

# Women's Platform

# Annual Report 2024



## 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 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

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# CHAIR'S REPORT

I'm delighted to present this annual report, which is my first as Chair of Women's Platform. The year has been positive and demonstrates significant delivery, in particular within the advocacy and collaboration areas of work following the return of institutions in February 2024.

Women's Platform was very pleased to see the Executive and Assembly back, and is hopeful that stable institutions will enable a new focus on rights based, inclusive decision making. The inclusion of childcare and ending violence against women and girls in the draft Programme for Government are positive signs, and Women's Platform is encouraged that the Ending Violence against Women and Girls is based in international human rights standards, while also resourced to support new areas of action.



For Women's Platform, the year was characterised by bridge building and new relationships. In person participation at the Commission on the Status of Women 68 in March was a particular highlight, demonstrating the value of investment in international engagement, as the delegation gained significant new learning and connections that have informed all our work over the year and contributed to identifying new opportunities. The role of Women's Platform as a bridge builder was further highlighted during the year, in particular through revitalising four nations collaboration and exploring new engagement with the European Women's Lobby. This area of work is vital in the current global context of a growing backlash on rights, and Women's Platform is committed to building effective international collaboration, as well as East-West and five nations working.

Funding international travel is a challenge for all charities, and Women's Platform is hopeful that these clearly demonstrable benefits can assist in exploring ways to support this, particularly through public sector collaboration. In particular, learning has informed significant advocacy work since the return of institutions, which is highlighting the urgent need for a gender lens in decision making. In this light, it was disappointing to learn that the Gender Equality strategy and LGBT strategy will be delayed, and Women's Platform will utilise both advocacy and capacity building programmes to support and amplify calls for leadership on this, as a basis for sustainable and equitable development of Northern Ireland.

I would also like to highlight 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, which developed significantly over the year, and has demonstrated both the value of capacity building and

keen interest of women to participate in public life. Over 400 women across Northern Ireland have engaged with Women's Spaces to date, and the programme is highlighting the need for mechanisms for women to be heard in decision making, which will be a priority also for Women's Platform in the coming year.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Women's Platform Committee for their commitment, enthusiasm and support, and in particular the previous Chair Louise Coyle, who led significant work in modernising governance and increasing diversity on the Committee. We are very aware of the challenging circumstances around us, and our focus in the coming year will be on securing long term sustainability for the organisation, while further strengthening intersectional practice, and introducing new and accessible engagement mechanisms for women of all backgrounds. I would also like to thank our funders for their continued support, which provides an invaluable foundation that allows development and innovation, and inspires us daily to go further. Importantly, I would like to thank our Director, Jonna Monaghan, for her steadfast commitment to ensuring that Women's Platform is continuously developing and improving, while working domestically, regionally and internationally to advocate for all women and girls in Northern Ireland.

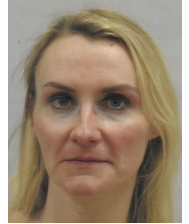
Finally, as Chair I would like to confirm that the Committee has given due consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit.



**Emma Osborne**  
**Chair**

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

I'm pleased to share this Annual Report of Women's Platform, which highlights focused delivery and relationship building.



Following return of the Executive and Assembly, there was a significant focus on engagement with decision makers, and responding to consultations. This process highlighted the vital importance of strong advocacy for rights based decision making, and underlined the need for capacity building on international standards. Training programmes and webinars sharing good practice from international networks were highlights of the year, and feedback shows participants feel they gain confidence to engage in decision making processes.

The same was very evident in the work of the Women's Spaces consortium, which was very active and identified a keen interest of women to engage in policy and decision making at all levels. This demonstrates the contribution of Women's Platform to the sector, and it is encouraging that mechanisms such as the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security also has taken an open and inclusive approach to its work. Over the next year, focus will be on strengthening long term work in this area, including preparation for CEDAW examination, and widening the capacity building offer.

The diversity of the Committee has significantly enhanced the capacity of Women's Platform to respond to the needs of different audiences of women and girls, and has widened perspectives. This has in particular informed a strengthened focus on communications, which has included building an Instagram presence, and introducing a podcast series due to launch shortly. It is hoped that in person participation in the Commission on the Status of Women can continue as a mechanism to platform women and girls in Northern Ireland at the international level; however, relationships built have already identified ways to strengthen this capacity and next year will focus on building new opportunities for this.

I would like to thank the Committee for their ongoing commitment and support, with particular thanks to both Chairs for their leadership. I would also like to express my thanks to all partners and members of Women's Platform, whose commitment is what drives us and whose advice is invaluable in making sure our work is meaningful. I look forward to continuing development and innovation through a new strategic framework in 2025, which will focus on accessibility and inclusion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonna Monaghan'.

**Jonna Monaghan, Director**

## OUR WORK

### CEDAW

During the year, Women’s Platform led advocacy for implementation of CEDAW provisions and recommendations in policy making in Northern Ireland, which were positively highlighted in the Ending Violence for Women and Girls strategy launched in September 2024. Women’s Platform also further developed its role as lead support for the women’s sector on international standards, ensuring shared consultation responses and engagement build on human rights standards. This role has enabled Women’s Platform to establish close collaboration with organisations across the sector, and specifically with the Women’s Policy Group as the strategic collective platform for the sector.

Capacity building remains a key role for Women’s Platform, and throughout the year consisted of both training on international human rights standards, and a series of webinars sharing international good practice and perspectives. Both programmes were well received, and participants have noted that the capacity building programme builds their confidence to engage with concepts of human rights, as well as decision making.

Both advocacy and capacity building activities have contributed to preparations for CEDAW reporting, which due to delays at the UN did not take place in 2024 and may be postponed until 2026. Work to date has focused on gathering data and evidence, and identifying key priorities, and will be expanded to direct consultation with women’s organisations and groups in 2025. Women’s Platform is also leading engagement with sister organisations in England, Scotland and Wales to explore and agree a relevant four nations mechanism.

During the year, Women’s Platform also completed 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 involved a visit of Council of Europe experts in January 2024, and contributed to developing working relationships with the Council of Europe, including strengthening understanding of the context of devolution among Council of Europe experts on violence against women and girls.



### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

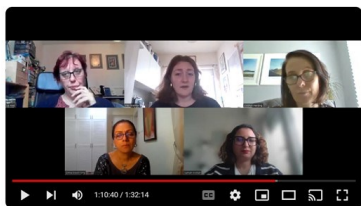
- First agreed Convention adopted in 1966
- Focus on core human rights
  - Right to personal integrity
  - Equality before the law
  - Gender equality and minority rights
- Individual and political rights at centre
  - Right to vote
  - Freedom of expression, assembly and association



## INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

### Commission on the Status of Women

CSW68 in March 2024 focused on poverty and social protection, . Women’s Platform supported a small delegation at CSW68, to maximise opportunities to gather evidence, learning and good , and build relationships with international networks. Learning from the delegation was collated in a report shared with the sector as well as key decision makers, and highlights the value of direct engagement with organisations and in particular governments and international agencies, as well as the vital role of shared priorities and solidarity. Women’s Platform also provided daily updates to members, and engaged with both the UK and Irish governments. .



A side event was organised in collaboration with NI Women’s Budget Group and Women’s Support Network on gender budgeting, involving learning from Malaysia, where civil society has been able to support the government to introduce gender budgeting. This side event also shared learning from the UK Women’s Budget Group, and

contributed to developing collaboration on gender budgeting beyond Northern Ireland. A CSW68 follow up event was also organised in May, which highlighted the value of relationships built, including with the Scottish Women’s Convention. Both events received very positive feedback as an information and encouraging environment, and work is ongoing to develop further opportunities to share learning internationally.

Evaluation of CSW68 participation has identified in person participation at CSW as a priority for the future, and has underlined the need to enable larger delegations. The challenges of this in the current financial situation have been acknowledged, and there has been a focus over the year to identify ways to secure participation, through a range of funding mechanisms. In addition, Women’s Platform has contributed to international preparation for CSW69, which will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action.







*Left—right: Reception hosted by UK Deputy Ambassador to the UN James Kariuki, with Charles Ramsden of UK Government Equality Hub; official CSW68 side event; Meeting with Deputy Ambassador Keith McBean and Caoimhe Landy at the Irish Mission to the UN*

## 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 continued to act as a support to England as the current UK Board member, to ensure a smooth transition in the rotation and support relationship building. Women's Platform also continued to engage with the European Women's Lobby through events and information sharing, and represented the UK on the sexual and reproductive health and rights taskforce. Women's Platform also led engagement with the European Women's Lobby to explore how the UK can effectively contribute to the network in a post Brexit arrangement, which identified a shared interest in building resources and strengthening peer to peer engagement and learning. This process also identified a potential role for the UK as an independent voice, particularly in relation to evaluating EU policy and practice.

### 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. A need to review and development of this mechanism was identified in 2022-23, and Women's Platform led engagement with sister organisations to explore priorities and ways of working. A process for review was agreed in summer 2024, and the role of Women's Platform in East-West collaboration as well as five nations working was acknowledged as a key support for future development. The process has contributed to building and strengthening relationships, and has confirmed a renewed interest in four nations collaboration at both domestic and international level.

## Women, Peace and Security

### Women's Spaces

Women's Spaces is a Reconciliation Fund Strategic Partnership funded by the Irish Government, and is designed to build the capacity of women in Northern Ireland to engage with peacebuilding. Women's Platform is 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, supported by the consortium as a strategic partnership.



*Photos © Women's Spaces project*



Women's Spaces engaged over 200 women through a series of online and in person events, including the Where are the Women programme, which was developed as part of Women's Spaces and has been shown to provide an accessible and positive introduction to issues of women's rights, human rights and peacebuilding. In total 10 Where are the Women?

programmes were delivered in Year 2, exceeding targets agreed with the funder. External evaluation and feedback from participants also highlighted interest in engaging with policy making, and an event in June 2024 in collaboration with Northern Ireland Assembly Connect offered over 40 women an opportunity to engage with decision makers. In August, 50 women took part in an event organised in with Belfast City Council, highlighting ways to engage in local level decision making. Women's Spaces coordinators also connected women to capacity building and learning opportunities organised by others, including women's sector organisations.

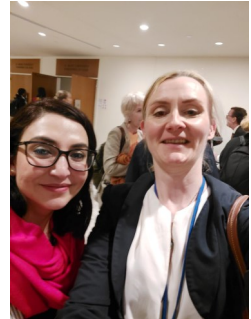
Year 2 also focused on a toolkit, which will set out clear mechanisms for how women and girls can effectively engage in peacebuilding at different levels. Content and the toolkit framework were put in place in Year 2, with a draft resource to be tested with participants before roll out in 2025.

The consortium approach has created significant learning, and strengthened close partnership working. External evaluation has also highlighted these developments as vital for success, and connecting women to the wider women's sector. A key aim in Year 3 is a long term plan, as the evaluation demonstrates that there is further demand beyond the initial three year project.

### 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 remained active throughout the year, and focused in particular on violence against women and girls, while introducing a growing focus on international solidarity. Sinéad McLaughlin MLA was re-elected as Chair and Emma Sheerin re-elected as vice chair, with Cara Hunter MLA also re-elected as secretary and Diane Forsythe MLA re-elected as treasurer.

As part of its focus on building international solidarity, the APG heard from the former ambassador of Afghanistan to the US on the situation of women in Afghanistan, which led to engagement with both the UK and Irish governments seeking a focus on upholding international human rights. The APG also wrote to both governments on a number of occasions expressing concern about the situation in Gaza, and urging both governments to act to uphold international law, protect civilians and ensure humanitarian aid access to Gaza. This role will be developed further in 2024-25, and will also include a focus on support for women arriving in Northern Ireland, including from conflict areas.



*Ms Adela Raz, former Afghan ambassador to the US at CSW68*

The APG also continued to explore engagement with Councils and NISRA. This work has focused on creating connections for women's organisations to engage directly, and is contributing to highlighting the need for a gender lens in decision making and in particular data collection. Meetings with NISRA and Belfast City Council took place during the year as part of this work.

### Advocating for women, peace and security

Women's Platform participates in GAPS, the UK civil society network on women, peace and security, and has strengthened collaboration with a focus on connecting learning from Northern Ireland to learning from other regions. Women's Platform contributed to the 2023 shadow report on the UK National Action Plan, and supported and endorsed development of a First 100 days document for the new Labour government in July 2024. Women's Platform also engaged with the Northern Ireland Office to advocate for implementation of domestic commitments in 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 the UK government has been on highlighting the specific considerations in Northern Ireland, and in particular on the need to engage with the women's sector.

## 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 in advocacy for gender equality and inclusive decision making. The collaboration has identified clear and distinct roles for both partners, and has also contributed to strengthening capacity on international human rights within the sector, as identified in informal feedback from organisations participating in Women’s Policy Group. 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 2024-26, and covering issues from the Good Jobs consultation and draft Programme for Government to the Assembly Inquiries into gaps in equality law and relationship and sexuality education. Women’s Platform also participated in an advisory group for a Women’s Assembly to be organised in February 2025, and organised events as part of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival.

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

### Strengthened focus on communications

Women’s Platform is delighted to have the support of The Dormant Accounts Fund NI to develop communications capacity and widen access to information and learning on international human rights for members and stakeholders. During the year, there was a focus on strengthening communications, and Women’s Platform introduced an Instagram account, which has grown significantly in a short time and is enabling engagement with new audiences and stakeholders. Social media presence was overall strengthened during the year, while the fortnightly newsletter continued to be well received, with members noting that information shared is useful and enables a new perspective on issues in Northern Ireland. Communications will remain a priority in 2025, and there will be a focus on increasing access to good practice from international networks and organisations.



## OUR PEOPLE

### Committee

Position	Name
Chair	Emma Osborne (from August 2024)
Chair (until Aug 2024)	Louise Coyle
Treasurer	Jeanette Thornton
Secretary	Anne McVicker
EWL member	Karen Devlin
Member	Alexandra Brennan
Member	Naomi English
Member	Aislinn Fanning
Member	Siobhán Harding
Member	Alexa Moore
Member	Maxine Murphy-Higgins
Member	Beverly Simpson

### Staff

Director	Jonna Monaghan
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#### Charity Commission registration

Women's Platform was successfully registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in April 2022. The first annual report will be submitted to the Charity Commission for 2023-24, 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 2024

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCORPORATING THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	Note	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Year to 31-Mar-24 TOTAL	Year to 31-Mar-23 TOTAL
		£	£	£	£
<b>Income from:</b>					
Donations and Legacies:					
Charitable Activities: 3					
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust		-	51,667	51,667	53,761
DFA Reconciliation Fund		-	82,583	82,583	80,960
Dormant Accounts NI		-	18,832	18,832	9,416
Engender 1/4 of UK EWL Membership General		8,945	-	8,945	660
Interest		233	-	233	438
					195
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>9,178</b>	<b>153,082</b>	<b>162,260</b>	<b>145,430</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>					
Charitable Activities 6					
		3,793	127,247	131,040	120,588
<b>Total Expenditure:</b>		<b>3,793</b>	<b>127,247</b>	<b>131,040</b>	<b>120,588</b>
<b>Net income/(expenditure)</b>		<b>5,385</b>	<b>25,835</b>	<b>31,220</b>	<b>24,843</b>
<b>Transfers between funds</b>					
		-	-	-	-
<b>Net movement in funds</b>		<b>5,385</b>	<b>25,835</b>	<b>31,220</b>	<b>24,843</b>
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>					
<b>Total funds brought forward</b>	11	10,537	36,541	47,077	22,234
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	11	<b>15,922</b>	<b>62,376</b>	<b>78,297</b>	<b>47,077</b>

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

(Private company limited by guarantee without share capital)

TRUSTEES' REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024BALANCE SHEET  
As at 31 March 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
<b>Fixed Assets</b>			
Tangible Assets		-	-
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Debtors	8	-	-
Cash at bank		78,537	55,317
		<u>78,537</u>	<u>55,317</u>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	10	(240)	(8,240)
<b>Net Current Assets</b>		<u>78,297</u>	<u>47,077</u>
<b>Net assets</b>		<u>78,297</u>	<u>47,077</u>
<b>Funds</b>			
Restricted		62,376	36,541
Unrestricted		15,922	10,537
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	11	<u>78,297</u>	<u>47,077</u>

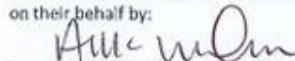
The company is entitled to the exemption from the audit requirement contained in section 477 of the Companies Act 2006, for the year ended 31 March 2024.

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 23/10/24 and were signed on their behalf by:



Anne McVicker  
Company Secretary

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](mailto:info@womensplatform.org)**

**[www.womensplatform.org](http://www.womensplatform.org)**

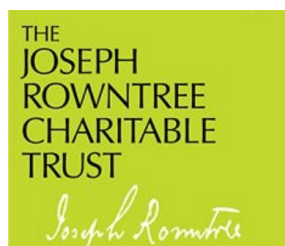
**A charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.  
Registration no. NIC108453**

**A company limited by guarantee NI041273**

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



Delivered by  
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COMMUNITY FUND**



An Roinn  
Gnóthai Eachtracha  
Department of  
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