee without share capital)

TRUSTEES' REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

BALANCE SHEET
As at 31 March 2022

	Note	<u>2023</u> £	<u>2022</u> £
Fixed Assets			
Tangible Assets		-	-
Current Assets			
Debtors	8	-	-
Cash at bank		<u>55,317</u>	<u>22,474</u>
		55,317	22,474
Liabilities			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	10	<u>(8,240)</u>	<u>(240)</u>
Net Current Assets		<u>47,077</u>	<u>22,234</u>
Net assets		<u><u>47,077</u></u>	<u><u>22,234</u></u>
Funds			
Restricted		36,541	12,331
Unrestricted		10,537	9,904
TOTAL FUNDS	11	<u><u>47,077</u></u>	<u><u>22,234</u></u>

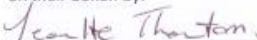
The company is entitled to the exemption from the audit requirement contained in section 477 of the Companies Act 2006, for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The trustees acknowledge their responsibilities for ensuring that the charity keeps accounting records which comply with section 386 of the Act and for preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company as at the end of the financial year and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the financial year in accordance with the requirements of sections 394 and 395 and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 relating to financial statements, so far as applicable to the company.

The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its financial statements for the year in question in accordance with section 476.

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

The financial statements were approved by the board directors on 6/9/2023 and were signed on their behalf by:



Jeanette Thornton
Treasurer

The notes on page 22 to 27 form an integral part of these accounts

WOMEN'S PLATFORM LTD

(Private company limited by guarantee without share capital)

TRUSTEES' REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCORPORATING THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	Note	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Year to 31-Mar-23 TOTAL £	Year to 31-Mar-22 TOTAL £
Income from:					
Donations and Legacies:					
Charitable Activities:	3				
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust		-	53,761	53,761	40,000
DFA Reconciliation Fund		-	80,960	80,960	-
Dormant Accounts NI		-	9,416	9,416	-
Engender 1/4 of UK EWL Membership		-	660	660	-
Other Income		438	-	438	-
Interest		195	-	195	-
Total income		633	144,797	145,430	40,000
Expenditure on:					
Charitable Activities	6	-	120,588	120,588	55,848
Total Expenditure:		-	120,588	120,588	55,848
Net income/(Expenditure)		633	24,210	24,843	(15,757)
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds		633	24,210	24,843	(15,757)
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward	11	9,904	12,331	22,234	37,991
Total funds carried forward	11	10,537	36,541	47,077	22,234

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All incoming resources and resources expended derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities also complies with the requirements for an income and expenditure account under the Companies Act 2006.

The notes on page 22 to 27 form an integral part of these accounts



Women's Platform Ltd

6 Mount Charles

Belfast BT7 1NZ

info@womensplatform.org

www.womensplatform.org

**A charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.
Registration no. NIC108453**

A company limited by guarantee NI041273

**An organisation in special consultative status with the Economic and
Social Council of the United Nations**