



NORTHERN IRELAND
WOMEN'S EUROPEAN
P L A T F O R M

***Submission to the Committee on
the Convention for the Elimination
of all Forms of Discrimination
against Women (CEDAW)***

**Vth Periodic Report of the United Kingdom
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

Shadow Report compiled by Northern Ireland
Women's European Platform, March 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Introduction

This report presents an analysis of the position of women in Northern Ireland in relation to specific articles contained in the CEDAW Convention. Specific questions are included at the end of each of the Articles. It includes a summary update on progress made in relation to a number of the recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee following its last examination of the UK. Further information on each of Articles can be found in the full report. Included under each article is a set of recommendations and questions which we feel could be addressed to the Government.

Articles 2-4

(Full report pages 5 - 7)

- At the previous hearing the Committee commended the government's commitment to mainstreaming, stressing that this should be monitored and evaluated, and that the legislative provisions for maintaining equality for women in Northern Ireland be extended to the rest of the UK. However there has been no rigorous evaluation of mainstreaming. Furthermore as outlined in the section covering Articles 2 - 4, experience in Northern Ireland suggests that while the mainstreaming measure has much potential, it has not been effectively implemented. Indeed, it has tended to result in the development of gender neutral policies which disadvantage women.
- The UK government has not met its obligations in relation to the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in key institutions, including many of those set up directly as a result of the peace negotiations.
- The Committee expressed concern that protection of women's human rights would be uneven across the devolved regions of the United Kingdom, and this has proven to be the case, with a number of examples of women in Northern Ireland not benefiting from a number of equality and social policy measures introduced in other parts of the UK. The UK report (paras 184 -188) sets out a number of developments, many of which do not apply to Northern Ireland where progress lags behind in key areas including: public and political representation, childcare and anti-poverty measures.

Article 5

(Full report page 8)

- This report highlights a number of areas where women are subject to discriminatory stereotypes and sex roles. We would refer the Committee in particular to our commentary and recommendations in relation to : Article 10 - education and career 'choices';
- **Article 11 - employment, including part-time work and occupational segregation;**
- **Article 13 - women and poverty;**
- **Article 14 - rural women;**
- **Article 15 - gender issues and policing**

Article 6

(Full report page 9)

- A number of studies and much anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that there is significant women/child prostitution in Northern Ireland. There is also evidence that paramilitary groups have been involved in organised prostitution for a number of years, usually involving brothels (the Police Service of Northern Ireland is aware of 60-70 brothels in the province) and trafficking of women for sex.
- We welcome the recent announcement of new legislation to make kerb crawling an offence in Northern Ireland but much remains to be done to address the exploitation of women in the sex industry and to ensure that services are in place to support women.
- There has been a sharp increase in the number of women trafficked to Northern Ireland but an accurate measure of this has yet to be established. There is an urgent need for further extensive research and data to provide information on the scale of these activities and for government and agencies to develop appropriate responses. Often women who have been trafficked to Northern Ireland will not testify for fear of reprisal.
- The UK needs to meet its obligations under the Council of Europe Convention requirements in relation to women and to children, and this includes greater support and protection for women. We welcome the fact that the UK government has signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and we would like to know when it will ratify the Convention.

Article 7

(Full report pages 10 - 11)

- The Committee made a number of recommendations regarding increasing the number and percentage of women in public and political life, in the judiciary and in the professions. In Northern Ireland there has been little/no progress in this respect, with the number of women in electoral politics and political life remaining virtually unchanged. While targets have existed for many years in respect of public appointments, these have not been met, nor have initiatives been introduced to ensure that they are. We are concerned that the government response to this problem has too often been about actions to increase the number of women putting themselves forward for selection, rather than addressing more fundamental issues of direct and indirect discrimination against women.

Article 8

(Full report page 11)

Although Northern Ireland has devolved government, representation on international diplomatic teams tends to be selected from civil servants based at Westminster. The implementation of international conventions and treaties and the advancement of women's equality would be enhanced through local officials playing a central role in such negotiations and feeding back to government departments in Northern Ireland.

Funding to women's NGOs in Northern Ireland has been concentrated on organisations providing services - mostly in areas of socio-economic deprivation. We strongly argue that NGOs should be adequately funded by government to conduct policy work and enhance public engagement with the international treaties.



Article 10

(Full report pages 12 - 13)

- There is evidence that young women in Northern Ireland suffer as a result of stereotypical attitudes to gender roles and to careers. Young women's choices and actions are influenced by the persistence of discrimination and gender inequality and the concerning way in which young women in Northern Ireland feel they have to accept this as inevitable.
- At the previous hearing the Committee expressed concern about levels of teenage conception and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases. It recommended a range of measures. In Northern Ireland there has been a failure to address these issues with continuing problems around sex education and access to contraception and sexual health advice. (See Sections on Articles 10 and 12). In recent years there has been a marked increase in HIV diagnosis - an increase of 45% between 2000 and 2005 - and STIs. The increase has been particularly sharp in relation to the transmission of the infection through sex between men and women.

Article 11

(Full report pages 14 - 16)

- The Committee requested that government include in its Sixth Report comprehensive discussion of measures taken to alleviate women's poverty. As highlighted throughout this shadow report, women in Northern Ireland continue to experience poverty, and policy in many respects lags behind that in other parts of the UK (Section on Articles 11 and 13).
- It should be noted that substantive developments discussed in the UK government report relating to childcare provision for working parents refer to England, and progress in Northern Ireland has been very much more limited. Northern Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of childcare provision within the UK and Europe.
- Lone parents, most of whom are women continue to be particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. The government has focused on employment as the primary means of addressing poverty but this had limited success due to low wages, inadequate childcare and lack of appropriate qualifications.

There is a high level of working poverty in the UK. We are therefore extremely concerned that extending conditions on lone parents is a simplistic measure which could increase lone parents' vulnerability to poverty.

- The Committee recommended actions to reduce the pay gap. Little progress has been made. Women also continue to be over represented in the lowest paid occupations.

Article 12

(Full report pages 17 - 18)

- The Committee expressed concern at the failure to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, and recommended that government initiate a process of reform in Northern Ireland in relation to abortion law. This has not happened. There are three key concerns:
 - 1) There continues to be highly restrictive access to abortion and aftercare for abortion;
 - 2) Inadequate provision of emergency contraception;
 - 3) Intimidation of providers of family planning and sexual health information and advice.

Article 13

(Full report page 19)

- Gender differences in the labour market have an impact on women's economic situation in later life, particularly in relation to their access to pensions. This is significant for women in Northern Ireland as they are less likely to be in paid employment than in any other UK region, less likely to be in occupational pension schemes, and have lower average earnings. Pension provision still does not take into consideration that women are the major carers and often give up employment to do this. Government's pension policy has failed to address these substantive gender inequalities. It is estimated that women in Northern Ireland receive just over 75% of the income that men receive from the state pension.
- We are concerned about the limitations of the draft anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland and the lack of progress in implementing it.

Article 14

(Full report page 20)

Women living in rural areas of Northern Ireland experience double and sometimes multiple discriminations across a range of issues. The isolation is perpetuated by the lack of transport infrastructure and the lack of provision of range of services. Research has shown that women in Northern Ireland do play a vital role in maintaining agriculture through their off-farm work. However socio-cultural patterns of land transfer and the organisational culture of the agricultural establishment continues to frustrate the greater participation of women in the industry and the recognition of their role in a sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Article 15

(Full report page 21)

- The Committee expressed concern about the treatment of women within the criminal justice system and commented specifically on the treatment of young female offenders in Northern Ireland. These issues continue to cause grave concern and in addition recent research has highlighted serious issues relating to women detained in Northern Ireland.
- The Committee should take into account the serious under-representation of women in the judiciary. The UK government report states that "As of January 2007, Northern Ireland had four female county court judges, 2 female district judges and 4 female resident magistrates. Of the law magistrates there were 150 women out of 276 in 2006. Overall, 47% of the judiciary are female." As the Committee on the Administration of Justice notes in its submission to the Committee, "... of 4 Appeal Court judges, none are female, and of 12 High Court judges, none are female. It is also worth noting that Law Magistrates are not legally qualified and preside over a very small area of the law". Of the recent appointments made by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, 62% were male and 38% were female.
- Women are very under-represented in the new Police Service for Northern Ireland. Evidence also suggests failure to retain women police officers is a problem and links this to a culture which disadvantages women. There has been a failure to act on recommendations regarding part-time work, childcare and job share.

General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee

(Full report page 22)

- The Committee expressed concern about the absence of a national strategy on violence against women and made a number of recommendations in this respect. There have been no developments in this area. Policy developments in Northern Ireland have been extremely limited and have been largely confined to domestic violence.
- Statistics on domestic violence in Northern Ireland show an increase. In 2006-2007 there were 23,456 PSNI attended domestic violence incidents - one incident every 22 minutes across Northern Ireland. Also in 2006-2007, 20% of attempted murders had a domestic motivation.
- The recent Court Watch report in Northern Ireland highlighted a deep sense of dissatisfaction by many survivors of domestic violence with the way in which they had been treated by many personnel connected with the justice system.
- Sentencing is currently inconsistent. The fact that the violence is located within the home is still frequently viewed as a mitigating rather than an aggravating factor.
- Non-eligibility for legal aid is having serious implications on women accessing civil orders. The means test places women in considerable financial hardship or forces them to give up their employment. The protection of women is a public safety issue and should not be the personal responsibility of individual women.
- The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People has raised concerns about the fact that within the home and family life there continues to be breaches of children's rights under the UNCRC in terms of abuse and violence.





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