Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities:
Barriers to Participation

Report compiled and written by:
Dr Helen McLaughlin
on behalf of the **Women's Centres Regional Partnership**

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abbreviations

APS: Anti-Poverty Strategy

BPFA: Beijing Platform for Action

CEDAW: Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

DARD: Department for Agriculture and Rural Development

DE: Department of Education

DEL: Department for Employment and Learning

DSD: Department for Social Development

DWW: Derry Well Woman

ECNI: Equality Commission Northern Ireland

EHRC: Equality and Human Rights Commission

EQIA: Equality Impact Assessment

FWN: Fermanagh Women's Network

GAP: Gender Advisory Panel

GES: Gender Equality Strategy

NCP: Northern Childcare Partnership

NICMA: Northern Ireland Childminding Association

NICVA: Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

NIMDM: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure

NIRDP: Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme

NISRA: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Office

OFMDFM: Office of the First and Deputy First Minister

PDP: Possibilities Development Partnership

RCSG: Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group

S75:   Section 75

WCRP: Women's Centres Regional Partnership

WRDA: Women's Resource and Development Agency

WSN: Women's Support Network

WWC: Women and Work Commission

Ministerial Foreword

To change existing patterns of social disadvantage and deprivation we need to understand the different root causes. As Minister for Social Development, I welcome this comprehensive report that describes the role of women living in disadvantaged communities and details the barriers that make it difficult for women to fulfil their potential or participate fully in society.

Of course inequality and barriers to participation are faced by many within our communities, not just women, but this report highlights the significant and important role that women can and do play in raising children, caring for extended families and building stronger communities.

When we understand the barriers faced by those struggling with deprivation and exclusion then we can start to identify the resources and support needed to improve people's lives. Indeed many within government and beyond are starting to recognise that women should have access to services, educational opportunities and support, and to good childcare facilities that will enable them to develop personally, make a positive contribution to their children's education and to play a fuller part in the regeneration and development of their local community.

This report calls for cross-cutting departmental commitments to tackle the barriers that lead to social exclusion and deprivation of women in disadvantaged communities. This collective approach, I believe, will improve the health and well-being of our society and help build a fair and shared future for all.

I believe this report can act as a catalyst to generate more informed discussion and debate on this important subject across all Government departments, public sector organisations and agencies, and in the voluntary and community sector. I trust that it is a step towards enhanced and full

participation of women from all disadvantaged areas in building stronger and healthier communities.

MARGARET RITCHIE MLA
Minister for Social Development

WCRP Foreword

This report into the barriers facing women living in disadvantaged areas was commissioned by the Women's Centres Regional Partnership with funding from the Voluntary and Community Unit of the Department for Social Development. The aim was to carry out a baseline study detailing the position of women in disadvantaged communities, providing analysis of barriers to participation and indicating key policy issues to be addressed. Helen McLaughlin, the author of this report, has succeeded admirably in providing a detailed synthesis of a wide range of research materials, coupled with an extremely valuable set of policy recommendations for government departments to consider, that, if acted upon, will go a long way to redressing some of the most persistent areas of inequality. We thank her for her work and her forbearance in coping with a project that extended its scope beyond that initially envisaged. We hope this report will be used by policy makers, politicians and the voluntary sector as a resource to aid future policy making.

Dr Margaret Ward
Policy Sub Group
The Women's Centres Regional Partnership

Executive Summary

This is a report into the barriers facing women living in disadvantaged areas. It encompasses barriers to participation in work, education and training, and public and political life. A wide range of existing and recent research was called upon to create a picture of the barriers facing disadvantaged women.

It is clear from the research that the lack of appropriate childcare remains the single biggest barrier to women's participation in all areas, and, not surprisingly, much of this report is taken up with articulating the specific issues and needs regarding childcare as experienced by disadvantaged women.

However, the report also identifies a range of other barriers which work alongside lack of childcare to preclude women from full participation. In summary, the barriers are:

- Lack of appropriate childcare
- Poverty
- Low levels of skills, qualifications and confidence
- Low levels of flexibility and choice in work and training
- Gendered career pathways
- Barriers in public life
- Barriers to access - travel and transport
- Health and well-being issues

There are a number of observations which can be made about the barriers facing women in disadvantaged areas:

1. Barriers affecting women from all backgrounds are amplified for women living in disadvantaged areas.

2. Each barrier is integrally linked to the other: for example, gendered careers advice leads women to choose lower-status, lower-paid jobs than their male counterparts, making them more prone to poverty. Women living in poverty have a greater risk of educational under-achievement which leaves them lacking the skills, qualifications and confidence to enter the work-place. These women are less likely to be able to afford the kind of childcare best suited to their needs and aspirations. Low-levels of flexibility and choice in the workplace push women into low-paid, part-time, low-status jobs, which embeds them in poverty. In other words, the barriers identified in this report are structural.

3. Because the barriers are structural, addressing any one barrier in isolation is unlikely to lead to the full participation of women from disadvantaged areas in work, education and training, and in public and political life. There is no one government department which can, on its own, improve the situation. Instead, joint action is required across many government departments if these barriers are to be addressed in a strategic and not piecemeal manner.

The Gender Equality Strategy

The *Gender Equality Strategy* (2006) represents an important milestone in efforts towards gender equality in Northern Ireland. It recognises the structural nature of the barriers to women's full participation, and that cross-departmental action is called for. This is why it cross-departmental Gender Action Plans are called for to support the *Gender Equality Strategy*. Although the Gender Action Plans need to be cross-departmental, the starting point of course is for individual departments to clearly identify which aspects of their work fall within the Gender Action Plans, and to make clear what action they will take to achieve the full participation of women.

In order to draw up meaningful plans, an understanding of the barriers faced by women in all aspects of life is needed. While a Baseline Study has been produced to support the *Gender Equality Strategy*, which gives a statistical

picture of current levels of participation and representation in some areas, it does not *explain* why current levels of participation and representation are as low as they are.

This report cannot claim to explain all barriers facing all women in all walks of life. But it does provide substantial information about why women, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, are not currently participating to the full in education and training, work and public life. As well as supplying vital details which can inform the future direction of the work of the women's sector, this information is also offered as a support to government departments as they draw up, review and amend Gender Action Plans, not just this year, but in future planning cycles too.

Presentation of the Recommendations

Therefore, in order to make the report's recommendations useful and accessible to government departments, it was agreed that they should be grouped as far as possible according to the department having lead responsibility for each area, and these follow below. One of the observations made in this report, however, is that often, there are multiple departments having responsibility for different aspects of provision - childcare and careers advice for example. It is hoped that each department will attend to the recommendations directed towards it, but departments are also urged to enter into discussion with other departments where areas of responsibility are shared, or need to be clarified.

The recommendations below do not suggest that no action is being taken by departments on any of the issues raised. Departmental staff will recognise some areas in which they have begun to take action: research may be underway, new approaches being tested, or projects supported. Many other recommendations remain to be addressed. But they are offered together as a full set of recommendations, which need to be implemented together and co-operatively, if gender equality is to be achieved. Equally, it must be recognised that this is not an exhaustive list of recommendations.

Departments will have detailed knowledge of areas of their work where action needs to be taken, which may not be listed below.

Finally, it is beyond the scope of this report to detail the mechanisms by which each recommendation is to be implemented. This is the work that will have to be done if the Gender Action Plans are to deliver on the aims of the *Gender Equality Strategy*.

Recommendations by Department

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (DARD)

➢ Implementation of the appropriate recommendations within the Rural Childcare Stakeholder's Group's *Rural Childcare: Investing in the Future* (2008), and the Northern Childcare Partnership's *Report on Childcare Issues affecting Families in Rural Areas* (2007).

➢ More strategic, long-term support for local community transport schemes in rural areas geared towards enabling women to access appropriate childcare, and work, education and training.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE (DCAL)

➢ A partnership between government, the media and women's organisations to challenge stereotypes in the media.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DE)

➢ It is absolutely clear from all research consulted that what is needed is an **Integrated Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland** which includes a range of aims and measures including those listed below;

- Transparency about where lead responsibility lies for childcare and children's provision;

- Further research into the gap between supply and demand for childcare in NI;

- Increased provision of local, high quality, affordable, flexible childcare;

- A clearer understanding of the differences and connections between school-related children's provision on the one hand, and childcare on the other;

- Promotion of integration of school-related children's provision on the one hand and childcare on the other, to provide seamless childcare cover for women wanting to take up education, training or work opportunities;

- Support for flexible childcare to fit different working patterns;

- Provision of children's centres in disadvantaged communities, offering a range of locally based services;

- A more strategic approach to long-term funding for community-based organisations who already supply quality childcare in disadvantaged communities;

- Further research on the childcare needs of ethnic minority and migrant women, particularly with regard to culturally appropriate childcare provision;

- Further research on the childcare needs of women with disabilities, and women who have children with disabilities;

➢ Further research into informal care – the benefits, the drawbacks, and the reasons for its popularity;

➢ Better access to training for childminders and improved quality standards for childcare;

➢ Better and more accessible information on childcare provision;

➢ Consistent, mandatory support for childcare, travel and other costs associated with women's participation in local decision-making structures, public bodies and political life;

➢ Intervention in primary and post-primary education to challenge gender stereotyping at an early age;

➢ Training for childcare, early years workers and teachers on challenging gender stereotyping.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING (DEL)

➢ Promotion and expansion of on-site childcare provision to accompany education and training provision, and work. Consistent provision of on-site childcare across FE, as well as use of local community-based education and training provision which can offer on-site childcare;

➢ Free, on-site childcare for women who need it in order to access education and training;

➢ Financial support for women accessing education and training (whether for childcare, materials or equipment) to be available upfront where possible, and where expenses are reimbursed, payments should be sufficiently regular to permit low-income women to participate;

➢ Schemes in FE and HE permitting payment of fees in smaller instalments;

➢ Clearer information on the financial assistance available for participation in FE and HE, particularly for part-time courses, and its impact on benefits;

➢ Provision of financial support for part-time courses involving less than 50% of full-time hours;

➢ Recognition of low confidence levels as a major barrier to women's participation in education and training, and work and public life;

➢ Further research into the reasons for the prevalence of low confidence among women, including young women, from disadvantaged areas;

➢ The provision of a range of education and training options, offering both accredited and non-accredited provision;

➢ The adoption across FE of recognised good practice developed by women's education providers in targeting "hard-to-reach" women. This should include:
- the provision for childcare,
- the provision of pastoral support, including support for women with disabilities and women from minority communities,
- the development of learning environments and approaches which are more conducive to women's learning;

➢ A move away from Commissioning Frameworks, and towards the strategic, long-term funding of local community-based education and training which addresses the barriers faced by women living in disadvantaged rural and urban areas;

- The development of greater opportunities for work experience and shadowing schemes to accompany education and training provision;

- Further research into the opportunities available to, and work-readiness of women with higher level qualifications including graduates;

- A review of course timing in FE and HE to establish the feasibility of shifting morning start times in particular to accommodate school drop-offs;

- Promotion of bite-sized learning in FE and HE so that women can combine learning with other responsibilities;

- Non-gendered careers advice which takes account of all possible routes for individual young women to pursue, and which provides clear information on the implications of different career choices in terms of pay, status, prospects and security;

- FE colleges to demonstrate equal effort and proportional outcome in finding Apprenticeships for girls;

- Long-term strategic funding and support for organisations already demonstrating good practice in supporting women from disadvantaged areas into non-traditional professions;

- A equality review of New Deal funding criteria for FE to ensure that it does not disadvantage or put another barrier in the way of women entering non-traditional professions;

- A recognition that work is only a way out of poverty if it is well-paid work with options for progression.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT (DETI)

➢ Establish a dedicated enterprise unit to support the start-up of female-owned businesses;

➢ Improve the success rate of women entrepreneurs through greater support for female-owned businesses;

➢ Ensure gender balance on boards and advisory groups under the remit of DETI;

➢ Action at industry level to ensure that women are treated fairly within male-dominated professions;

➢ Firmer legislation on flexible working, requiring employers to grant requests and extend current flexible provision;

➢ Employers to be encouraged to provide quality and senior jobs on a part-time or job-share basis.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING (DEL) AND DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT (DETI)

➢ Trade Unions / Sector Skills Councils to work with voluntary and community sector providers to identify routes for women into non-traditional careers;

➢ Sector Skills Councils to work with employers on providing Apprenticeships for women in trades;

➢ Sectors which employ large numbers of women should be assessed with regard to enforcement of the national minimum wage;

- Firmer legislation on flexible working, requiring employers to grant requests and extend current flexible provision;

- Employers to be encouraged to provide quality and senior jobs on a part-time or job-share basis;

- Men to be encouraged to take parental leave, share responsibility for time off work when children are sick, or during holidays, and to seek flexible working;

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) recommends the introduction of mandatory pay audits, aimed at identifying areas where pay gaps persist, and eliminating them;

- Awareness-raising of the time expended daily and weekly on domestic chores and guidance on what a fair split between partners might look like given different family circumstances.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT (DOE)

- Gender proof consistently on all activities in relation to the RPA;

- Look at good practice, in Wales for example, in terms of achieving gender parity in institutional reform;

- Promote gender action plans in local councils;

- Gender proof all consultations regarding the RPA;

- Ensure the involvement of under- represented groups in community planning.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY (DHSSPS)

➢ Mental ill-health to be recognised as a significant barrier to women's participation in education, training, work and public life;

➢ Further research on the extent of the impact of the conflict on women's mental health, and to ensure the provision of appropriate services and support to enable women to deal with that impact. Consideration needs to be given to the congruencies and differences between general mental health interventions, and interventions needed to deal with mental health problems which may be conflict-related;

➢ Sexual violence and abuse to be recognised as factors which impact on all aspects of a woman's life and choices, including her access to work, education, training and development. Resources should be put in place to support all aspects of the 2008-2013 *Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy*;

➢ Robust long-term support must be put in place for frontline services for women dealing with sexual violence and abuse, and for programmes which enable women dealing with sexual violence and abuse to overcome barriers to education, training, development, and fuller participation in all aspects of life;

➢ Implementation of the appropriate recommendations in Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report on young women, particularly their call for holistic relationship and sex education, dealing with the emotional aspects of sex, and healthy relationships; recognition of non-heterosexual relationships; health issues especially STIs (pp. 137-138).

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DRD)

➢ Better, more frequent and more affordable public transport, which takes account of women's need to do school drop-offs and pick-ups;

➢ Support for community and rural transport schemes such as those noted by the Northern Childcare Partnership and the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group.

➢ Public and community transport services to take account of the needs of women with disabilities, and women who have children with disabilities.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (DSD)

➢ Continue support for the emergency funding of the Women's Centres Childcare Fund in the absence of any other funding support;

➢ Simplification of financial support for childcare, in particular the Childcare Component of Working Tax Credit;

➢ Changes should be made to legislation, allowing women to accrue sufficient benefits to entitle them to a full state pension on retirement;

➢ Measures to ensure the seamless transfer from one benefit to another (e.g. Income Support to Jobseekers' Allowance), or from benefits to work when women enter education, training or employment;

➢ Government policies and strategies to support in practice the choice to care for one's own children. This means that benefits must be sufficient to support a good quality of life;

➢ Ensure gender balance in funding and in representation in Neighbourhood Renewal areas with gender proofing of all policies.

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER (OFMDFM)

➢ Production of Gender Action Plans to support the *Gender Equality Strategy*, based on a clear understanding of the barriers to women's participation and the actions needed to increase women's participation;

➢ Press for the full implementation in NI of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which provides for women's participation in post-conflict public and political structures;

➢ Consistent, mandatory support for childcare, travel and other costs associated with women's participation in local decision-making structures, public bodies and political life;

➢ Public bodies and political structures to review working practices and identify areas where flexibility can be introduced;

➢ Decision-making bodies to meet in local areas and provide financial support for travel costs;

➢ Long-term, strategic provision of training, confidence building, mentoring and support for women to participate in public and political life;

➢ Awareness-raising on the possibilities of becoming involved in public and political life;

- The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI (OCPANI) Code of Practice to be strengthened as envisaged to ensure steps are taken to increase diversity in public appointments;

- Clear guidance for public bodies on identifying specific barriers to participation and implementing positive action measures;

- Training and awareness raising for public bodies and board members on diversity;

- Support for public bodies to put in place time-bound, measurable plans for increasing the participation of women, particularly women from disadvantaged and rural communities

- Long-term, strategic provision of training, confidence building and support for women to participate in public and political life;

- Opportunities to formally shadow appointment-holders with a view to applying for public appointment;

- The provision of mentoring especially for women from disadvantaged communities, in order to enable them to move confidently from awareness to training, through the application and appointment process, and support with initial board meetings;

- Further study on the impact of payments and expenses for public appointments on benefits, and the introduction of schemes if necessary to ensure that benefits of women on low-incomes are not impacted;

- Exchange of experience with other Executives such as the Scottish and Welsh who have also been working to increase diversity in public appointments.

Introduction

"Systems, whether they are social, economic, cultural or political are gendered and the government acknowledges that the status of women and men within those systems is unequal. In order to address these inequalities it is important to identify and remove the barriers which restrict equal participation and equality of opportunity. The government is committed to effectively working towards better equal benefits for both men and women in key issues such as poverty, health, education and decision-making and to act upon the different ways women and men are affected by these issues" (*Gender Equality Strategy*, p. 5).

Background

This report was commissioned by the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) on behalf of the Women's Centres' Regional Partnership (WCRP). It is funded by the Department for Social Development (DSD). Its aim is to provide a baseline study detailing the position of women in disadvantaged communities, providing analysis of the barriers to participation and indicating key policy issues to be addressed.

The report is produced at a time and in a policy environment in which government has committed itself to far-reaching action on Gender Equality, most evidently in the OFMDFM's production of the *Gender Equality Strategy* in 2006, about which more will be said later. The report is intended to have a number of uses:

- To indicate the barriers faced by women generally;
- To draw attention to the particular barriers facing women who live in disadvantaged areas, in poverty, and in rural / urban areas in a more qualitative way than a statistical analysis permits;
- To request strategic actions plans from each government department aimed at removing barriers facing women and increasing their

participation; and to provide nuanced information to support those charged with producing such plans;

- To provide an information resource to the community based women's sector so that they can assist in removing barriers facing women especially those in disadvantaged communities and increase their participation.

Defining the terms

The work relates particularly to Northern Ireland. Within the Northern Ireland context, then, the starting point for this research was a consideration of what was meant by "women in disadvantaged communities", "women living in poverty", and "women living in rural / urban areas". Terms such as disadvantage, rural deprivation, and poverty have become common currency particularly since the late 1980s, but it is worth saying at the outset what is meant by these terms in this report.

Disadvantage and Deprivation

The means of defining what is meant by disadvantaged areas have become sharper in recent years. Following the Robson Index of Deprivation and building on the Noble Measures, the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2005) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland, and is considered by government to allow more effective targeting of policies and resources on deprived areas (NIMDM, p. 3). It measures deprivation by considering the following criteria: Income, Employment, Health, Education, Proximity to Services, Living Environment, and Crime and Disorder (NIMDM, p. 4). In other words, deprivation is considered to be much more than low income or lack of money. It tends to focus more broadly on a lack of access to work, education or services, or a greater exposure to the negative aspects of life such as crime, or an inadequate living environment. Areas experiencing a combination of these factors are considered to be deprived, or disadvantaged. According to the government's anti-poverty strategy *Lifetime Opportunities*: "For the 284 000 people who live in such areas, there is a greater risk of poverty, poor health,

both physical and mental, and the despair that comes from having no apparent prospect of improvement" (Foreword).

Clearly disadvantage is a complex issue, and has to do as much with barriers and limiting factors as it has to do with poverty *per se*, although there is of course much confluence between disadvantage and poverty. However, it is of course individuals who directly experience the impact of disadvantage, and it is increasingly recognised that disadvantage can be multi-layered, depending upon the circumstances of the individual. In disadvantaged communities, women face more barriers for example to education and employment than men. A woman with a disability, a woman from an ethnic minority background, a woman who is a migrant worker, faces still more barriers. This report attempts to be mindful of the layers of disadvantage faced by women across a range of backgrounds, but there is no doubt that for each group of women who experience additional layers of disadvantage, much more work remains to be done to detail their particular circumstances and experiences.

Poverty

Poverty tends to be distinguished from the broader characterisation of deprivation in that definitions often focus on income levels. *Lifetime Opportunities* relates poverty to income, generally measured according to the size of income, whether or not it is rising in real terms, and whether or not it is keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the wider economy (p. 2). OFMDFM applies a broad definition of poverty on the website of its Poverty and Social Exclusion Unit: "People are considered to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to prevent them from enjoying a standard of living which would be regarded as acceptable by society generally. Around 341,000 people live in relative income poverty in Northern Ireland. Over 100,000 of these are children". The Government's *Gender Equality Strategy* recognises in particular "women's vulnerability to poverty e.g. lone parents, carers, low earners, inadequate pensions" (p. 18).

Rural

It is now generally accepted that living in a rural location can exacerbate problems experienced in urban areas, and that there is also a whole raft of barriers which are exclusively rural (e.g. *Gender Equality Strategy*, pp. 76-77). It is also widely recognised that "the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' is not clear cut" (NISRA 2005, p. 2). So complex is the issue that an Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group was established by NISRA in 2005 in order to attempt to define the terms as they pertain to Northern Irish society. The report of that group proposes a flexibly applied definition of rural as generally referring to settlements with a population of 4 500 or less (NISRA 2005, p. 5). On this basis, approximately 65% of Northern Ireland's 1.7m inhabitants live in urban areas and 35% in rural areas (NIRDP 2007, p. 9). The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group (RCSG), in its 2008 report, uses the terms "rural circumstance" (e.g. p. 14) and "rural distinctiveness" (e.g. p. 16) to describe the combination of factors, including dispersed population, distance from services, high levels of land-use etc. which characterise the experience of people living in such areas. The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group report makes the observation that in rural areas, "disadvantage is often not concentrated into particular geographical areas as is the case with more urban areas. This makes it harder to identify and to measure, particularly if the measurement tool is based on geography since rich and poor can be living side by side in the same community" (p. 16). In this report, sources of information pertaining to people in broadly "rural circumstance" as defined by report authors, are used.

The Scope of the Study

The report pertains to Northern Ireland, and it is described as a baseline study. It is not, however, a statistical baseline study. Rather, it is a study which attempts to present a picture of the situation of women on the ground in the first decade of the 21st century, in areas which can be broadly characterised as urban or rural disadvantaged. The report attempts to nuance what statistics we already have on both geographical and gender deprivation with qualitative information about the experiences and needs of women across a range of backgrounds and experiences, urban and rural, in Northern

Ireland. The report's subject is, then, substantial, and so it cannot claim, not does it attempt to be, exhaustive. However, the report does highlight the most notable barriers which have emerged from the research consulted as central to determining the extent of women's participation in education, work and public life, and it offers recommendations which are believed to have the potential for real and measurable impact on some of the most persistent barriers. However, it will also be important for government departments and women's and community and voluntary organisations to identify areas for which they have interest or responsibility and to work proactively to make additional proposals for increasing women's participation.

Methodology

This report is based on desk research. Because it seeks to outline the barriers facing women generally, and to focus on the particular experiences of women in disadvantaged rural and urban areas and in poverty, a range of material has been drawn upon which can be broadly categorized as follows:

- General, contextual and policy documents: This includes past reports into aspects of gender equality and women's participation, as well as policy, consultation and information documents on gender produced since 2000. Most sources deal with information relating to Northern Ireland only, and some documents relevant to gender produced in the South of Ireland and in Great Britain have been drawn upon where it has been useful to do so;

- Reports and studies which are either directly concerned with, or shed light on, the experiences of women in disadvantaged rural and urban areas. These include for example, *Shankill Women Have Their Say* (2006); WCRP's *Women's Centres' Community Based Education* (2008) which features case studies from all 14 member organisations; Women's Centre Derry Evaluations (2003 – 2007); Fermanagh Women's Network's consultation on a Gender Equality Strategy for Fermanagh (2008); the reports of the Northern Childcare Partnership

and the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group on rural childcare (2007), the reports of Gingerbread NI's Possibilities Development Partnership illuminating the experiences of lone parents (2007 & 2008), and many others. It is documents such as these which draw attention to the daily experiences of women from disadvantaged communities within the context of the broad statistics.

A full bibliography of sources is supplied at the end of this document.

How the Report is Presented
The report begins with an overview of the legislative and policy background on Gender Equality in Northern Ireland. It is then divided into sections, each of which deals with a core barrier facing women, and identifies the ways in which that barrier impacts on options for women in disadvantaged communities in regard to education, work and public life. Each section will also draw attention where possible to examples of good practice, and make recommendations for action.

Many of the barriers facing women are repeated, and multiplied, for women across a range of identities (urban, rural, older, younger, disabled and non-disabled, from ethnic minority backgrounds etc.) The barriers are often also repeated across a range of areas of policy and service provision, i.e. the barriers which prevent women from accessing education are often the same barriers which prevent them from accessing work, or making the transition into public and political life. Where barriers arise which have a particular impact on education and training, or work, or public life, this is made clear in the text.

Overview: The Context for Gender Equality

Northern Ireland Legislation

At Northern Ireland level, there is now in place a raft of legislative measures aimed at eliminating gender discrimination. These include *The Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970* (amended 1984) (Appendix One), and *The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976* (Appendix One). Increasingly, since their inception in the 1970s, such measures have developed from laws enabling individuals to take action against specific instances of discrimination, to measures geared more strategically towards the promotion of gender equality.

Section 75

The most notable progress towards a more strategic approach to equality is enshrined in *Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998* (Appendix One) which came into force on 1st January 2000. It requires public authorities such as Northern Ireland government departments, most non-departmental public bodies, District Councils and other bodies, to have "due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
(b) between men and women generally;
(c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
(d) between persons with dependents and persons without".

It also requires public authorities to "have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group" (Northern Ireland Act 1998, p. 16). Schedule 9 of the Act makes provision for the enforcement of duties under Section 75. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is charged with overseeing the implementation of Section 75.

As a direct consequence of the introduction of Section 75, all government departments were required to produce an Equality Scheme which would indicate how they intend to meet their obligations under Section 75. In particular, departments are required to screen all policy and action areas in order to ascertain whether or not an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is required, and to carry out an EQIA for each policy or action area considered likely to have differential impacts on the groups specified in Section 75. In the case of gender, for example, the assessment would identify any adverse differential impact on women and men, and propose ways of avoiding or mitigating the adverse effect (*Gender Equality Strategy*, pp. 62-63). The first portfolio of departmental Equality Schemes was submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) in early 2001.

Departments are required to produce Annual reports on their Equality Schemes, and OFMDFM presented a 5-year review to the Equality Commission in 2006. In this, it recognised actions such as consultation and partnership with the voluntary sector as "enabling" factors for equality, and lack of resources and lack of know-how as "impediments". The report recognises that training had been undertaken by departmental staff, but that more analysis of training needs was required (OFMDFM March 2006, pp. 30-31).

Review of Section 75

The Equality Commission subsequently undertook its own review of the effectiveness of Section 75 (May 2007). In it, the Commission offers a very brief overview of impacts of Section 75 on the nine categories. The Commission recommends greater congruence between departmental Equality Schemes and their 3-year corporate plans, and complementarity between Equality Schemes and cross-departmental strategies such as the *Gender Equality Strategy* and *A Shared Future* (p. 52). In its report on the UK's 6th periodic report on CEDAW (2008), ECNI concludes that while Section 75 has had an impact on the process of policy making, including consultation etc.: "There is less evidence that the legislation has yet had the intended impacts and outcomes for individuals" (p. 10).

Overall, ECNI states: "A shift in gear now needs to take place within public authorities; away from concentrating primarily on the process of implementing Section 75, towards achieving outcomes" (ECNI 2007, p. 7). There is an emphasis on public authorities detailing the actions they will take in key areas to promote equality of opportunity and good relations, setting targets and measuring outcomes (p. 8). It is hoped that this report, focusing as it does on real barriers facing women on the ground on a regular basis, highlights key areas towards which real action on gender equality can be directed, and measurable outcomes achieved.

The Policy Context: *Gender Equality Strategy*

It was against the backdrop of the equality agenda promoted as a consequence of Section 75 that the *Programme for Government* (2004-2006) committed government to bring forward and implement a cross-departmental strategy on gender equality. The Gender Equality Unit was set up in OFMDFM to advise and support government departments to promote gender equality throughout their policy making and service delivery and in tackling gender inequalities. After extensive consultation, the *Gender Equality Strategy* was launched in 2006, with the following vision:

***A society in which men and women are equally respected and valued as individuals in all of our multiple identities, sharing equality of opportunity, rights and responsibilities in all aspects of our lives* (GES, p. 14).** The Strategy is considered to underpin and complement the statutory duties outlined in Section 75. The Strategy outlines a number of key action areas, which are:

- childcare/caring as roles for both women and men;
- health and well being;
- representation in public life/decision making;
- education and life long learning;
- access to employment;
- gender pay gap;

- work-life balance;

- stereotypes and prejudices linked to men and women's gender;

- peace-building;

- poverty; and

- gender related violence (GES, pp. 17-18).

The emphasis on equality in Section 75 led to some policy makers interpreting the duty as a requirement to treat men and women equally – in other words that policy and practice should be "gender neutral". The *Gender Equality Strategy* initially tended towards this approach (Ward 2006), which does not recognise the different conditions of disadvantage experienced by women. The unequal conditions faced by women mean that in order to participate equally, gender neutral policy making which does not take account of their already disadvantaged condition, must be set aside, and positive action measures introduced to enable women to compete and participate on equal terms with men.

The Strategy now recognises that: "treating men and women the same – that is being 'gender neutral'- is not the solution to eradicating gender inequality" (p. 15), and later: "Treating men and women the same will not ensure equal outcomes because of the different experiences of women and men and the different economic and social positions occupied by them" (p. 27).

The Strategy commits government to applying two tools in implementing the Strategy:

- **Gender Mainstreaming**: "To effectively tackle gender inequalities we must address the structures and systems which act as root causes of gender inequality. To do this we must mainstream gender concerns into all our policies, programmes, service delivery etc. using gender analysis to identify where structures, systems and society's stereotypical norms lead to unintentional disadvantage and discrimination on the grounds of gender" (p. 26); Gender

Mainstreaming "challenges decision-makers to question the assumption that policies and programmes affect everyone in the same way" (p. 27).

- **Gender Action Measures**: "which include positive action as provided for within the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976…/ These action measures will be based on gender analysis and have clear outcome focussed targets. They will seek to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to gender" (p. 26).

In the *Programme for Government 2008-2011*, the Northern Ireland Executive restates its commitment to "tackling remaining gender inequalities, to implementing the cross departmental Gender Equality Strategy and to working towards the total elimination of the gender pay gap". In addition they state that they will ensure that there are effective programmes and strategies aimed at "achieving the eradication of all forms of violence against women, and examine strategies to combat the lack of women's representation in political and public life and to ensuring access to affordable quality childcare" (p. 12).

Gender Action Plans

The *Gender Equality Strategy* envisages that two cross-departmental gender action plans, one for women and one for men, will support the strategy. These three-year action plans are expected to identify departmental objectives, anticipated outcomes and performance targets set by the departments in order to meet the strategic objectives of the strategy. In effect, this requires all departments to articulate how they intend to operationalize the Gender Equality Strategy through gender mainstreaming and gender specific actions across all policy and service delivery areas. The Action Plans are expected to be subject to assessment and updating on an annual basis (p. 34).

The Gender Equality Unit established a Gender Advisory Panel to help finalise the Strategy and to advise and assist departments in the development and monitoring of the gender Action Plans. Although the *Gender Equality*

Strategy was published in 2006, at the time of writing, neither the action plan for women, nor the action plan for men, has been produced, although they are anticipated early in 2009. The Gender Advisory Panel has expressed its concern at the delay. OFMDFM states that it is "currently co-ordinating work across departments to refresh cross-departmental gender action plans". These plans have then to be agreed by the Executive. Following their publication, annual progress reports are expected to be available. A baseline study detailing the relative positions of women and men across a range of sectors and spheres has been published by OFMDFM (2008), so that progress can be reviewed. However, there are indications that the in-depth mid-term review of the Strategy, due to take place in 2011, may be delayed as a result of the delay in producing the Gender Action Plans. The plans represent a real opportunity to demonstrate how the kinds of outcomes envisaged in the Review of Section 75 will be achieved.

Developments in other Sectors

While the departmental gender action plans are awaited, some sectors and areas are proceeding with gender action plans of their own. For example Fermanagh Women's Network (FWN) is leading a project in which they aim to develop and implement a Gender Equality Strategy for Fermanagh, involving partners from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

Recommendation: The Gender Action Plans should be produced as soon as possible, and updated regularly based on information on the reasons for low levels of women's participation and the actions needed to increase women's participation.

International Context

The wider background to gender equality developments at home is the range of international instruments which require action on gender equality from state governments. These include:

- *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979;*
- *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995, 2000, 2005);*

- *The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (1995);*
- *The Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) (Articles 2 & 3);*
- *UN Resolution 1325 (October 2002);*
- *EU roadmap for equality between women and men COM (2006) 92.*

Both the UK and Irish governments are signatories to commitments under these instruments. Further details on each can be found in Appendix Two.

Review of Progress on CEDAW

National governments who are signatories to CEDAW submit periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee. The UK submitted its fifth and sixth periodic reports for consideration by CEDAW in July 2008. The Committee was less than satisfied with the UK government's progress, a sentiment echoed in the ECNI report (ECNI March 2008). The Committee expressed disappointment at a "…lack of uniformity in the format and content of the reports and the lack of reference to its previous concluding observations of 1999 and its general recommendations…replies were not always satisfactory and did not answer the questions entirely and precisely…some questions remain unanswered" (CEDAW 2008, p. 1).

The Committee did, however, welcome some positive developments in the UK such as "the proposed introduction of a single equality legislation in Northern Ireland…Government Departments' engagement with non-governmental organisations and civil society groups in the promotion of women's human rights and gender equality…Government support and funding of programmes aimed at women's empowerment and gender equality" (p. 2). The Committee also welcomed Section 75, but noted with concern "that varying levels of public understanding of the concept of substantive equality have resulted in the promotion of equality of opportunity and of same treatment only, as well as of gender-neutrality, in the interpretation and implementation of the Gender Equality Duty. The Committee also notes with concern that many public bodies, including Government ministries, have faced difficulties in developing results-based and action-oriented equality schemes and in mainstreaming gender equality into all policies and processes" (pp. 4-5).

The Committee expressed concern about the lack of full integration of the Convention into national legislation, and a lack of public and professional awareness of the Convention's measures (p. 4) and asked for measures for this to be put right immediately (p. 5). The Committee recommended the implementation of "temporary special measures" to accelerate women's equality (p. 6).

Other areas in which CEDAW called for urgent action include:
- Funding of women's organisations (p. 7)
- Violence against women (pp.8-9)
- Political Participation and Participation in Public Life (p. 10)
- Employment (pp. 10-11)
- Vulnerable Groups of Women (p. 12)
- Health (p. 11)
- Integration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals (p. 13).

Next Steps on CEDAW

The government is expected to provide a report within a year on Recommendation 14 (incorporation of the Convention into Single Equality Legislation and engagement with civil society in formulation of new equality legislation) and 16 (development and enactment of "a unified, comprehensive and overarching national strategy and policy for the implementation of the Convention") (CEDAW 2008, p. 14). The 7th periodic report is due in May 2011 (p. 15).

Recommendation: Action should be taken at a Northern Ireland level to ensure the integration of CEDAW recommendations with actions encompassed in the *Gender Equality Strategy.*

The *Gender Equality Strategy* and International Commitments

Government considers that the *Gender Equality Strategy* links with its commitments enshrined in both CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action:

"The strategy and its supporting action plans bring together what government is doing in Northern Ireland to promote gender equality and enable government to demonstrate how it is meeting its international commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (GES, p. 11). It considers that the awaited Women's Action Plan "provides a local mechanism which will enable Northern Ireland to initiate and co-ordinate action to meet these international commitments" (GES, p. 20). The *Gender Equality Strategy* links each of its strategic objectives explicitly to the twelve critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, and specific articles of CEDAW: a useful linkage which helps to "join up" international commitments with domestic policy (pp. 21-25). Precisely because of the connection which government draws between the *Gender Equality Strategy* and these important international obligations, it is all the more pressing that Gender Action Plans emerge sooner rather than later.

Section 1:

Lack of Childcare –The Primary Barrier

Introduction

All research consulted pointed to the lack of appropriate childcare as the single biggest barrier to women's engagement in education and training, work, and public and political life. The research shows that childcare provision is much more than a useful extra which "helps" women to participate: it is more correct to say that without it, many women from disadvantaged areas are entirely unable to consider education or work at all. Employers for Childcare's 2003 survey of over 2000 women in Northern Ireland found that lack of suitable childcare was the single most prohibitive factor for women in Northern Ireland who want to work (2003). Derry Well Woman's Childcare Audit *Childcare on the Borderlines* (2006) found that: "The absence of accessible, affordable, quality childcare poses a major stress factor, particularly in women's lives, and is a major barrier to accessing or returning to education, training and employment" (p. 1).

The issue is deeply linked with social / cultural expectations that women will shoulder the caring responsibilities: the absence of childcare is rarely cited as a reason why a man cannot take up education or work opportunities. Women are much more likely than men to have to consider how they will fit education around childcare and associated responsibilities such as school drop-offs and pick-ups. This means that the playing field is not level for women and men. Without childcare in place, course fees, working hours or transport costs are redundant issues for many women, as participation will not be possible in the first place. In short, if women from disadvantaged areas are to participate in education, work and public and political life, the provision of appropriate childcare is the essential first ingredient. As The Women's Centre Derry Evaluation 2007/2008 found, for one project in particular, "for all participants, without childcare, they would simply be unable to participate in education or development at all" (p. 58).

Alongside childcare, women are also increasingly undertaking responsibility for caring for older relatives. Some young women participating in Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report, for example, spoke of assuming major caring responsibilities early in life for the care of a parent, sibling, or other relative (p. 36). For a woman in this situation, lack of appropriate care is as much of a barrier as lack of appropriate childcare is for a mother. While this report focuses primarily on childcare, it is recognised that much more work needs to be done on women who find themselves in a caring role, and the extent to which this impacts on their opportunities.

The remainder of this section will examine the specific childcare-related issues that women from disadvantaged areas face, pointing where possible to examples of good practice, and making recommendations.

1.1 Limited Availability

There are a number of ways in which children are provided for and/or cared for away from parental care during the day. These are:

- Informal care (family and friends)
- Registered childminders
- Nursery / daycare
- Pre-school provision
- After-schools clubs and breakfast clubs.

Research by a number of organisations including the Northern Ireland Childminders' Association (NICMA), Employers for Childcare, Derry Well Woman, and many others, finds that the highest proportion of parents tend to opt for informal care, although less is known about why this is the case. The two major kinds of formal childcare in Northern Ireland are childminders and day nurseries, with nurseries tending to be more expensive. NICMA points out that registered childminding is the most popular and affordable form of formal care, accounting for 63% of full-time daycare places and 37% of all childcare places in Northern Ireland (p. 4).

The overall impression is that childcare provision is patchy in Northern Ireland. DETI's *Women in Northern Ireland* report (September 2008) indicates that between 2002 and 2007 the overall number of day care places in Northern Ireland fell by 1% from 47 170 in 2002 to 46 914 in 2007. Day nursery places, generally the most expensive kind of provision, increased by 49% since 2002. Places with registered childminders fell by 17% from 2002. Playgroup places fell 13% in Northern Ireland from 2002. 'Out of school' club places increased by 40% from 2002 (p. 17). NICMA expresses concern at the decrease in the number of places with registered childminders in particular, which they estimate to have dropped by 20% in the four years to March 2007 (p. 5). The Possibilities Development Partnership's (PDP) 2008 report, *Lone Parents Speaking Out*, points to DHSSPS data (2005) suggesting that the number of registered childminder and day care places in Northern Ireland equates to 1 place for every 6.4 children under four (p. 33).

Liz Fawcett, commenting on the NICMA study in 2009, notes that: "Nearly one third (30%) of parents who had recently looked for childcare said they had found their search 'fairly' or 'very' difficult – parents in rural areas were more likely to find their search difficult (43%)". She concludes that the figures suggest that "childcare is not currently accessible to all who require it in Northern Ireland" (Fawcett 2009, p. 4). It is a view shared by the CEDAW Committee who also express concern about the "lack of available and affordable childcare" in Northern Ireland (CEDAW 2008, pp. 10-11).

The *Shankill Women Having their Say* report bears this out, observing: "The women…fervently believed that there were not enough childcare places" (p. 21). Shankill women identified what they considered to be a particular gap in provision for children of primary school age, for children aged 11 and over, and for children with disabilities and special needs (p. 24). *Childcare on the Borderlines* identifies unmet need across a range of ages, and for children with special needs, or particular cultural needs such as those from the Travelling community (p. 3). It also identified a lack of affordable care in the North West and border region particularly for parents of children under eighteen months (p. 2).

For other women, such as those from the migrant community, the childcare issue is even more difficult. A report on migrant workers suggests that "half of the new migrant workers and families population are women and the issue of childcare, coupled with the greater likelihood of fewer or no family support networks disproportionately impact on women" (Holder 2007 cited in RCSG, p. 24).

The particular challenge of finding childcare in a rural area was indicated by the Rural Childcare Strategy Group who point out that there are more registered childminders in urban areas (p. 46). *Childcare on the Borderlines* also points to the fact that services in rural areas are fewer than in urban areas (p. 3), an issue which Fermanagh Women's Network also found in its consultation on a Gender Equality Strategy for Fermanagh. It identified that limited registered childcare provision was felt to be a particular issue for rural women (FWN, 2nd June 2008).

1.2 The Problem with Statistics…

Given the concern expressed across both urban and rural areas about the lack of availability of childcare, and its significance as a barrier to participation in education, the government's statistics in its *Baseline Picture* for the *Gender Equality Strategy* bear some scrutiny. The document points to a 22% increase in childcare places between 1994 and 2005. It also points out that: "… pre-school places whether nursery schools, reception provision or voluntary / private playgroups have increased by 91% from 10 785 in 1995/96 to 20 611 in 2005/06. The number of places in reception provision, contrary to the rises seen in other pre-school places, has consistently declined from a high of 2 575 in 1997/98 to 754 in 2005/06..." (p. 11).

Based on these figures, the report authors conclude:

"Only for a very small proportion (4%) of households with pre-school children was there an absence of any childcare arrangement. In 2005/06, the most common form of pre-school childcare was provided by relatives (43%), followed by a nursery class/school (33%), a play group or parent and toddler

group (18%) or a day nursery (15%).../ In 2005/06, a higher proportion of households with school aged children were without any childcare arrangements (18%). However, for those that had, the most common forms of childcare for this age group in 2005/06 were relatives (53%), after school / breakfast/homework clubs (16%), friends / neighbours (14%) and registered childminders (10%)" (OFMDFM & NISRA, 2008, p. 12).

OFMDFM's presentation of the figures on childcare, perhaps unintentionally, presents a skewed picture of childcare provision. To report that only 4% of households with pre-school children had an absence of a childcare arrangement gives the impression that in our society, there is almost universal childcare provision. A closer look at the figures reveals the problems with this analysis. The Equality Commission *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland, October 2007*, finds that: "Despite a 7% increase in the number of places available since 1996, Northern Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of childcare provision within the UK with only 92.5 day nursery places per 1 000 children of 0-4 years…compared with 195.5 in England in 2006" (cited in RCSG, p. 37). It is important for statisticians to exercise caution therefore in stating that only 4% of households in Northern Ireland with pre-school children are without childcare arrangements, and to look at some of the questions which underlie a heavy reliance on family support.

What is more, the inclusion of provision such as "parent and toddler groups" as a form of "childcare arrangement" is concerning: again there is a confusion between provision for children, and childcare provision aimed at enabling parents to undertake education, training or work.

That being the case, it is all the more important to embark on a more strategic approach by being clear about the extent to which childcare provision is meeting or not meeting need.

1.3 Lack of service integration
As outlined earlier, there is a range of childcare and children's provision in Northern Ireland. However, not all of the options are available to all children of

all ages and in all areas. Just as importantly, as signalled earlier, not all of the options can be classified as "childcare". Provision geared around school, whether pre-school, breakfast, or after-school clubs, is primarily geared towards providing for children's development, and not towards enabling parents to access training or employment. School-related provision operates independently from nursery or childminder care, and there is little evidence of any link-up between the two. Indeed, the Possibilities Development Partnership's 2008's report observes that: "There has been little attempt to integrate extended school policy with policies to increase labour market participation" (p. 34).

The Northern Childcare Partnership (NCP) *Report on Childcare Issues affecting Families in Rural Areas* points to the problem of a "patchwork of provision" in rural areas which is not integrated, and which requires parents (most often mothers) to be available during the day to undertake a number of drop-offs and pick-ups, or to organise relays of carers to do so for them. The report found that: "There was a general consensus that facilities opened too late and closed too early in order to allow parents to find suitable childcare to suit their working hours. As a result some parents had to rely on a number of childcare providers to bring and collect children from School, Afterschools, Playgroup, Nursery etc." (p. 14). The study found that those parents who said they had difficulty accessing childcare cited: lack of registered childminder; one pre-school / playschool in the area with limited places; lack of Breakfast Clubs or Afterschool Clubs in some areas to cater for school-aged children; need for creche or nursery facilities to cater for the 0-4 year-olds (p. 17). Because of gaps in provision, or the part-time nature of some provision, many parents used a combination of childcare provision, such as playgroup and relative, or playgroup and childminder (p. 16). The report found that: "As the number of children in a household increases, the arranging and co-ordinating of childcare can become more complex. This involves coordinating childcare and transport for children of various ages, to and from pre-school, primary school, and the childcare provider. Parents were of the view that it was difficult to organise transport as children may be at various premises, and

because of variance in age, children would be getting out of school etc. at different times" (p. 12).

The women in the Shankill study also pointed to the difficulty of managing childcare around the 'staggered starts' associated with children attending nursery, and the phased introduction system for primary one children (pp. 21-22). Derry Well Woman's *Childcare on the Borderlines* research points to the problem of "discontinuous" childcare arrangements over the course of the day, with care being available for example for 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon. The report concludes: "This was not helpful for parents working full-time and presented difficulties for parents in terms of co-ordinating their childcare arrangements" (p. 3).

The mismatch between pre-school provision and pursuing part-time education and training was raised as a barrier for women across a number of reports. While pre-school provision did free mothers for a short time, many found that the two hours in a morning or afternoon supplied by providers was simply not enough to allow them to engage in a course or work, particularly, if as is the case for rural women, they have to travel long distances for drop-off and pick-up. This reinforces the message that pre-school provision does not constitute a form of childcare which enables carers to participate in the education or labour market in any meaningful way, particularly as many places are part-time. Women who wanted to follow courses had to put in place arrangements for someone else to drop-off and pick-up children, so that they could study or work.

The research consulted suggests that for many women, making up the appropriate menu of care from the limited range of childcare and children's provision in their local area, in a way which genuinely frees them up to undertake education or work, is at best a challenge, and at worst an insurmountable obstacle. As long as childcare, school-related provision, and labour market participation strategies remain disconnected, someone needs to be available during the day to move children from one form of provision to another, sometimes several times in a day depending on arrangements for

different children. Failure to integrate provision in other words ties up a substantial proportion of the potential labour force, and swells the ranks of the so-called "economically inactive".

1.4 Lack of flexibility

Linked to the problem of lack of integrated service was the lack of flexible childcare. Participants in the Shankill study claimed that "childcare services did not take account of the true working lives and needs of women and parents. There was concern that childcare did not suit flexible working patterns e.g. shift work, part-time work, or certain kinds of full-time work" (pp. 21-22). A further issue was the "real or perceived inflexible nature of employment and the lack of recognition given by employers to the role of women outside of the workplace" (p. 13).

According to the Shankill women: "…one of the most positive changes to childcare provision would be the introduction of more 'flexibility' to mirror the needs of working parents and children. There is a need for adequate levels of childcare provision for children of school age and particularly for older children in their late primary school and early secondary school years. The women advocated childcare provision should comprise of a range of set-ups ie. full-time, part-time, sessional, after schools, summer holiday clubs etc." (p. 23). Some rural parents suggested that childcare should fit in with shift work, and part-time work which involved working occasional full days (e.g. NCP, p. 14). Some respondents to the Northern Childcare Partnership study who were in employment were struggling to fit childcare for school-aged children around school holidays, teacher training, elections, or pupils sitting the transfer test (p. 14). The Rural Childcare Strategy Group points out that longer travel to work distances in rural areas place additional demands on childcare outside normal work hours (p. 45). *Childcare on the Borderlines* points to a similar findings in the North West. The research found that childcare was often available too late for parents who need to drop children off before work or for parents working late / weekend shifts (p. 3). The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), in its report on a *Black and Ethnic Minority Health and Well-being Development Project for North and West Belfast* finds that

long and unsociable working hours for women for example from the Chinese community working in the catering industry causes particular difficulties for these women (p. 18).

Even where childcare is offered on-site, as is the case with most women's centres, there are indications that women are increasingly asking for flexibility and an extension of provision. The Women's Centre Derry, for example, offers childcare for children aged 0-4, to coincide with class-times and additional support sessions. In recent years, women taking part in evaluations, while expressing their appreciation for the childcare provided, have begun to ask for additional childcare, either for older children, or for extra hours in order to enable them to complete coursework and projects. There seem to be two main reasons for this. One is that for women to participate fully in courses, they need time to complete coursework. Another is that for some women, the experience of doing one course gives them an appetite to do more, and some have expressed the view that if afternoon childcare were available for school-age children, they would wish to pursue further courses (REF). This is something for women's centres to consider, but also an issue for FE Colleges, who will need to offer and / or extend childcare provision if they are to attract "hard to reach" women, as is one of the stated objectives of DEL's *Learner Access and Engagement* Strategy.

Participants in the Shankill study discussed the Children and Young People's package announced in 2006 by the Secretary of State, Peter Hain. They wanted more information on how this fund would help people living in disadvantaged areas. Women wanted to know what was meant by 'wraparound' schools, and the extent to which any package would support the flexible childcare provision provided by the community sector (p. 23).

1.5 Travel and Transport - Access
For many women, the location and accessibility of childcare is a central issue determining whether or not it genuinely enables them to take up training, education or work, and many express a desire for more local and on-site provision. This kind of provision has the potential to be better for children too.

The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group (RCSG) points out that: "Studies would show that children benefit from having their needs met closer to where they live, play, learn and have social networks" (pp. 11-12). These findings apply as much to urban as to rural areas. Although better transport networks would undoubtedly help women, the research suggests that women's preference is for locally available childcare which does not require substantial travel. This issue is dealt with in more detail in Section 7 Access: Travel and Transport.

1.6 Quality

Quality emerged as an important factor in childcare provision in the NICMA study: "More than half of all parents (52%) said the quality of care was an important consideration in seeking childcare". The study also found that day nurseries were viewed more favourably than childminders with regard to perceived quality of care, but that there appeared to be less awareness of what childminders could offer (Fawcett 2009, p. 4).

The quality of childcare provision was a major concern for the participants in the Shankill study: "Women need to be certain that when they are using childcare, their children are in a safe environment and that the care provided is of high quality" (p. 23). For these women, quality coincided with locality (nearness), affordability, cleanliness, structure and routine: "Children should be in an environment that incorporates physical and mental stimulation. The women believed that another key aspect of utilising external childcare was trust. It is crucial that mothers build a relationship with the childcare provider so that trust can develop" (p. 20).

Trust was also an issue for rural parents. The Northern Childcare Partnership report discovered that some parents had concerns that the lack of registered childminders meant that unregistered minders were in operation, and that parents had no choice but to use them. One parent said: "There are a lot of unregistered childminders with limited facilities and looking after large numbers of children. I have concerns about my child's stimulation with current childminder, but cannot get a registered childminder with availability" (p. 18).

The same finding emerged in *Childcare on the Borderlines*, which found that: "Trust, reliability, the availability of vetted staff and the good reputation of the provider were the key factors influencing parents' choice of childcare" (p. 2). Their audit also looked at quality issues from a provider's perspective. They found that "Lack of funding and the interminable cycle of funding applications hampered long-term planning, investment, and had a negative impact on staff morale…Low pay and job insecurity have hindered recruitment and retention of staff or good quality staff in some areas. This has knock-on effects for the availability of childcare places" (p. 3). Providers felt that the childcare sector was neglected as it was seen as "women's work" and therefore undervalued (p. 4). The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group report points to a range of factors compromising the quality of rural training provision in particular: "Limited infrastructure, buildings and adequate IT reducing opportunities for training; access to information and networking" (p. 54). Training was raised as a concern in the NICMA survey, with 91% of respondents supporting the introduction of mandatory basic training as part of the registration process for childminders (p. 4).

1.7 Reliance on Informal Care

In much of the research, the issue of quality tended to be conflated with trust, an issue which led many parents to rely on informal care. The NICMA study found that there was a strong preference among many parents for care provided by someone who knows the child (Fawcett 2009, p. 4). This was an important factor for lone parents too, according to the Possibilities Development Partnership's 2008 report (p. 57) with some parents expressing concern about "leaving the kids with someone else" (p. 59). In fact, the 2007 Possibilities Development Partnership study found that among the reasons given by lone parents for non-participation in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was "concern over the idea of a 'stranger' looking after one's children" (p. 11). Many lone parents expressed a strong preference for using family and friends (PDP 2007, p. 28). *Childcare on the Borderlines* also found that care by friends and grandparents were the most frequently used informal childcare arrangements, and were particularly important for under-fives (p. 2). Both the

Northern Childcare Partnership and the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group reports point to a similar trend in rural areas.

While childcare provision by relatives is welcome, the question as to whether childcare provided by relatives is always sufficiently regular and flexible to enable women in particular to avail of full-time or part-time education, training or work opportunities is not clear. Is this *ad-hoc* care, or regular care which supports mothers to return to education or to take on regular paid work? A majority of respondents in the Possibilities Development Partnership lone parents study used family or friends for childcare, usually a mother or sister, and some noted the drawbacks: "If you're paying someone to do it you know that they are going to be doing it regularly and if you are working you need reliable childcare" (PDP 2008, p. 55). A heavy reliance on relatives and even friends and neighbours for the care of school-age children begs the same question.

Employers for Childcare's 2003 report *The Childcare Barrier* points to earlier research which found that mothers relying on parental or self-care of children were more than twice as likely to leave a job than mothers using centre [formal] care (EFC 2003). The report also suggests that the use of informal care "is strongly and inversely associated with the mother's income, suggesting both that women are more likely to take only a part-time job when using family members to care for children and women with low earning capacity may be compelled to use unpaid care" (EFC 2003).

Furthermore, childcare supplied by relatives is almost invariably supplied by female relatives. As it is not possible to pay the Higher Education childcare grant or the childcare element of Working Tax Credit to a family member, this raises the question of whether or not reasonable payment is able to be extended for such care. If it is not, then there must be a raft of mainly women in society caring for their grandchildren and/or nieces and nephews, either for little or no economic gain: women's work is again undervalued and unpaid, and what is more, this unpaid caring work prevents these women themselves from accessing education or work opportunities.

Given the findings above regarding the limited availability of childcare, more research is needed to establish whether informal family care is a matter of free choice, or rather a matter of relatives stepping into the breach to enable a female family member to undertake work or educational opportunities. If it is a last resort, or the only viable option, this is problematic. It is also important to be mindful of the fact that some women do not have the choice of family care. As the Shankill study states: "Many of the women believed that there is a prevalent view held in Northern Ireland that we live in a society that is very much 'family orientated', therefore a lot of care is provided by relatives and neighbours. However, in reality, this is often not the case and the needs of women, in terms of 'caring', are often not met and extremely under-resourced" (p. 20).

In short, where informal care is a willing choice by all parties and is well supported, it can be the right choice for that family. Where informal care is chosen as a result of the shortcomings of current provision, it could be less likely to be a satisfactory long-term arrangement which enables women to participate fully in education, training or work. More research is needed into informal care, the reasons for it, its implications for all concerned, and ways in which it can be better supported.

1.8 Cost

The cost of childcare is a factor emerging from many studies. The Shankill study found that the expense of childcare constituted a real barrier for women who wish to access it. Some women were convinced that working was "rarely worthwhile … as most of the earnings were needed for childcare. There was a general belief that women would not be much better off working because of the high costs of childcare" (p. 21). Many lone parents also considered the cost of childcare to be prohibitive. According to the Possibilities Development Partnership research, there was a strong perception among this group too that the cost of childcare would outweigh any financial gain from returning to work (PDP 2007, p. 28). The study highlights the implications of this lack of integration on lone parents: "The problem of finding appropriate care could be exacerbated when a child attended school or pre-school provision for part of

the day, or where a child had a disability or special needs. Some interviewees provided graphic accounts of their attempts to put together packages of care with help from families, tax credits or childcare training allowances and sometimes social services" (PDP 2007, p. 28).

The Northern Childcare Partnership report into rural childcare found that 34% of parents in the Northern area felt that childcare was very expensive, especially when there were two or more children within the household (NCP, p. 12). According to Fermanagh Women's Network's Gender Equality Project, the affordability of childcare was a big issue for women in Fermanagh (FWN, June 2008). The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group report also draws attention to the increased costs of access to childcare services experienced in rural areas, pointing to a "scattered population contributing to the likelihood of increased costs in service provision" (p. 54) as one issue. It was a problem compounded by the fact that the disadvantage experienced by rural dwellers can be hidden because of population dispersal: "unlike those in urban areas, the more disadvantaged families in rural areas often live amongst those better off" (p. 54). Employers for Childcare's *The Childcare Barrier* report concluded that "the price of childcare is sufficient to affect both decisions about labour force participation and hours of work" (EFC 2003).

1.8.1 Help with Childcare Costs

From October 1984, help with childcare costs has been available to families receiving Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance and Housing Benefit. From October 1999, Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance were replaced by Working Families' Tax Credit and Disable Persons Tax Credit. From April 2003 these were incorporated within the new tax credits, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit (DETI 2008, p. 17).

It is perhaps not surprising that many of the women participating in the Shankill study were aware of the existence of the Childcare component of the Working Tax Credit but thought that "the eligibility criteria were difficult to understand and the system difficult to navigate" (p. 21). The Possibilities Development Partnership report also points to a lack of awareness about what support does exist, and a difficulty in grappling with the current system

for accessing support. As their report puts it: "Childcare cannot be treated just like any other commodity. As it exists the market in childcare is diverse and confusing with parents having concerns about gauging quality. The system of subsidy through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is administratively complex and there is confusion among many parents in this survey about exactly what financial support is available and in what circumstances" (PDP 2008, p. 61). NICEM's 2006 report into the experiences of black and ethnic minority communities suggests that the problem of accessing understandable information on benefits and services is even greater for women from these communities (e.g. p. 17). Clearly, more support with the cost of childcare is needed. But also simpler and clearer information about what is available and how to get it is needed.

Despite the additional costs of childcare to rural families, rural parents considered the childcare component of Working Tax Credit to be limited in its usefulness: "… only those parents who work at least 16 hours a week and who use a registered provider are eligible for assistance. Therefore parents who choose or have a dependency on family and friends to look after their children cannot claim this subsidy. Parents receiving the maximum credit of 70% *(currently 80% of costs – Ed.)* of costs would be those earning the lowest income. Even with the subsidy, some parents may find it difficult to pay the remainder of the cost as childcare is so expensive; therefore this would outweigh any financial gain of being in paid employment" (NCP, p. 22).
Given the heavy reliance on informal care in rural areas indicated in rural studies, the childcare component would remain irrelevant to many families. *Childcare on the Borderlines* suggests: "Unmet need in terms of access to affordable care also indicates a need for subsidy of care and more financial assistance for parents who cannot afford care" (p. 3).

The Possibilities Development Partnership study suggests that lone parents have had similar experiences of Working Tax Credit: "… despite government initiatives such as the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, the issue of cost remains paramount. To date, increases in childcare, early years provision and the introduction of tax subsidies for working parents do not

appear to have narrowed the gap for parents between childcare costs and low earnings. In particular, the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit can only be used to pay for formal care and cannot be claimed by parents who choose, or have to rely on, informal family care" (PDP 2007, p. 28).

1.8.2 Childcare Grants for FE and HE

According to www.studentfinanceni.co.uk, help is available with childcare costs. A Childcare Grant is available for full-time students with children in registered and approved childcare. Support with childcare costs is available to part-time FE students who are receiving financial assistance from the Support Funds (which are limited and for which there is high demand) and available only to students in financial difficulty. Childcare support is also available through the *Care to Learn* programme for 16-19 year old parents in FE, for a range of courses.

While support is therefore available to some degree with childcare costs, stipulations around age, and around the amount of time spent studying, mean that there remain a range of potential students who are unable to access such support. For example, some childcare support for part-time students is dependent on the student following a course which represents 50% or more of full-time study. Many women returning to education begin with courses which require lower time input, and build up to other courses afterwards.

1.9 Lack of Information

Lack of information on childcare provision also proved a barrier for women. Shankill women viewed this as "a significant problem". The women suggested that the production of a directory of local childcare services would be extremely helpful to the women in the area (p. 23). Derry Well Woman's *Childcare on the Borderlines* noted a high concentration on informal childcare in the North West and suggested: "Choice and pattern of formal usage might vary if parents had better access to information about local availability. Many parents said they lacked such information" (p. 2).

A survey of 501 parents undertaken for Employers for Childcare in 2006 concluded: "Overall, the image that emerges from the research is of a fragmented and incoherent perception among parents of childcare provision in Northern Ireland. This lack of clarity represents a significant impediment to the operation of the market" (EFC 2006). As a consequence of these finding, Employers for Childcare is in the process of attempting to address some of the most notable information gaps. For example, in the absence of a single source of information on schools-based provision, they are currently compiling a directory for parents of extended provision available at local schools (EFC Interview, Feb 2009).

1.10 Strategic and Policy Strengths and Weaknesses

To identify lack of appropriate childcare as a major barrier to women's participation is hardly a new finding. There is now a growing awareness that lack of childcare prevents women from participating in education, work and public life. This report is written against a backdrop of a number of initiatives on childcare, or more correctly, provision for children:

- *Children First*: *a Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland* (1999). This incorporated a focus on Social Inclusion, Quality, Affordability, Access, Family-friendly workplace practices, Information, Partnership and Funding. It aimed to enhance childcare provision including pre-school playgroups, out-of-hours childcare, day care facilities and crèche facilities for children aged 0-14. The review of *Children First* (DHSSPS 2005) points to gaps in the strategy and recommends a new vision for childcare for Northern Ireland which includes the allocation of mainstream funding to the childcare strategy;

- OFMDFM have published *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016* (OCYP); The Children and Young People Funding package (2006-2008) incorporated provision for Extended

schools; Extended early years provision and provision for children with special needs and disabilities;

- The development of an *Early Years Strategy* (DE) is aimed at improving the well-being and development of children in Northern Ireland from 0-6 years. One of the strategy's aims is "to provide access to quality day-care provision that is affordable and allows parents to balance the demands of parenthood and working life" (due April 2009);

- The planned expansion of Sure Start which aims at providing families with parenting support, especially in disadvantaged communities: to include the introduction of a day-care element; new projects and satellite services; and expansion of existing projects; a new programme for 2-year-olds. These are targeted at under-4s and their families within the 20% most disadvantaged wards, aimed at giving an additional 12000 children access to Sure Start services (OCYP, p. 52);

- The Pre-School Expansion Programme – by 2003/4 there were funded pre-school places available for 95% of children in their pre-school year (*Lifetime Opportunities*, pp. 15-16);

- The Extended Schools programme, primarily in areas of disadvantage focusing on supporting learning, healthy lifestyles and creativity, to include breakfast clubs, after-school study support, after-school youth, sport and leisure activities, and programmes for parents (OCYP, p. 52);

- The Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit which, from April 2006, allowed parents on low incomes to claim up to 80% of the cost of formal childcare;

- The development of the *DHSSPS Family and Parenting Strategy* covering health and social services for children and young people;

- £8m package for multi-disciplinary support teams for children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities (*Lifetime Opportunities*, p. 17);

- *Lifetime Opportunities: The Government Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland* which incorporates the following pledges:
  - "To work towards enhancing support for early years by establishing Children's Centres in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland" (p. 20);
  - "By 2020 to ensure that schools become established centres of the community offering services and learning opportunities before and after the traditional school day" (p. 32);
  - "By 2020 to ensure the provision of childcare to a professional standard to be available to all, beginning in disadvantaged neighbourhoods" (p. 32).

There is no doubt that childcare has moved up the political agenda in recent years, and that programmes such as the Pre-School Places programme is an important intervention in early years provision. However, Liz Fawcett, reporting on NICMA's study into public attitudes to childcare, points to the UK government's investment of £4billion over 3 years in Sure Start projects and Early Years and childcare provision, and the Irish government's Euro575million five-year National Childcare Investment Programme which is designed to create up to 50 000 new childcare places. She observes that to date in Northern Ireland, there has been "no comparable level of public investment in childcare" (Fawcett 2009, p. 1).

In February 2009, Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie announced a rescue package of over £1.5million to safeguard the provision of over 2,000 childcare places in some of Northern Ireland's most deprived areas. The package has of course been welcomed by the centres benefiting from it, but in reality, for the women's centres it represents the extension of a year-old emergency package for childcare provision at risk of closure, in the

absence of a more strategic long-term approach. It is a shortcoming that she herself recognised when launching the package. The announcement serves to highlight the fact that while there may be a broad recognition now that lack of childcare constitutes a key barrier to women's participation, and an apparent commitment to developing a more strategic approach, there is still a long way to go. Part of the problem lies in the way that childcare is administered in Northern Ireland. Responsibility for aspects of childcare / early years provision lies across DE, DEL, and OFMDFM, with other departments taking an interest too (e.g. DARD's Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group). It is not surprising then that provision is patchy and inconsistent.

1.11 The Cost of Inadequate Childcare

Lack of appropriate childcare has a direct and discernible impact on economic activity across the UK, but in Northern Ireland the problem is worse. Women who take primary responsibility for childcare, and who are therefore unavailable for work outside the home are classified as "economically inactive". 32.9% of women were economically inactive in Northern Ireland in Spring 2008 compared to 25.9% in GB (DETI 2008, p. 2). 43% of working age economically inactive women (of whom there are 335 000) were unavailable for work due to family / home commitments, the estimate for men in this category was too small for reliable quotation (DETI 2008, p. 15). A survey undertaken for ECNI (2003) found that nearly a quarter of employed mothers were "constrained in the hours they worked by childcare problems". A further 20% said they were constrained in their choice of job by childcare needs. Before the arrival of children, 85% of working women are full-time. That falls to just 34% of working mothers with preschool children (EHRC 2008, p. 13). The Early Years Strategic Alliance (EYSA), in their *Early Years Manifesto*, observe that while the working age economic activity rate for women without dependent children is 73%, "the corresponding rate for women with 3 or more children is 45%...67% cited the lack of affordable quality childcare as the main barrier to seeking employment" (p. 9).

Once a woman has had her first child, often regardless of her qualifications, her trajectory in the labour market either stops altogether, or declines and

never recovers to match the trajectory of male colleagues. There were many examples of the impact of lack of availability of childcare in the research. The following quote, from a rural woman, comes from the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group study:

"It will be at least 10 years before I can consider training or employment opportunities. I cannot see in the short-term any opportunities to have childcare facilities that suit our family in place in our area. This is sad as I would like to have a choice even to consider part-time work (Stay-at-home mother, 5 children (1 with disability), Fermanagh" (p. 36).

The Northern Childcare Partnership study, also concerned with rural provision, found that "Lack of day care facilities often resulted in parents having to leave work or reduce their working hours in order to care for their child" (p. 18). Not surprisingly, the Northern Childcare Partnership report found that a majority of parents depended on relatives for childcare. *Childcare on the Borderlines* concludes that: "Unmet need, whether due to availability or cost, is a key influence on whether parents take up work and educational opportunities. Parents experienced problems in relation to keeping up employment and the difficulty of maintaining good relations with employers when childcare problems were experienced" (p. 3).

It is not only women who are impacted by the lack of appropriate childcare. The Early Years Strategic Alliance points to the impact of inadequate childcare provision on children: "The lack of access to suitable and affordable age appropriate childcare is one of the most significant barriers to women's equal participation in the labour market and also a significant contributor to Northern Ireland's high levels of child poverty" (p. 8).

1.12 The social and economic benefits of childcare
Just as there is a social and economic cost associated with inadequate childcare provision, so too there are discernible benefits when appropriate, high quality, affordable childcare is found. Women in the studies reviewed

were highly conscious of the wider benefit of quality childcare to children and to the wider economy.

1.2 Good Practice

Clearly, the limited availability of the right kind of childcare places, flagged up as an issue in urban disadvantaged areas and even more so in rural areas, is a key barrier. But even where forms of childcare and children's provision are available, the lack of integration and flexibility, concerns about quality and trust, and high cost also present barriers. It may seem a daunting challenge, then, to get childcare provision right. Yet there are many examples of childcare provision for women living in disadvantaged areas which has struck the right balance. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report on *Women's Centres' Community Based Education* highlights the fact that all 13 centres featured provide free, on-site childcare to course participants. Women entering a women's centre, whether in Dungannon, Craigavon, Belfast or Derry can expect this service.

The Women's Centre Derry supplies one example of the benefits of the kind of childcare provision supplied by women's centres. Evaluations of the Women's Centre Derry consistently show that childcare provision is central to women's participation: "Most women mentioned the childcare provision as one of the best features of the Women's Centre… As one woman put it: 'For me that childcare was great – it was a deciding factor – it breaks that cycle'" (McLaughlin 2003, p.16). Women's Centre staff interviewed for the evaluation also expressed the view that the provision of free childcare was "central to those success stories" (p. 29). The high quality of childcare provision at women's centres was raised again and again by participants on their courses. The 2006-07 evaluation found that: "The free, on-site crèche is a core service provided by the Women's Centre, addressing one of the key barriers preventing women from taking up access to education and development opportunities…Mothers reported extremely high levels of satisfaction with the childcare service: it is one of the most highly rated aspects of the Women's Centre's service, with 82.4 % of respondents rating it as 5 – Great, and 15.2% rating it as 4 – Very good" (McLaughlin 2007, p. 34).

The evaluation found that the benefits most clearly associated by parents with the childcare service was to do with play skills and interaction with other children. Around two thirds also reported improvements to speech and development. More than half of mothers reported a greater interest in reading and books thanks to the crèche's library project. Mothers also reported benefits to themselves, in the form of greater awareness about diet and dental health, and a third felt that their child ate a broader range of more healthy foods as a result of attending the crèche. Respondents enthused about the childcare service: " 'I was hoping my child would get more interaction with other children without me being around to help her to settle into pre-school. She loves coming to the crèche and enjoys playing with the children' ". Women also pointed to specific benefits to their children: " 'My daughter is great – more sociable, trained for the nursery. The crèche and the staff have lots of energy' ", and: " 'My child is more outgoing – enjoys other children's company. He has learned to share' ". Another felt freed-up to enjoy her course: " 'I have peace of mind knowing my child is in the crèche – great' " (p. 35).

The Shankill study found that: "Many of the women believed there were benefits to be gained by young children attending crèches. Focussing efforts on young children in their early years can bring health as well as social benefits and provide a sound foundation for life. Positive aspects of childcare provision (external to the home) included the structure and routine provided for young children and the space to enable 'social mixing'. Crèches also allow stressed parents to have time and space, often opening up other potential opportunities such as the ability to work outside of the home" (p. 20).

It is not surprising then that throughout all four Shankill workshops "it was reiterated that it was essential that government earmarked more funding for childcare. The women suggested that the benefits would far outweigh the costs. Childcare provision with the community and voluntary sector would become more secure, ensuring local availability, particularly in disadvantaged areas" (pp. 21-22).

Recommendations

Organisations such as the Northern Childcare Partnership, the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group, the Early Years Strategic Alliance, Derry Well Woman, the Possibilities Development Partnership, and Employers for Childcare, have produced research in recent years, much of which incorporates detailed recommendations on childcare, as well as examples of good practice. While this report does not attempt to rehearse their recommendations in full, many of the recommendations below echo those expressed in those documents.

Minister Ritchie concluded her recent announcement of £1.5m of emergency funding for community childcare with a statement of support for the work being done by the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to produce a strategy for childcare. She added: "I will be working with my Executive colleagues to resolve this matter as quickly as possible" (18 February 2009).

➢ Congruent with Minister Ritchie's assertion, it is absolutely clear from all research consulted that what is needed is an **Integrated Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland** which includes the following aims and measures:

➢ Implementation of the appropriate recommendations within the Rural Childcare Stakeholder's Group's *Rural Childcare: Investing in the Future* (2008), and the Northern Childcare Partnership's *Report on Childcare Issues affecting Families in Rural Areas* (2007).

➢ Transparency about where lead responsibility lies for childcare and children's provision;

➢ Further research into the gap between supply and demand for childcare in NI;

- Increased provision of local, high quality, affordable, flexible childcare;

- A clearer understanding of the differences and connections between school-related children's provision on the one hand, and childcare on the other;

- Promotion of integration of school-related children's provision on the one hand and childcare on the other, to provide seamless childcare cover for women wanting to take up education, training or work opportunities;

- Support for flexible childcare to fit different working patterns;

- Provision of children's centres in disadvantaged communities, offering a range of locally based services;

- A more strategic approach to long-term funding for community-based organisations who already supply quality childcare in disadvantaged communities;

- Promotion of on-site childcare provision to accompany education and training provision, and work. Consistent provision of on-site childcare across FE, as well as support for local community-based education and training provision which can offer on-site childcare;

- More frequent and affordable public transport, and support for community and rural transport schemes such as those noted by the Northern Childcare Partnership and the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group;

- Further research on the childcare needs of ethnic minority and migrant women, particularly with regard to culturally appropriate childcare provision;

➤ Further research on the childcare needs of women with disabilities, and women who have children with disabilities;

➤ Further research into informal care – the benefits, the drawbacks, and the reasons for its popularity;

➤ Better access to training for childminders and improved quality standards for childcare;

➤ Simplification of financial support for childcare, in particular the Childcare Component of Working Tax Credit;

➤ Consistency of childcare allowances for women participating in public bodies;

➤ Better and more accessible information on childcare provision.

Many of the above recommendations point to the need for more childcare. These recommendations should be read in the light of the section on work / life balance. While we need childcare to suit our working hours, the working hours of men and women generally need to be reduced. Childcare should be available to enable men and women to work a reasonable part-time or full-time day if that is what they choose. It should not be used to provide extended cover on a continuous basis to support parents with dysfunctional work / life balance, or to support companies who make unreasonable time demands of their employees. After all, the people who are impacted most by the childcare arrangements we make are children. Further research needs to be done to increase our understanding of the impact of different forms of childcare on children, and to provide guidance on how many hours per day children should ideally be in childcare. Whatever the findings, we should not make the assumption that it must be women and not men who will supply care for the remainder of the time.

Section 2:

Poverty

Introduction

It was clear from the research that poverty is not only a consequence of low levels of participation in education and employment: it is also a factor which prevents women from participating in the first place. We know that disadvantage is a significant factor in determining educational attainment and career prospects. The *Our Children and Young People* strategy notes that in 2003/2004, 5% of school leavers in NI achieved no qualifications. However, 12% of children who were entitled to free school meals (taken as an indicator of disadvantage) left school without qualifications. 6% of all school leavers obtained no GCSEs, but this rises to 14% of pupils entitled to free school meals (OCYP, p. 6). The Shankill report points to 2001 Census data which indicates that at that time, while 58.6% of all school leavers gained five or more GCSEs, in the Shankill ward the figure was only 26.1%. While 61.7% of all school leavers went on to further or higher education, only 19.6% of school leavers from the Shankill did so. While the figures are now historic, the fact that Shankill retains its number one status in the NIMDM suggests that the situation has not significantly improved.

Increasingly, research shows that these barriers are exacerbated by gender. The barrier is not only to do with living in a disadvantaged area, but is also to do with women's *added economic disadvantage within the household*. Maggie Feeley characterises this as "the exacerbation of poverty due to dependence on a husband's low wage and the lack of independent means, and the lack of reward for domestic and caring work" (Feeley 2001, p. 48, citing Lynch et al 2001). For women who are lone parents, the situation is even worse. A study by Hillyard *et al* (2007) concluded that lone parents in Northern Ireland had the lowest standard of living of any household type and were more than twice as likely to be poor (cited in PDP 2008, p. 35). A total of 26.9% Income

Support Claimants are classified as Lone Parents and the majority of these are women (95.2%) (DETI 2008, p. 18).

NICEM's 2006 study has found that some black and ethnic minority groups report particular experiences of poverty. For example, it identifies that Chinese asylum seekers are entitled to an allowance which is only 70% of the standard level of income support (p. 17). Asylum Seekers and Refugees were found to lack awareness of their welfare benefits entitlements (p. 25). Poor living conditions and lack of resources mean that many "live close to poverty and have a poor diet" (p. 26). Difficulty in accessing social security benefits and lack of awareness of entitlements were found to impact on migrant workers too (p. 28).

We can expect that as the economic downturn worsens, and more jobs are lost, the economic disadvantage of women will increase. All of this means that poverty disproportionately affects women when weighing up the costs of doing a course or taking up a job.

2.1 The Cost of Education

The cost of mainstream courses was raised by many women in the research studied as a prohibitive factor in accessing educational opportunities. As Feeley put it in her 2001 report *Making Good Learning Partnerships*: "Women in employment, women with qualifications, transport, good childcare and extensive social networks, face fewer material and social barriers to inclusion in mainstream FE than do working class women" (p. 44). This is borne out in the Shankill study, in which there was a general view from local women that 'education costs' in terms of course fees and materials, the cost of transport, and, as outlined earlier, the cost of childcare. The Shankill report found that: "for many women the prospect of further expense within their tight budgets was not feasible" (p. 10). The lack of independent income is an important barrier particularly with regard to education. If the household income is seen as coming from and perhaps pertaining to the male partner, it may be more difficult for a woman to make calls on that money for her own development, particularly in a domestic situation where resources are already stretched.

The Possibilities Development Partnership report states that poverty was a major factor restricting choices and opportunities for lone parents, 91% of whom are female. Financial hardship led to debt for many, sometimes totalling thousands of pounds. Many relied heavily on the Social Fund (PDP 2008, p. 107). The report notes that the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy, *Lifetime Opportunities*, suggests that many people need help to manage their finances and avoid debt. The report points out that in fact, for many, debt is an inevitability as there is simply not enough money, however well it is managed (PDP 2007 p. 31). Given these factors, it is not surprising to find that lone parents found the need to buy course materials and equipment prohibitive. The study found that a number of New Deal for Lone Parents participants undertaking FE courses reported that they faced "unrealistic demands" to buy their own equipment (PDP 2007, p. 26). A number of respondents in the study also reported problems with having expenses reimbursed from further and higher education colleges. Some reported having to wait weeks for childcare payments to be processed, which in turn caused problems with childminders. One woman found that an FE college had waited for her to submit two expenses claims before reimbursing her. When she asked why this had happened, it was clear that the staff had no idea of the impact late repayment could have on a woman on an already stretched budget (PDP 2007, p. 27).

2.1.1 Grants and Financial Support

There is some support available for the costs associated with attending HE and FE courses, as detailed at www.studentfinanceni.co.uk. Support with childcare costs is detailed earlier. Support for the wider costs of courses includes:

- Parents' Learning Allowance available for full-time students with children to help with course-related costs;
- Adult Dependants Grant which is payable to students who have another adult dependent on them;
- A Fee Grant to help with the cost of course fees available for part-time courses which represent 50% or more of a full-time course – also some

colleges provide reduced fees for students in receipt of Working Tax Credit or certain benefits;

- Support (up to £250) with course costs including books, travel and other course expenses;

- Education Maintenance Allowance payable to students aged 16-19 from low-income households;

- Discretionary Awards.

However, financial support is subject to strict eligibility conditions, and most of the above provision would be of little assistance to a woman from a disadvantaged community returning to education by undertaking a community-based course for a few hours per week. Furthermore, reimbursable course expenses often need to be claimed retrospectively, and are sometimes only repaid weeks (or months) after they have been incurred. Retrospective reimbursement of course expenses is not a valid way to provide financial assistance for a disadvantaged woman on a low income or benefits, with children to support.

Although limited financial assistance is available for education, across the Shankill study, the Women's Centre Derry evaluations, the Possibilities Development Partnership lone parents' research, and Youth Action's research into younger women, there seemed to be a general lack of awareness about whether and how much support was available for participation in education, and whether or not it would interfere with benefits.

2.2 The Cost of Work

2.2.1 The gender pay gap

Women earn less than men. This is because many traditionally female career paths are lower paid than traditionally male career paths, and because women are more likely to work part-time than men due to caring responsibilities. Because it is difficult to find highly-skilled and well-paid part-time work, women are corralled into low-skilled, low-paid part-time work, with fewer benefits, as a result of having and caring for children. As the Women

and Work Commission puts it in *Shaping a Fairer Future* (2006): "Women face substantial penalties, in terms of pay and progression, for taking time out of the labour market or reducing their working hours to care for children or other relatives" (p. viii).

Furthermore, there is evidence that the gender pay gap is widening instead of narrowing. According to DETI, the ratio between male and female median hourly earnings excluding overtime has decreased to 97.2% (from 98.3% in 2006), which represents a slight widening of the gender pay gap. The median gross weekly wage for full-time females at April 2007 in NI was £372.6 while for full-time males the figure was £424.8 (DETI 2008, p. 10). CEDAW points out that this pay gap between men and women is one of the highest in Europe, with average hourly earnings of full-time women employees amounting to 83% of men's (CEDAW 2008, pp. 10-11). In Framework for a Fairer Future, the UK Government itself points out that unless we do something, the pay gap between men and women will not close until 2085 (p. 7).

Not only does the gender pay gap mean that women are worse off than men currently, according to the Women and Work Commission, it also means that women are at greater risk of falling below the poverty line and of being worse off than men in retirement (p. vii). This is because women are not permitted to accrue sufficient contributions to entitle them to a full state pension.

2.2.2 The Benefits of work – worthwhile or worse off?

It is clear from the research that the fact that women are more likely to be dependent on benefits, and the low pay associated with women's work, are directly connected. Women who depend on benefits, and who will often find themselves responsible for high costs of childcare, ask themselves two questions. The first is: "Will I earn enough over and above my benefits-based income to make it worthwhile to work?" The second is: "Am I in danger of being worse off as a result of starting to work?"

A rural woman contributing to the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group study summed up the difficulties of making work pay: "I want to return to work. I recently took up a part-time job advised that I could work up to 16 hours per week and retain benefits. I have 5 children, 2 weeks into my job and my housing benefit has been cut. Apparently I can work up to 16 hours but can only earn £20 before it impacts on benefits. This makes it very difficult to return to work and make it viable (Mother of 5)" (p. 36).

The impact of earnings on means-tested benefits such as Housing Benefit was an issue shared by urban and rural women. In the Shankill study, low wages and the "benefits trap" were cited as significant barriers to employment faced by women living in the area. The study found that: "What is perceived as women's work, eg. cleaning and childcare, is notoriously low-paid and the risk of moving from social security payments is too great. One of the most cited obstacles in relation to this is the potential loss of housing benefit when moving into employment. Furthermore, there are many 'front-loaded' costs when moving into work, eg. travel, clothes and these, coupled with moving from the security of benefits, would constitute a step too far for many women" (pp. 12-13). Many women believed that because the jobs available to them were low-paid, most of their wages would be spent on childcare (p. 13). Decent wages and 'work that pays' were described as key priorities for the women in the Shankill study (p. 14). It was also suggested that incentives or an easier transition from benefits to work would help (p. 14).

Information on the impact of work on benefits was considered to be a key issue by women in the Shankill study, who largely did not know where to access information on these matters. They expressed a desire for accessible information on education, jobs, childcare, and entitlements such as tax credits, in a one-stop-shop format provided in one centre or building. Participants felt that greater knowledge of the impact of work on benefits would help to remove many of the obstacles faced by women who wanted to return to education or move into work. Lack of awareness on entitlements, sometimes in relation to immigration or work status, was also found to be an issue for black and ethnic minority communities (NICEM, p. 17).

The Belfast-based organisation WOMEN'STEC have had considerable experience of assisting women from disadvantaged areas to embark on education and training aimed at supporting them into non-traditional careers. They had recently offered a course in which a third of students dropped out because "the transfer from Income Support to Jobseekers' Allowance which accompanied their embarkation on the course was far from 'seamless'". The result was that four women, including lone parents, ended up with no benefits for a period of 2-3 weeks. Participants on a recent "Training for Work" programme had the same problem with benefits transfer. Another WOMEN'STEC programme entitled *Women into Engineering* had hit serious difficulties when the local College, who were managing the budget, were unable to pay childcare or travel costs on a sufficiently regular basis to suit participants' needs. This meant that many women had dropped out (WOMEN'STEC Interview, Feb 2009).

Lone parents participating in the Possibilities Development Partnership lone parents study also agreed that the way in which the social security system operated created a 'benefits trap' that made it very difficult to make the transition from welfare to work. Indeed, it was clear that lone parents found it particularly difficult to break the cycle of benefits dependency. The study found that lone parents were twice as likely as other employment market entrants to leave work within the first year and that there was "considerable cycling between benefits and work" (PDP 2008, p. 31). The study found that although most (77%) of participants said they were actively seeking work, 31% said that they did not believe they would be better off financially. A further 23% did not know or were unsure whether they would be better off (PDP 2007, p. 29). Some of the participants had experienced particular difficulties with delays in receiving tax credits when they were making the transition from welfare benefits to paid work. One woman had incurred rent arrears because her Working Tax Credit did not come through for several weeks, causing her great anxiety (PDP 2007, p. 30). As the study put it: "Women with children cannot afford to accept low-paid jobs" (PDP 2007, p. 14).

Poverty keeps women out of education and training, and out of work. Not surprisingly, it also keeps them away from public and political life. The 2004 *Women's Factsheet* states that: "Lack of independent or sufficient income has been identified as one of the reasons why women traditionally have been unable to participate in the 'public sphere'. Without independent income, women cannot freely choose to participate in many activities which require payment for participation, travel etc." (Factsheet 2004, p. 1).

2.3 Good Practice

The UK government has tried to break the cycle of benefits dependency for lone parents in particular by introducing a Return to Work credit of £40 per week for the first 12 months in work, where earnings are less than £15 000 per year. However, the Possibilities Development Partnership report observes that that are were no current plans to extend this payment to Northern Ireland. It adds that unless lone parents in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to "progress and earn a good living", retention in the labour market is likely to remain an issue (PDP 2008, p. 105).

The Women and Work Commission recommends extended assistance for lone parents to support their retention and progression in work (p. xii).

Recommendations

All of the barriers in this report impact on women's economic well-being, and most of the recommendations across all sections have a bearing on poverty as a barrier to participation. However, there are some specific actions which could help.

> ➢ CEDAW recommends the introduction of mandatory pay audits, aimed at identifying areas where pay gaps persist, and eliminating them;

> ➢ Sectors which employ large numbers of women should be assessed with regard to enforcement of the national minimum wage;

➢ Changes should be made to legislation, allowing women to accrue sufficient benefits to entitle them to a full state pension on retirement;

➢ Free, on-site childcare for women who need it to enable them to access education and training;

➢ Financial support for women accessing education and training, whether for childcare, materials or equipment to be available upfront where possible, and where expenses are reimbursed, payments should be sufficiently regular to permit low-income women to participate;

➢ Schemes in FE and HE permitting payment of fees in smaller instalments;

➢ Clearer information on the financial assistance available for participation in FE and HE, and its impact on benefits;

➢ Provision of financial support for part-time courses involving less than 50% of full-time hours;

➢ Measures to ensure the seamless transfer from one benefit to another (e.g. Income Support to Jobseekers' Allowance), or from benefits to work when women enter education, training or employment;

➢ Measures aimed at making it "worthwhile to work". While a Return to Work type of scheme has its uses, ultimately the aim is to improve remuneration levels for the kinds of work that women tend to do in the long term.

Section 3:

Skills, Qualifications and Confidence

Introduction

It was evident from the research that there was a complex of factors influencing the extent to which women felt prepared to participate in education, training and work. These related factors were limited qualifications, limited skills and experience, and an attendant lack of confidence.

We know that girls in Northern Ireland do considerably better than boys at school in terms of exam results, and progression to further and higher education (DETI 2008, pp. 3; 19-20). Statistics on school performance show that girls regularly outperform boys. A higher proportion of girls (70.9%) leaves school with at least five GCSEs compared with 55.4% of boys (2004/5), and a higher proportion of girls (52.7%) leaves school with at least two A Levels compared with 36.3% of boys (GES Baseline 2008, p. 16). A higher proportion of girls (45.6%) go on to HE than boys (30.8%) and a higher proportion of girls (29.7%) go on to FE than boys (25.3%) (GES Baseline, p. 17). Yet we also know that better performance in school signally fails to translate to better, or even equal, success in the labour market or indeed in public life. For example:

- 74.9% of working age males are in employment compared with 65.3% of females (DETI 2008, p. 1).
- 22% of female employees are in administrative and secretarial occupations, compared with 7% of men. 13% of female employees are in personal service occupations, such as catering, domestic service and hairdressing, compared with 3% of men (DETI 2008, p. 9).
- 38% of female employees work part-time compared to 8% of male employees. 83% of part-time employees are women (DETI 2008, p. 7).
- Just three years after graduating, women earn 15% less than their male counterparts (Women and Work Commission, p. vii).

- Women with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds face even greater barriers: a woman with a disability is two and a half times more likely to be out of work than a non-disabled person; a woman from an ethnic minority background is also two and a half times more likely to be out of work than a person not from an ethnic minority background (Framework for a Fairer Future, p. 7).

What this section attempts to do, then, is to get past the statement that "girls do better than boys in school" and to consider what it is that holds back women from disadvantaged communities both rural and urban.

3.1 Lack of Qualifications, Skills and Experience

A low level of qualifications, skills and work experience was cited as an obstacle in most research. The low levels of educational attainment in disadvantaged areas has been signalled earlier. The women in the Shankill study expressed concern about the obstacle of having few or no qualifications. This, along with a lack of work experience prevented women from applying for and getting jobs. Low levels of literacy were considered a huge problem, and one which was prevalent in the Shankill area. It barred women even from the initial stages of job search: completing an application form (p. 13).

The Women's Centre Derry Evaluation 2007-08 found that how women feel about their qualification level is an important factor in how prepared they feel for further education and work. Women were asked to rate their qualification level before starting a Women's Centre course, and to rate their qualification level on completion. No participants rated their qualifications as 5 – Great before the course, and only 16% rated their qualifications as 4 - Very Good. This increased to 68.5% rating their qualifications as "Great" or "Very Good" on completion of the course. While 10.5% of respondents rated their qualifications prior to attending as 1 "Poor", no respondent rated her qualifications as "Poor" on completion of the course (p. 38). This suggests a marked shift in women's own attitudes towards their qualifications, and points

to the greater degree of confidence in their abilities that participation of both accredited and non-accredited courses can bring.

The Possibilities Development Partnership study found that lack of appropriate skills, qualifications or recent employment experience was a barrier for many lone parents (PDP 2008, p. 104). It was felt that the issue was worse for lone mothers because they tended to be younger than married mothers and so had less work experience and lower levels of qualifications (PDP 2007, p. 14).

3.2 Qualifications, Skills and Employability

One issue which emerged from the research was a trend that even women with higher levels of qualifications can still find it difficult to find the right job. For example, Chrysalis Women's Centre in Craigavon is planning a project called *Live and Learn* aimed at women who have a degree. They have a range of prospective participants, all of whom have had similar experiences of having borrowed £10-12000 to come through the higher education system, and are unable to find work suited to their qualifications. Prospective participants include: a woman who has a law degree, but has worked in retail and in a fast food outlet; a woman with a degree in Science who is now a registered childminder; a woman with an Arts degree who was unable to find even retain employment; a Polish woman with a Masters who is unable to find a "match" for her qualifications here. Some have come to the Centre through Surestart and the Centre finds that they can be even more depressed and demoralised than women with no qualifications. The Centre has suggested that women with degrees are not getting sufficient training to lead them into viable employment with the result that there is no clear career path (Chrysalis interview Feb 2009).

3.3 Lack of Confidence

The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report into *Women's Centres' Community Based Education* draws attention to a characteristic which many participants from disadvantaged communities share: low confidence and low

self-esteem. The report states: "Unfortunately it is common for women living in disadvantaged areas to suffer from cripplingly low levels of self esteem and confidence which make it impossible for them to access mainstream education and training provision" (p. 17). This is borne out by many of its case studies, including Falls Women's Centre (p. 51), Greenway Women's Centre (p. 66), and Magherafelt Women's Group (p. 75). The Possibilities Development Partnership lone parents report too points to "lack of confidence and self-esteem" as a major barrier for lone parents (PDP 2007, p. 64). Many respondents spoke of: "Issues relating to confidence and self-esteem, and to what many participants perceived as their lack of inter-personal skills" (PDP 2007, p. 19).

The Shankill study found this debilitating lack of confidence to be a key issue for local women: "The issue of lack of confidence and self belief was raised as a barrier for many women. For those who previously had a negative experience within the formal education setting, low self confidence was a huge obstacle that prevented them from returning to education" (p. 9). The Shankill study found that linked to lack of confidence was "fear'...from fear of feeling isolated and out of one's depth, to fear of failure. Some women were worried about committing to attending a class and then wanting / needing to withdraw. Others were concerned that they would feel out of place and 'show themselves to be stupid' in front of their peers" (p.9). The study also identified that this fear meant that for many women, taking the first step into a building, even a women's centre, was daunting (p. 9). According to the report, women had lengthy discussions about the general 'psyche' of people living in the Shankill area. They related decades of local violence, job losses and economic decline to "a permeating sense of disillusionment and 'lack of expectation'", which had impacted upon the confidence and self-esteem of both individuals and the community as a whole. They felt that as a result, local women were not availing of the programmes and services on offer. Education is often the first step on the journey into employment. As many women lack the confidence to avail of education provision, it is not surprising that they feel unable to make the leap into employment.

Low confidence was cited as a problem to such an extent in the 2003 Women's Centre Derry evaluation that the Centre has since decided to measure increases in confidence as part of its evaluation process. The 2007-08 evaluation shows that only 15% of women rated their confidence and self-esteem as "5 – Great" or "4 – Very Good" prior to beginning their course or project at the Women's Centre. This had leapt to 50% on completion of their course. While 49% of women (almost half) rated their confidence and self-esteem prior to undertaking the course or project as only "2 – OK or 1 – Poor", this had dropped to 14% rating confidence and self-esteem as "2 – OK or 1 – Poor", on completion of the course (McLaughlin 2008, p. 37). This points to very low confidence levels on entry, and to a substantial increase in confidence and self-esteem, as evaluated by participants themselves, as a consequence of participating in a Women's Centre course.

Most women interviewed felt that going through the doors of the Women's Centre Derry for the first time was easier than walking into other, larger adult education institutions. One woman said: "I felt awkward going in. My confidence was low. I had thought about [another mainstream local adult education provider] but that scared me – it's big and impersonal, with no childminding. There was no pressure in the Women's Centre. (McLaughlin 2003, p. 16)".

3.3.1 Reasons for Low Confidence

There are of course many and complex reasons for low confidence and self-esteem, but two reasons in particular emerged from the research consulted: negative school experiences, and a community history of low confidence and low achievement. Both of these link back to the problems of limited qualifications, skills and experience.

i) Negative School Experience

Despite the figures which show a steady improvement in girls' performance at school, many women felt that their lack of confidence stemmed directly from a negative experience of the school system. A number of women interviewed in the Women's Centre Derry external evaluations reflected on their experiences

of being made to feel "stupid" and unable to keep up with other students. A negative school experience sometimes coincided with a diagnosis later in life of dyslexia. This was also the case in the Shankill study, in which some women said that they had low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, or a diagnosis of dyslexia, which had a negative impact on their educational attainment (p.9).

This is not simply a historic problem, but one which is evidenced in the experience of younger women. A woman of 25 years old featured in the case study for Magherafelt Women's Group in the *Women's Centres Community based Education* report recalled being told to sit at the back of the class and do art: "As a result she could not read or write. This also affected her speech" (p. 75). Indeed, Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report found that among their interviewees: "A number of young women noted their main dislike of school as the actual structure, routine, environment or culture of school. Some simply felt unsuited to the formal school environment and found it difficult and not conducive to learning" (p. 48). It is a problem which the report characterises as "a consequence of an education system in Northern Ireland which offers hierarchical and differential learning" (p. 49).

ii) Historical Reasons

In certain areas, lack of achievement at school is a specific consequence of the historical employment profile of the local area. For example, in the Shankill, most jobs in which women were employed (tobacco / mills / stitching) did not require educational qualifications, meaning that there was little priority or value afforded to women's education. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership's report on women's community based education notes that the consequence is that "the needs of women and children have been, and in many cases, continue to be gravely neglected. The emotional and psychological health of the women and children suffered immensely. Feelings of isolation, fear and worry often greatly inhibited their educational and personal development and well-being.../The legacy and aftermath of the above is that a generation of women suffer from a debilitating lack of

confidence and self-esteem. Many feel apathetic and powerless to change their situation" (p. 77).

In other words, in areas where women's education has had a low priority historically, education continues not to be a comfort zone for women in the present generation. A poor educational experience, or lack of priority afforded to education, raises an important barrier with regard to access in later life to mainstream educational opportunities.

3.3.2 Inconsistency in Pastoral Support

Lack of confidence means that pastoral support, in the form of personal development and confidence-building, and individualized support is essential if women from disadvantaged areas are to participate in education and training. The Possibilities Development Partnership research found inconsistent levels of pastoral support available to lone parents across educational provision. According to the report: "Those who attended a further education college as part of the [New Deal for Lone Parents] programme often praised the course-related support they received from tutors, but were less happy with the level of pastoral support provided. This appeared to be due in part to difficulties with communication and contact with colleges, and also to inadequate understanding on the part of colleges of the broader issues faced by lone parents new to training programmes. A number of interviewees talked of being very nervous about actively seeking advice, even when they had particular difficulties which affected their ability to attend their course or to get work done, such as the need to care for sick children. Their experiences demonstrated that lack of appropriate support and intervention at this stage had a negative impact on retention" (PDP 2007, p. 24).

3.4 Support for Students with Disabilities

Many education and training venues have now made physical adaptations for people with disabilities. In addition, some providers offer broader support to students with disabilities in order to ensure full access to courses and services. Belfast Metropolitan College, for example, has a Centre for Inclusive Learning Development, which provides advice, guidance and support for any

student with a disability and / or learning difficulty. The Centre has been awarded a Beacon Award by the Association of Colleges, in recognition of its work with students with disabilities and / or learning difficulties. However, what is less clear is how consistent this kind of provision is across HE, FE and community sector provision, and the extent to which such provision takes account of the particular needs of women with disabilities.

3.5 Accreditation

Because many women from disadvantaged areas can find themselves lacking qualifications and confidence, the availability of the right accreditation options is essential. For some women lacking qualifications and experience, an accredited course is the answer. For women who are the most marginalised from education, training and work, non-accredited options are often an essential first step.

The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report into *Women's Centres Community Based Education* points out that women's centres ran an almost equal number of accredited and non-accredited courses in 2005/6 (163 accredited, 168 non-accredited) (p. 98). Of 4686 women enrolled in courses that year, 1561 gained a qualification. Given that these centres are based in disadvantaged communities, and are needs-led, this is a strong indication of the range of need in such communities, and the consequent need to provide a range of both accredited and non-accredited courses. It is often the attraction of non-accredited courses that brings women through the doors of centres for the first time, and leads them on to accredited courses.

The importance of providing a range of options was clear from the research. The consultation for Fermanagh Women's Network's Gender Equality Project found that some women were "less likely to want higher level / accredited courses (e.g. GCSE level / equivalent)", and found that many women expressed an interest in courses at an entry level or which supported them to take the step out of the home and into an education or training environment (FWN, June 2008). Indeed, during their consultations, women expressed concern that South West College would no longer provide affordable non-

accredited training, although that had yet to be confirmed. Fermanagh Women's Network felt that the loss of provision under the WEA's Opportunities for Women Learning (OWL) programme had been a blow for hundreds of women who relied on its mix of local provision and appropriate range of accredited and non-accredited courses. For women experiencing isolation and mental health problems in particular, non-accredited courses were considered the vital first step onto a pathway to accredited provision (FWN interview, September 2008).

This is illustrated by many of the case studies in the Women's Centres Regional Partnership report into women's community based education. Chrysalis Women's Centre supply one such example, that of Leah, a lone parent with three children, who lived in a disadvantaged area of Craigavon. She initially came to the centre with friends to join a cookery class. She has since progressed to obtain an ICT qualification, ECDL Advanced, and Word Processing Level 3. She is about to progress to a SAGE Accounts course. Having gained confidence, she now teaches an Italian cookery class, and offers nutrition and health courses for all ages. She teaches non-accredited ICT programmes in-centre, and has recently become centre administrator (p. 39). The Centre's non-accredited provision is what attracted Leah to ultimately access accredited courses and work.

Some women from disadvantaged communities of course want to have accreditation, even at higher levels. The Possibilities Development Partnership's research discovered that many lone parents had found the New Deal for Lone Parents with its restriction to NVQ Level 2 accreditation, highly restrictive, with the result that DEL has now upgraded the accreditation ceiling to Level 3. Young women in the *Still Waiting* report raised a similar concern (p. 38). Women participating in the Shankill study also placed a high value on the availability of accredited options: "Education enhances employability and can be the start of a journey that eventually leads to women entering the labour market. Attaining qualifications is an important aspect of this journey" (p. 9).

The Women's Centre Derry finds that women accessing Centre courses are seeking the full range of accreditation options from none at all, to Foundation Degree Level. Like many other community-based women's education and training providers, they offer a mix of recognised accreditation options under the same roof. One result of this is that women are frequently able to progress from lower to higher level qualifications in-Centre.

The Women's Support Network's response to a study on a Virtual College for Women observes that: "Engaging 'hard to reach learners' usually comes through attendance at non-vocational / self-development courses which are provided by women's centres and which can lead to Further Education" (p. 10), and that the FE Colleges have historically been able to reach significant numbers of women from disadvantaged communities through local women's centres (p. 16).

What is important is to recognise then is that there is no single correct accreditation path for women in disadvantaged communities. Women of different ages and in different circumstances find themselves at different starting places. As Feeley observes: "...access that is dependent on attendance at formal adult education privileges those who have already had positive experiences of learning and acquired sufficient cultural capital to feel at ease in such an environment. For the rest, the formal educational system is excluding, and reproduces inequalities including those of race, gender and class" (Feeley 2001, p. 30).

3.6 Progression

The experience of participants in women's centres' courses and classes provides a clear illustration of the barriers to educational progression that many women face, and the importance of viable progression options for women in disadvantaged communities. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report found that of 4686 learners accessing women's centres courses in 2005/6, 85% progressed to further education and training, many within the women's centre itself (p. 100). While this is a good indication that

the centres are meeting women's needs, it also raises questions about how easily women can progress from local community provision to FE or HE.

Staff and tutors interviewed for the Women's Centre Derry evaluation saw the challenge facing women as one of moving from a learning environment which addressed barriers, to one which did not. They expressed concern that: "women left the Women's Centre in which their needs were met, only to come up against a brick wall elsewhere, in that childcare was not freely available in other institutions. There seemed to be little point in preparing women to progress to further and higher level education, when they were then immediately ruled out of taking up those opportunities due to the lack of childcare provision at those institutions" (McLaughlin 2003, p. 34).

The Centre's Demystifying Computers course provides a good example of the variety of progression experiences women had. The evaluation found that one participant planned to teach IT, which would mean undertaking a course at the local FE College. However, the course she had looked into ran from 5.30pm-9.30pm, hours which precluded her from following that progression route. That said, another woman had embarked successfully on that course, and planned to progress to IT teaching. Two of the women interviewed were planning to progress to ECDL, and three others to the City & Guilds Electronics course. One of these three was concerned that the timing of that course (evenings) would prevent her from progressing, as it would coincide with other responsibilities (McLaughlin 2003, pp. 60-61). The evaluation concluded: "While many women demonstrated a clear awareness of progression routes, and an enthusiasm to access them, some women reported that certain progression routes remained closed to them due to, for example, timing which clashed with family responsibilities and lack of childcare" (McLaughlin 2003, p. 63). As one woman observed: "There is never the same level of access elsewhere as there is in the Centre" (McLaughlin 2003, p. 47).

Lifetime Opportunities pledges that: "Under the FE Strategy, FE colleges will develop learner programmes that encourage and support progression,

particularly for those learners who have low or no qualifications, those who are furthest from the labour market, and those who are reluctant to make use of conventional FE provision" (p. 37). Yet the issue of progression is not just about having next step accreditation options available, it is about having *barrier-free* next step accreditation options available. Education providers who wish to target "hard-to-reach" women, but who do not provide childcare, are upholding the central barrier to women's progression.

Participants in the Women's Centre evaluation felt that working with other educational establishments to ensure that progression routes were open was essential. One woman suggested: "The Centre must consider what support is needed and do more to help women move on. It should be a place women can come back to and get help to find a solution. The Centre must work with agencies and educational institutions it has a relationship with to help women to move on. This is like the final phase of what the Centre should be doing" (McLaughlin 2003, p. 47).

3.7 The policy climate for women's education and development

On the face of it, the policy climate looks favourable with regard to access for women from disadvantaged communities to enhance their skills, qualifications, and confidence. The ***Gender Equality Strategy*** includes the following objective: "To ensure women and men, including girls and boys, shall have equal access to education and lifelong learning and opportunities to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents" (p. 19). The strategy also recognises the need to support and resource organisations which provide support and services to disadvantaged communities, including women's organisations (GES, pp, 40-41).

The **Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)** includes the following in its Strategic Objectives: "to increase participation and widen access to those previously under-represented in the sector". The ***Essential Skills Strategy*** recognises the need for investment in this provision in order to bring the "hardest-to-reach" into education. However, the majority of Essential Skills provision is to be delivered through FE Colleges.

The government's current flagship for reaching the most disadvantaged is DEL's **Learner Access and Engagement** (LAE) programme 2008-2011, aimed at enhancing collaboration between the FE sector and voluntary and community organisations (DEL FE 08/08, p. 3) with a view to increasing the participation of those who are unemployed, socially excluded/disengaged, or reluctant to make use of conventional FE provision. FE colleges award learner support contracts on the basis of competitive tender, with contracts awarded based on a set of established criteria. The LAE's goals include for example "increased adult participation in FE by adults in disadvantaged areas". It envisages the voluntary and community sector engaging "hard-to-reach" adults who meet the eligibility criteria, providing all necessary advice, support and information. Among the target group are those who may have "barriers to learning including for example: caring responsibilities; disability; poor levels of literacy and numeracy; poor behaviour in, or attitude to, education and training; and other personal, emotional, or domestic circumstances" (DEL FE 08/08, p. 4).

However, there have been a number of reservations from voluntary and community sector education providers about the devolution of contracting decisions to the six new FE Colleges, in terms of the uncertainty this causes about funding for local education provision, and in terms of how college decisions would be monitored in order to ensure that they meet real needs on the ground. The Women's Support Network, in its response to a feasibility study on the idea of a "Virtual College for Women" expressed concern that the LAE pilot was in fact limited to Essential Skills, and excluded a range of courses which are provided by women's centres and which supply a ready progression route to Further Education (WSN 2008, p. 10).

It appears that the LAE programme, despite its emphasis on "hard-to-reach" learners, does not carry any guarantees that women whose only viable option for education is their local women's centre can depend upon that provision continuing into the future. In particular, LAE's focus on targeting those with extremely low or no qualifications has the effect of disqualifying a woman who for example, may have achieved an "O" Level several years ago, and who has

never worked outside the home since. Similar issues were raised regarding the New Deal for Lone Parents which originally had a ceiling of NVQ Level 2. The cross sectoral 'Possibilities' Development Partnership, of which DEL was a member, found that many parents wanted to study for qualifications beyond this level, and as a result, DEL has now increased the ceiling to NVQ Level 3.

The drawbacks in programmes of this kind are noted by the Women and Work Commission which recommends that age limits and rules on entitlement to training and education be removed, and that training should be delivered more flexibly (WWC 2006, p. viii). CEDAW also expresses concern that: "…changes in the allocation of Government funding from needs-based to 'commissioning' frameworks, and the gender neutral interpretation of the Gender Equality Duty, have negatively impacted on funding to women's organisations and the provision of 'women-only'services, in particular domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centres" and it calls for "increased and sustained funding to non-governmental organisations and other civil society groups involved in the area of women's rights". It also recommends that Government carries out an impact assessment of its 'commissioning frameworks' on the funding of women's organisations (CEDAW 2008, p. 7).

3.8 Good Practice
3.8.1 Women's community-based education
Women's community-based education provides the most obvious example of good practice in addressing the needs of women from disadvantaged communities with regard to education, training and confidence building. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report on *Women's Community Based Education* points out that the centres, mostly located in areas of high social and economic disadvantage, are specifically geared to address the barriers faced by women in disadvantaged communities. Their target groups include "those living in the most deprived areas, ethnic minority women and a considerable number of women at risk of isolation in rural areas" (p. 10). The centres featured in the report provide community based education and training to women in disadvantaged circumstances for whom mainstream education has been unsuccessful, who have little or no qualifications, and little

or no experience of the labour market (pp. 11-12). The report shows that all the centres address the barriers faced by women in the disadvantaged communities in which they operate by providing:

- Free, on-site childcare for women attending education and training, thereby removing the major barrier to participation for women in disadvantaged areas;
- Elder and Dependent care provision where possible: a number of centres offer financial support to enable an alternative carer to be paid. Others aim to have this provision, but can find themselves limited in their ability to do so due to funding restrictions;
- Personal development support and courses which provide a first step back into education;
- Courses delivered at times of day and evening to suit women with caring responsibilities;
- Free and subsidized courses, and a provision for weekly fee payment;
- Central location in the community so that travel and transport are less likely to be barriers to participation;
- A broad range of both accredited and non-accredited courses so that women can find the right point of entry for their level of skill and confidence;
- Information and encouragement on progression to FE and HE;
- Supportive staff and tutors;
- A conducive learning environment: "informal, friendly, unbureaucratic, encouraging and participatory" (p. 14).
- Opportunities to become involved in the life and management of the Centre.

These features represent a menu of support which has developed over the last 20-30 years in these centres, based on meeting the specific practical needs of the women who come through the door. In other words, the approach of women's centres is tried and tested, based on the particular experiences of women in disadvantaged communities, and is clearly meeting a need, given that 4,686 learners came through the doors of only 13 women's

centres in 2005-2006, with an 84% completion rate, and this with limited funding.

External evaluations of the Women's Centre Derry identified three features in particular which made the centre a successful learning venue for women. The three features were: free on-site childcare, supportive staff and tutors, and a conducive learning environment. By supportive staff and tutors, women meant staff and tutors who took extra time to explain difficult course content to them, who coached them about preparation of assignments, and who were understanding when they had to miss classes due for example to a child being sick. By conducive learning environment, women meant a learning environment which felt relaxed, with small class sizes, and an informal yet efficient atmosphere. When women were asked to name the single best thing about the Women's Centre as part of the 2003 evaluation, these were the three aspects of the Centre's provision that came top of the list. Comments like "It gave me back my self confidence", or "It got me back into the swing of things" were common. One woman remarked: "I have exceeded what I thought I was capable of – I have surprised myself. This has given me good self-esteem". Another remarked: "the Women's Centre made me realise that I had more potential than I thought – gave me the drive and confidence to push forwards". This increase in confidence was felt to have a real impact on women's lives: "I am much less intimidated now when I am out trying to sell my skills as a facilitator".

3.8.2 The Possibilities Development Partnership

The Possibilities Development Partnership is a cross-sectoral partnership comprised of Gingerbread NI, University of Ulster, Department for Employment and Learning, and GEMS NI (an employment matching service). There are many aspects of the partnership's work including research and development of international connections. They also developed a training model for lone parents which built on NDLP and Gingerbread's successful 'Choices' programme. The programme was designed to complement and extend existing interventions to support lone parents into employment (PDP 2007, p. 34). It included "pre-employment personal development training, with

wraparound support, including the provision of childcare and the supply of information specifically developed to meet the needs of lone parents considering moving from benefits to work" (PDP 2007, p. 34). Following a pilot, life coaching was added which included: career development, finding a job, budgeting, self-presentation, nutrition, and improving self-confidence and self-esteem. Careers advice and guidance was also offered, as well as information on welfare rights. Participants received full reimbursement for childcare, meals and travel expenses incurred (PDP 2007, p. 35). By 2007, of 38 lone parents taking part, 17 had progressed into further education or training; 7 had obtained paid employment; 4 were completing voluntary work; 4 were receiving further support with health-related or personal issues, and 6 had opted not to work at that time due to caring responsibilities (PDP 2007, p. 35). The model was considered to be a success, was positively evaluated by participants, and the cross-sectoral partnership feels confident that it can be seen as a useful template for future working relationships between public bodies and the voluntary sector (PDP 2007, p. 66).

3.9 The Place of Women-only Education

This report is written in a climate in which DSD's commitment to supporting women in disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland, including 13 women's centres and the Women's Centres Regional Partnership, recognises to some degree the need for structure and coherence in the sector. However, funding and sustainability for the sector as a whole remains a matter of serious concern to many providers on the ground. What is more, women's education and its potential remains largely under-recognised in the public sector. The "wee course" mentality mentioned earlier is a cultural message which has roots in the fact that: "Community education in general, and women's education in particular, is seen as secondary in status to mainstream work in colleges, which tends to be qualification-led and vocationally driven" (Feeley, p. 30).

It may yet prove to be an expensive underestimation. As is evidenced above, it is women's education and training organisations who supply the most ready examples of good practice in the provision of education to women in

disadvantaged communities, because their provision is custom-designed to address the barriers faced by women in these communities.

Some FE providers clearly recognise the value of women's education providers. Most women's education providers engage in some form of partnership with local FE colleges, often providing courses whereby the location, childcare, management, organisation and materials are supplied by the Centre, while the FE College provides the tutor. Indeed, as the Women's Support Network points out, for many women, their first encounter with FE is through their local women's centre. The Women's Centre Evaluation 2003 found that the NWIFHE representative interviewed as part of the evaluation felt that what the Centre offered was "excellent", it was well organised, and had "a professional approach to what they do". He welcomed the Centre's willingness to engage, and felt that there was empathy and goodwill in the institute towards the Centre. He considered that the Centre "delivers programmes that people want", listening to their clientele and sensitive to their particular needs. He considered them to be a cohesive team, with a strong management committee, a good funding mix and "politically assertive and good at getting their voice heard". There were certainly areas in which both parties felt that the relationship could be improved, but the FE representative's overall evaluation of the centre was high (McLaughlin 2003, p. 37). This is a relationship that endures to the present.

However, despite examples of productive partnerships between FE Colleges and women's education providers, the position remains uncertain, as is the position of women's education in general in terms of long-term sustainability. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report on women's community based education points to reliance on short-term funding and a reduction in overall funding, making it difficult for organisations to plan for the future. The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) identifies the lack of sustainable long term funding as the main issue for rural women's organisations, stating that: "The reduction in funding has also weakened the Women's Sector to work with rural women, to build up their ability and capacity to lobby against change or often to get 'their foot on the first step of

the ladder' of education so that they can equip themselves with the necessary skills and competencies to compete equally in the world of work" (NIRWN Assembly Briefing February 2009, p. 5). According to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership report: "Women's Sector funding has continued to be a critical issue for the sector, many organisations have closed, and those that have been able to survive have had to devote a large percentage of their time and energy to sourcing, applying to and securing other funding routes. Funding that can be secured is often short-term, with fewer funding bodies willing to support core funding costs of organisations, rather focusing on specific projects" (p. 4).

It would seem to follow that if the providers who are best placed to provide accessible, barrier-free education for women are under-resourced, or worse still, disappear altogether, women in disadvantaged urban and rural communities will have lost what for many is their only viable route to education and training. Government will need to be watchful that policies and strategies which seem to have laudable aims as regards addressing barriers to the participation of hard-to-reach women are not undermined by the processes by which they are operationalized.

Recommendations

➢ Recognition of low confidence levels as a major barrier to women's participation in education and training, and work and public life.

➢ Further research into the reasons for the prevalence of low confidence among women, including young women, from disadvantaged areas;

➢ The provision of a range of education and training options, offering both accredited and non-accredited provision;

➢ The adoption by FE providers of recognised good practice developed by women's education providers in targeting "hard-to-reach" women. This should include:
  - the provision of childcare,

- the provision of pastoral support, including support for students with disabilities and women from minority communities,
- the development of learning environments and approaches which are more conducive to women's learning;

➢ A move away from Commissioning Frameworks, and towards the strategic, long-term funding of local education and training which addresses the barriers faced by women living in disadvantaged rural and urban areas;

➢ The development of greater opportunities for work experience and shadowing schemes to accompany education and training provision;

➢ Further research into the opportunities available to, and work-readiness of women with higher level qualifications including graduates.

Section 4:

Flexibility and Choice

Introduction

The research suggests that a significant proportion of women, particularly those with caring responsibilities, do not consider work to be a viable option. Sometimes, this is due to a genuine wish to work in the home, undertaking primary responsibility for caring and domestic chores. Often, however, it is because of the practices, policies, and bad habits that we allow to endure, that fail to take account of the need for childcare and the pressures of family life on women. The lack of flexibility and choice in education, training and work emerged from the research as a major factor influencing women's participation in these arenas.

4.1 Lack of flexibility and choice in education

The research indicates that the seemingly simple issue of the time a class starts and finishes, or the timeframe in which a course needs to be completed, can be enough to prevent women with caring responsibilities from participating. For rural women in particular, the issue of the start and finish times of courses is inextricably linked with the problem of distance from the educational provider, and the availability of travel and transport. This was identified as a key barrier by Fermanagh Women's Network in its consultation on a Gender Equality Strategy for Fermanagh (FWN, 2 June 2008). It is also identified as an issue in both the Northern Childcare Partnership and Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group reports. Women are often responsible for dropping children of different ages to pre-school, primary and secondary schools in the morning, and collecting them at staggered times across the afternoon. For these women, a 9.15am or even a 9.30am start is not possible – only a later start-time will enable them to participate.

The problem is not exclusively a rural one, however. A number of women interviewed for the evaluations of the Women's Centre Derry said that one

factor which led them to choose the Women's Centre was the timing of the beginning and end of classes, which permitted them to do school drop-offs and pick ups, and not miss any of their class (McLaughlin 2003, pp. 20, 22, 57). The Shankill study too suggested that "in order to enhance the participation of local women in education, it is important to ensure that times and start dates of courses take account of wider family life and commitments, e.g. school times and holidays" (p. 10).

A further aspect of timing was considered important. The Shankill study revealed that in addition to more appropriate start and finish times, some women also expressed the desire to have the option to set "realistic goals" which took account of their life situation and caring responsibilities, accessing learning in "bite sized chunks". Full-time attendance was difficult for many women, meaning that only courses offered on a part-time basis enabled them to participate. The suggestion is that women choose the pace of their own learning to fit in with family responsibilities. This was not only to do with women's availability during the day. Many lone parents expressed anxiety also about being able to get time to study at home in addition to their other domestic responsibilities (PDP 2007, p. 24). Women were more likely to commit to and stick with courses offered part-time and with realistic achievable short-term goals. The women in the Shankill study felt that this would also give women a greater sense of achievement as they progressed through a programme of education (p. 10).

The importance of timing has also been recognised by the Women and Work Commission in *Shaping a Fairer Future* as a significant barrier to women's participation in work-related education and training. For example, it recommends that all work-related activities, work placements and training in New Deal women returner programmes should be offered on a part-time basis (p. xii).

4.2 The choice to work – or not

For some women, the work that they choose to do is within the domestic setting, as primary carers and taking responsibility for tasks related to the

smooth running of the household. It is a choice made particularly by mothers of pre-school children, and it is one apparently enshrined in *Lifetime Opportunities*: "For all parents, having the choice to work, or not, during the early years is a decision which families should be able to make for themselves. This means providing access to quality daycare provision that is affordable and allows them to balance the demands of parenthood and working life" (p. 19). The ten-year *Strategy for Children and Young People* also recognises the value of parenting: "We will offer support to parents, carers and families to ensure that they are able to take primary responsibility for their children and to assist them with the challenging task of parenting, where this is required" (p. 16).

Yet increasingly, the research suggests that women do not feel that they have the choice not to undertake paid work, and indeed that the choice not to undertake paid work is undermined in practice by government. The women participating in the Shankill study felt strongly about the choice to care for one's children when they are young: "Choosing this route, they believed, was becoming more difficult in society due to the pressure to continue working. These women believed that maintaining 'choice' was important and that both roles must be valued. There was a fear that staying at home to rear children was becoming almost 'socially unacceptable'" (p. 21). Youth Action's *Still Waiting* study also found "evidence of dilemmas and contradictions" among the young women who participated in their study, with many seeing the benefits of work, but also feeling that children benefited from having their mother at home, especially when younger (p. 38).

Lone parents in the Possibilities Development Partnership study echoed this sentiment. Participants felt that some parents preferred to stay at home and look after their children, especially in the pre-school years (PDP 2008, p. 59), but felt that this was not a choice that was supported by society. Some spoke of a "feeling of having to defend being at home with their children" (PDP 2007, p. 26). Some participants were particularly exercised by the irony that they were being encouraged to put their children in childcare so that they could go out to work - as registered childminders, looking after other people's children:

"Something which has not gone unnoticed by a number of participants in this study is a policy which appears to encourage mothers to give up caring for their own children and to purchase care so that they can be employed in the labour market – often in the childcare sector" The study emphasises the importance of acknowledging "the right of lone parents of dependent children to choose full-time parenting over participation in paid work if they so wish" (PDP 2008, p. 62).

What these lone parents have identified is a trend in government thinking, which is an increasing emphasis on work as the most effective way out of poverty: it is a philosophy enshrined in *Lifetime Opportunities*. The participants in the study identified one particular example of the outworking of this thinking. From late 2008, lone mothers with children over 12 are no longer entitled to claim Income Support and are expected to take steps into the labour market, which, according to the Possibilities Development Partnership, "departs from the historical policy position that lone parents should have a choice as to whether or not they take on paid work outside the home" (PDP 2008, p. 31). That said, the majority (76.8%) of lone parents interviewed for the study expressed a desire to enter paid work *at some stage*. Several had attempted to do so, but had found that low pay combined with childcare and transport costs, school meals, prescription charges and rent meant that they were "worse off, or 'breaking even' after entering paid work" (PDP 2008, p. 50).

The Early Years Strategic Alliance identifies the matter of choice as important too, calling for the decision to undertake caring and domestic roles to be recognised and valued as a matter of policy: "… the Assembly must support those parents, mainly mothers, who choose to stay at home to care for their children in their early years by providing access to appropriate home-based and group support services" (p. 8).

4.3 Work-Life Balance

4.3.1 Doing it all

While some women choose caring and domestic work as their primary role, others find that they have no choice in the matter and that even when they work outside the home, the domestic and caring roles remain their responsibility. This means that for many women, the phrase work / life balance does not mean the dual split between work outside the home, and quality family time, but rather, the triangular balancing act between work outside the home, work inside the home, and quality family time. According to Ann Marie Gray and Gillian Robinson in "What women want? Women and Gender Roles in Northern Ireland" (2004), the number of self-reported hours spent on household work differs considerably between women and men in the 2002 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: the mean number of hours for men is 5.92 per week compared to an average of 17.15 for women (p. 1). Marie Crawley observes that: "Women in Northern Ireland continue to provide more than 70% of all household and caring work…As a result, women are placed with the double burden of working outside the home while carrying the bulk of domestic and caring responsibilities within it" (Crawley, February 2005, p. 6). Gendered expectations of the roles women should play domestically play a large part in dictating their workload, meaning that many are juggling domestic chores, childcare, and a course or a job as well. For many women who attempt to undertake further education or take a job, the burden is too great.

Women's choices are limited then, and their decisions circumscribed, by the pressures of gendered expectations enacted daily in many homes in Northern Ireland. For a woman shouldering all or the bulk of caring and domestic responsibilities, increasing her workload by taking on education, training or a job might seem like an unwise step. It is no surprise that many of the lone parents participating in the Possibilities Development Partnership study "found it difficult to reconcile paid work with parenting alone" (PDP 2007, p. 29). What is worse is that the domestic burden which women carry goes largely unrecognised, characterised as "economic inactivity", as the Women's Support Network have pointed out (WSN 2008, p. 10).

Because their domestic responsibilities are not optional, the pressure which is easiest to opt out of is the course or job. Women's Centre Derry evaluations indicate that for some women, opting out of a course or programme whether at a local FE college or even a women's centre is made easier by the way that women's education tends to be diminished and even infantilised in language on a regular basis. For example, it was noted that a high proportion of women undertaking courses including GCSEs and university access courses in the Women's Centre still referred to their educational pursuit as "doing a wee course".

Clearly, where there is a partner, there is a role for that partner in alleviating the pressure of domestic and caring work and in sharing efforts towards attaining work / life balance for both partners. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) points out that a 2006 survey found that over 90 per cent of young people surveyed, both boys and girls, wanted to balance career and family life in the future. The report continues: "However, women wanting careers and a family are too often sidelined. Though many employers increasingly embrace the benefits of flexible working, others offer time off for raising a family and flexibility linked to childcare and caring grudgingly, as concessions that are a burden to business and those who seek them as not committed to the company. Given women's experience, it is not surprising that fathers – who increasingly want to spend more time with their children than was typical 40 or even 20 years ago – are reluctant to take paternity or longer parental leave or to seek flexibility, because of the career penalty or career death that may result. This means that, whatever a couple want to do, greater responsibility ends up being left to mothers, who in turn experience more of a penalty at work" (EHRC 2008, p. 15).

This is certainly borne out by the concerns expressed by lone parents. A common concern was the negative impact on their employment record if children were ill or family emergencies occurred: "There was certainly a perception of an inflexible labour market with employers frowning on workers with substantive care responsibilities" (PDP 2007, p. 29). There was concern that women needed to take more time off to look after children than men,

creating gender differentials in absentee rates for women and men, which in turn led to "negative employer attitudes" (PDP 2007, p. 19).

4.3.2 Flexible Working

The EHRC, commenting on our poor attempts at work / life balance suggest that "a fair portion of the blame must also be attributed to our rigid, inflexible approach to work" (p. 11). CEDAW welcomes measures such as the Work and Families Act (2006) which "provides for flexible working arrangements, and extended statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance from 26 to 39 weeks".

Certainly government rhetoric suggests that there will be increased support for flexible working. However, the Possibilities Development Partnership study found that lone parents considered existing legislation to be inadequate, noting that it does not *oblige* an employer to grant requests for flexible working: "There is certainly a perception of a very inflexible labour market with employers frowning on workers with substantive care responsibilities…Although there have been policy attempts to help working parents balance work and family life through providing greater flexibility for parents of young children, employers are not obligated to provide this" (PDP 2008, p. 61). Many participants in the study had the perception, and some had the experience, that "employers would not be sympathetic to requests for more flexible working patterns, and that any indication of disruption to an individual's paid work would have negative consequences" (PDP 2007, pp. 64-65). This is despite the fact that, as Employers for Childcare point out, the CBI itself has stated that: "Individuals working the hours and arrangements which best suit the rest of their lives are less likely to be absent" (EFC 2003).

Flexible working was felt to be an important issue for rural women in particular. The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group notes that rural women, because of restrictions on their mobility due to lack of transport, require "a greater degree of flexibility i.e. part-time / term-time employment" Ideally, this flexible working should take account of the fact that despite having an average higher educational attainment than males, rural women constitute a

"less mobile workforce" compared to males, largely because of family responsibilities (p. 36, citing Moss et al, 2004).

In public and political life too, flexibility is an issue impacting on women's participation. The EHRC, seeing the absence of women in powerful positions as indicative of a wider failure: "We have to ask ourselves in what other ways are the old-fashioned, inflexible ways we're working preventing us from tapping into talent?" (p. 17).

4.3.3 Part-time work

The job flexibility that most women seek especially in their children's younger years is the opportunity to work part-time. However, many find that their chosen job is not available on a part-time basis. The Women and Work Commission blames a lack of quality part-time jobs for women not returning to the labour market after child-rearing. They note that women often have to change employer and occupation, often with lower pay, in order to get part-time work. They observe that: "This means their skills are being-under utilised and this represents lost productivity for the UK economy…The lack of flexibility at senior levels is particularly acute" (WWC 2006, p. viii). The EHRC bears this out, citing a 2004 survey of part-time workers which showed that just over half had had previous jobs in which they used higher qualifications or skills or had more management / supervisory responsibility (EHRC 2008, p. 13).

The impact of women's need for part-time work, combined with the absence of quality part-time jobs, has the following typical labour-force profile. Figures taken from Marie Crawley's 2005 research indicates the gender balance in Fermanagh District Council full-time employment for 2004/2005. Of Chief Executive Officers and Directors of Service, 6 were men, none were women; of Senior Officer level and above, 30 were men and 14 were women. Of secretarial and administrative staff, 4 were men and 31 were women. Of technical staff, 106 were men and 12 were women (Crawley, February 2005, p. 25).

Fermanagh women consulted as part of Fermanagh Women's Network's Gender Equality Project, in addition to sharing many barriers with urban women, identified some pertinent to women living in rural areas. The dominance of the small business sector in Fermanagh meant that there were fewer large employers with good employment practices. It was felt that good practice from larger employers needed to be highlighted as an example of what was possible. There was also a view that Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) should be offered more resources and support in order to embed good employment practices. It was felt that Invest NI and organisations such as the Network of Enterprising Women should be involved in the solution (FWN, 2 June 2008).

Recommendations

➢ A review of course timing in FE and HE to establish the feasibility of shifting morning start times in particular to accommodate school drop-offs;

➢ Promotion of bite-sized learning in FE and HE so that women can combine learning with other responsibilities;

➢ Government policies and strategies to support in practice the choice to care for one's own children. This means that benefits must be sufficient to support a good quality of life;

➢ A recognition that work is only a way out of poverty if it is well-paid work with options for progression;

➢ Awareness-raising of the time expended daily and weekly on domestic chores and guidance on what a fair split between partners might look like given different family circumstances;

➢ Men to be encouraged to take parental leave, share responsibility for time off work when children are sick, or during holidays, and to seek flexible working;

➤ Firmer legislation on flexible working, requiring employers to grant requests and extend current flexible provision;

➤ Public bodies and political structures to review working practices and identify areas where flexibility can be introduced;

➤ Employers to be encouraged to provide quality and senior jobs on a part-time or job-share basis.

Section 5:

Gendered Career Pathways

Introduction

As indicated earlier, the relative success that some girls are having at school is not enjoyed to the same extent by those in disadvantaged areas, and the overall potential suggested by the figures is not being translated into success in the workplace or improved social and economic conditions for disadvantaged women. Indeed, even from as early as 16 years old, when many young women make the choice to enter further education, they are already choosing vocational routes which are traditionally female, and traditionally significantly lower paid than the vocational routes chosen by their male counterparts.

For example, the *Gender Equality Strategy Baseline Study* indicates that in 2005/6, 97.4% of FE enrolments for Hairdressing and Beauty courses were female, whereas only 2.6% of enrolments for Electrical / Electronic Engineering were female. 71% of FE enrolments for Administration and Office Skills were female, while 2.2% of enrolments for Mechanical Engineering were female (p. 33). Marie Crawley's figures for FE take-up in Fermanagh for 2004-05 show a similar trend: 634 enrolments in Construction, built environment and engineering were male, 17 were female; 497 enrolments in hairdressing and beauty were female, 12 were male; 1199 enrolments on health and social care courses were female, 88 were male (Crawley, February 2005, p. 16). The problems of gender segregation in course choice were also found to have been replicated in New Deal for Lone Parents (PDP 2007, p. 22). The UK government has now recognised that despite outperforming boys in exams, many girls and young women follow traditional routes in education and training leading them to low-paid and low-skilled jobs.

Yet there are convincing economic reasons to address the problem of gendered choices in education, training and work. The Women and Work

Commission estimates in *Shaping a Fairer Future*, that "removing barriers to women working in occupations traditionally done by men, and increasing women's participation in the labour market, could be worth between £15 billion and £23 billion or 1.3 to 2.0 per cent of GDP" (p. vii).

5.1 Construction and Manual Trades

There is a range of occupations in which women are under-represented, but perhaps one of the most obvious is in the construction industry and associated trades. According to Brigid Loughran who completed an evaluation for WOMEN'STEC in 2008, at the time of writing, the construction industry engaged 47 000 people, having been a growth industry in NI for a number of years, and was worth £1.5billion to the local economy. She pointed out that only 7% of women were engaged in the industry (Loughran 2008a, p. 5). An article in the *Northern Builder* on WOMEN'STEC indicated that: "According to a recent study, the largest ever undertaken of the local construction sector in Northern Ireland, only ten per cent of the industry workforce is female, with the majority employed in a clerical capacity and only seven per cent having a craft or trade background" (*Northern Builder* 18, p. 3).

5.2 Business

The construction industry provides the most obvious example, perhaps, of a male dominated profession. But there are other areas in which women are notably underrepresented, such as business and entrepreneurship. Northern Ireland is ranked bottom of the 12 United Kingdom regions in 2007 in terms of the rate of early stage entrepreneurial activity among women (DETI 2008, p. 23). In 2007, 3.1% of women in NI were expecting to start a business in the next three years compared to 8.7% of men. The gap is the largest of the UK regions and has worsened since 2007 (DETI 2008, p. 23). For women in disadvantaged areas, the figures are worse still. Women in the lowest household income group in Northern Ireland record the lowest level of entrepreneurial activity compared to all other UK regions (DETI 2008, p. 23). In addition, entrepreneurial activity is particularly low among young women and in the 45-54 age group (DETI 2008, p. 23).

5.3 Industry Attitudes

According to the *Northern Builder* article on construction: "Career sexism is an important issue and it needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by government, industry employers and individuals" (*Northern Builder* 18, p. 3). A WOMEN'STEC joinery tutor commented in the article that she still encountered negativity on the subject of women in construction. The rewards for women entering construction were considered to be lower than for men. Loughran found that "the non-traditional sector of manual trades rewards men with the best-paid and most skilled positions" and adds that women find it virtually impossible to get Apprenticeship opportunities to enable them to complete their training (Loughran 2008a, p. 5).

At the time the article was written, there was a strong sense that construction remained an important growth industry. It estimated that some 2,940 new recruits would be needed each year over the next four years in Northern Ireland to meet the demands on projects such as Belfast's £1bn waterside regeneration project, the Titanic Quarter and the Royal Exchange retail scheme (*Northern Builder* 18, p. 3). It is not yet clear what the impact of the economic climate is on this estimate, but construction has been impacted considerably by the downturn, and jobs have been lost in the industry over the last twelve months. In times of economic hardship and increasing unemployment, it can become even more difficult for underrepresented groups to attempt to redress discriminatory imbalances.

5.4 Attitudes in School and FE

There is no doubt that gendered socialisation begins at home in the early years. There is also a recognition in the research that the problem is embedded by school and further, and higher education. WOMEN'STEC, has recognised how early gendered choices are made. A tutor comments: "We need to get to the girls in primary school so that we can educate them by letting them know that a trade is not second best choice to the academic route. There was, and still is, a lot of stereotyping and peer pressure surrounding a career in construction" (*Northern Builder* 18, p.3). It was considered that there are very few programmes to encourage young women

into non-traditional routes, with the result that, even at 15/16, girls' FE and career choices are already largely determined. A perception that the trades are for educational non-achievers, instead of a viable alternative to an academic route also proved a barrier to women's participation.

WOMEN'STEC noted the example of a young woman at a local college to whom they were recently preparing to offer a placement. Despite their efforts, at the last moment, she opted to change to hairdressing. The organisation has identified the range of practical barriers facing such a woman when she is considering training for a non-traditional occupation. It was the experience of some of the organisation's client group that mainstream providers of vocational training in non-traditional trades at FE level could be off-putting. WOMEN'STEC suggests that the focus of Colleges tends to be on finding apprenticeship placements for boys and young men on the New Deal programme. As a result, women are unable to find a placement, and without the placement, their NVQ qualification is worthless. It was believed that New Deal funding for trade courses incentivizes colleges to privilege men over women. It was considered that DEL needed to encourage colleges to put as much energy into finding placements for women as for men because: "without Departmental encouragement, Colleges have little incentive to take action themselves" (WOMEN'STEC Interview, Feb 2009). According to Loughran, there is "a very strong need for a non-traditional skills focussed Apprenticeship project within WOMEN'STEC" which could be progressed through its social economy enterprise 'TradesWomen NI' (2008a, p. 5).

WOMEN'STEC had also found that women were deterred from non-traditional occupations as success stories of women who attend colleges and attain placements and finally work are still unusual. At one local College, there was just one female graduate in the trades in June 2008. Loughran points to the low levels of female participation, and high female drop-out rate, in Construction NVQ training. She suggests that: "Research shows that male domination at all levels of training and work is the main barrier preventing females from becoming involved" (2008a, p. 5). The women most likely to succeed are those who already have a degree of confidence to persist in a

male-dominated environment which is not suited to their needs. Given the earlier information on the extent to which some women are held back by lack of confidence, it is difficult to imagine that many would enter such an environment without considerable support and encouragement. It does not help that Colleges are not encouraged to focus on improving equality and de-segregating at a departmental and course by course level.

5.5 Careers Advice

There are of course a range of social and cultural factors weighing on young women when they choose to embark on courses leading them down career paths which are traditionally considered "women's work" and which are traditionally low paid. Government's most notable intervention in the choices that young women make is in the form of careers advice. The research consulted suggests that far from being the solution to gendered careers choices, careers advice may be helping to embed women's trajectory into traditional, low paid, employment.

Participants in the Possibilities Development Partnership research on lone parents pointed to "restricted discussions and choices" around careers (PDP 2007, p. 22). The report continues: "Participants on the NDLP …were not being fully informed of the limitations of particular choices in terms of jobs or earnings" (PDP 2007, p. 25). The study found that even for well-qualified lone parents on New Deal, the advice was described as poor (PDP 2007, p. 23). Overall, the study found a prevalence of "gendered course and careers advice" (PDP 2007, p. 64). It was a view shared by Shankill women who also believed that for disadvantaged women: "there was a dearth of information in terms of what is available in relation to training, jobs and advice on moving into work" (p. 13). WOMEN'STEC point to a lack of early awareness of the career options available: "Poor career advice deters women entering the construction industry and deep-rooted attitudes have to change" (WOMEN'STEC in *Northern Builder* 18, p. 3). It is a view which also emerged from young women participating in the *Still Waiting* report (p. 46).

5.6 Good Practice

WOMEN'STEC offers training in non-traditional occupations to women from disadvantaged communities. It does not replicate courses already on offer, but rather provides introductory and supplementary training for women entering non-traditional industry sectors. Training is accredited and allows women to progress to appropriate courses at FE level. It has programmes aimed at rural as well as urban women. WOMEN'STEC's most recent evaluation identifies a range of factors which made the programme a success for the participants. These included:

- High quality course
- Welcoming staff
- Encouragement
- Provision of Childcare and understanding of family responsibilities
- A sense of equality
- An ability to engage with young people, even those who have "difficult" educational backgrounds
- Well-trained staff
- Provision of transport
- An ability to challenge gendered expectations
- Flexibility for example meeting the needs of migrant workers who required an interpreter and Saturday sessions
- Accredited courses
- Additional opportunities such as IT, personal development, mentoring
- Career advice, information and guidance
- Taster courses
- Qualified and sympathetic female role models
- A women-friendly environment
- The opportunity for women to progress to become tutors in the organisation
- Confluence of objectives and practice with the Costello report, DEL and DETI strategies (summarised from Loughran 2008b, pp. 2-7).

These are the factors which WOMEN'STEC has found to be "enablers" for women participating in non-traditional occupations. The organisation has now set up a social economy project now called TradesWomen NI with support from URBAN II in 2007-08.

Recommendations

- ➢ Action at industry level to ensure that women are treated fairly within male-dominated professions;

- ➢ Intervention in primary and post-primary education to challenge gender stereotyping at an early age;

- ➢ Training for childcare, early years workers and teachers on challenging gender stereotyping;

- ➢ FE colleges to demonstrate equal effort and proportional outcome in finding Apprenticeships for girls;

- ➢ An equality review of New Deal funding criteria for FE to ensure that it does not disadvantage or put another barrier in the way of women entering non-traditional professions;

- ➢ Long-term strategic funding and support for organisations already demonstrating good practice in supporting women from disadvantaged areas into non-traditional professions;

- ➢ Non-gendered careers advice which takes account of all possible routes for individual young women to pursue, and which provides clear information on the implications of different career choices in terms of pay, status, prospects and security;

- ➢ Positive action measures to increase women's participation in areas in which they are under-represented, including public and political decision-making structures;

- Trade Unions / Sector Skills Councils to work with voluntary and community sector providers to identify routes for women into non-traditional careers;

- Sector Skills Councils to work with employers on providing Apprenticeships for women in trades;

- A partnership between government, the media and women's organisations to challenge stereotypes in the media.

Section 6:
Public Life

Introduction

Just as career paths such as construction and business are considered non-traditional routes for women, so participation in public and political life can equally be considered traditionally male preserves. While women's representation in public bodies, local authorities and political parties has increased in the last thirty years, women are still far from being on a par with men, and in some areas, the shortfall of female participation is considerably more marked than others. DETI's 2008 picture of *Women in Northern Ireland* gives the following detail:

- 33% of public appointments in Northern Ireland are held by women;
- On the 119 publicly appointed bodies in Northern Ireland, 23 Chair and 7 Deputy Chair posts are held by women;
- Of the 108 members elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2007, 18 (17%) are women – we have one female MEP;
- 21% of local government councillors are women;
- 5 out of 26 District Councillors have a female Mayor / Chair as at July 2008 (DETI 2008, p. 22).

In *The Grass Ceiling* (August 2006), Marie Crawley supplies a uniquely detailed picture of women's representation across a wide range of public and political bodies in Fermanagh.

Currently, political parties are nominating members to the Transition Committees tasked with progressing the reform of public administration. Female representation on these committees, despite the work of the Women in Local Councils Initiative, is worryingly low. This gender imbalance is likely to impact upon the ability of the women's sector to engage in relationship

building with the new committees. Policy priorities could be decided upon without sufficient reference to women's interests.

It is important to note that the same barriers which prevent women from participating in education, training and work, also impact on women's willingness and ability to take part in public life: lack of childcare, poverty, low levels of skills, experience and confidence, lack of flexibility, and lack of travel and transport are all significant barriers to participation. However, there are also some additional factors which prevent women from considering a role in public political life, for example: the perceived culture of public bodies; a lack of knowledge about what is required, and problems associated with remuneration.

6.1 Childcare allowances

A number of organisations who seek the involvement of women in decision-making, both community organisations and public bodies, make a voluntary contribution to the cost of childcare. However, Marie Crawley, in her investigation into the position of women in Fermanagh, found that childcare provision to enable people to participate in community and local development activities by membership of public bodies and partnerships, varied considerably. There was good practice in that some organisations repaid the full cost of child or eldercare as opposed to an allowance. However, Crawley found that many organisations had no such provision (Crawley, February 2005, p. 31). Her findings suggest that voluntary reimbursement schemes are inconsistent and often retrospective, which makes them less than useful for women on low incomes. This was echoed in Fermanagh Women's Network's work towards a Gender Equality Strategy for Fermanagh, which identified lack of appropriate childcare as a key issue barring rural women from participation in public and political life (FWN, 2 June 2008). Participants on the *Women on the Fringes* programme too considered lack of childcare to be at the top of the list of obstacles to be surmounted if women are to participate more fully in public life (Ward in *SCOPE* July/August 2004). As councils intensify their work regarding RPA, efforts to ensure that under-represented groups are involved in community planning will be crucial if

community planning is to be inclusive and reflective of all sections of the community.

6.2 Impact on benefits

The tutor of Belfast MET's *Get on Board* Programme, Eileen Mullan, has found that problems with remuneration act as a barrier to women's participation on boards. This is a significant issue for women from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular. It was difficult for women to participate in boards which required a substantial time commitment but which offered no payment. Conversely, where some reimbursement or assistance with expenses was offered, this could mean a reduction in benefits. For women dependant on benefits, this was a major obstacle (*Get on Board* interview March 2009).

6.3 Travel and Transport

Problems with transport and access impact on women's participation in public life. Participants on the *Women on the Fringes* programme considered the Belfast location of many bodies and inadequate public transport as key obstacles impacting on their participation in public and political life. This particularly excluded women with caring responsibilities (Ward in *SCOPE* July/August 2004). Fermanagh Women's Network also identifies inadequate transport facilities as an important factor. They note that the Review of Public Administration in particular would impact negatively on women's participation in decision-making: "The impact of RPA means that decision-making bodies are being centralized, meaning longer distances and / or unsuitable times for meetings" (FWN, 2 June 2008). Chrysalis Women's Centre had the same finding, noting that local women considered engagement in public appointments to be demanding in terms of both time and travel (Chrysalis interview, Feb 2009).

6.4 Timing

Eileen Mullan from *Get on Board* points out that involvement in a public body is a serious commitment which requires dedication and hard work, and that there is often a substantial time commitment involved. Distance from board

operations, and problems with travel and transport, were closely related to how much time was required for participation in boards. Meetings held at times which co-incided with family responsibilities, and at a distance, meant that women were much less likely to participate. There was a perception among participants on the *Women on the Fringes* programme that: "the male dominance of many boards contributed to a culture where time management was less important" (Ward in *SCOPE*, September 2003).

6.5 Perceptions of public and political Life

Some women appear to be put off involvement in public life because of their perception of the culture of public bodies. Chrysalis Women's Centre has found that amongst women who attend the centre is "the misconception that you must be aligned to a political party to be involved in public and political life". They found that women considered party politics to be very unattractive, so that any public role which they perceived (even inaccurately) to be associated with party politics was not an option they wished to pursue (Chrysalis interview, Feb 2009). These findings echo those of *Women on the Fringes* who found that the culture of many public bodies, and in the political world, is uncomfortable for "all who are not part of the old boys network". One woman had the view that public bodies were dominated by "the ones who play golf on a Saturday" (Ward in SCOPE, September 2003).

Women on the Fringes also found that there were perceptions among some women that they might be "domineered by all the men", or that men had a perception that "women don't have a lot to offer" (Ward in *SCOPE,* September 2003).   While some perceptions were due to lack of information or misunderstanding, not all were entirely inaccurate or unfounded. Some participants in the *Women on the Fringes* programme described feeling intimidated by the (often male – dominated) interview panel and process, with one woman for example describing being faced by an interview panel comprising five men and one woman, an experience which had unnerved her (Ward in *SCOPE*, September 2003).

6.6 Lack of skills and confidence

As noted earlier, lack of confidence is a significant factor for women in relation to work, education, and training. Even more unattainable and intimidating was the prospect of participation in public and political life, about which many women were ill-informed, and for which they felt even more poorly equipped. Some of these feelings were linked to inaccurate perceptions of the requirements in terms of skills and qualifications for joining a public body. Chrysalis Women's Centre identified a range of barriers to participation in public life which were particularly significant for women in disadvantaged communities with low confidence related to low qualifications and skills levels. These included:

- a fear of political life – it is perceived as very hard and women are unaware that "you don't need to be brainy";
- an expectation that you have to be highly skilled and a high achiever;
- a perception that participation in public life is demanding in that you need to be confident in public speaking (Chrysalis Interview Feb 2009).

These echo the findings of the *Women on the Fringes* programme which discovered "a belief that a higher education qualification was essential, and that one needed to be 'a professional' (Ward in *SCOPE*, September 2003). Lack of confidence and lack of support for women to participate in decision-making bodies were identified as significant barriers to women's participation in public and political life in Fermanagh (FWN, 2 June 2008).

6.7 The Application Process

There was a sense from the research consulted that the application process itself proved a barrier. *Women on the Fringes* identified a lack of awareness of how to get onto a public body with "many women not realising that you needed to be nominated and to fill in an application form – there was still a view that it was by invite only" (Ward in *SCOPE*, September 2003). The *Get on Board* programme identified problems with the application process, the information pack, the application forms, and the language used, as barriers. In the view of tutor Eileen Mullan: "the current appointments process is open, is transparent, but it is *not accessible* to everyone". She points out that the kind

of language used by public bodies, including acronyms and management speak, acted to exclude many except those in "the know" already, and caused many to feel that public appointments "are not for the likes of me" (*Get on Board* interview March 2009).

6.8 The Impact of Low Participation
6.8.1 Lower Quality Decisions
Low representation of women's voices in decision-making at local and regional level on matters which impact on their lives means that decisions are less likely to take account of the needs and circumstances of the whole population including women and children. Greater participation from people of all backgrounds – genuine diversity at board level – means greater accountability and a more highly functioning democratic process.

6.8.2 Perpetuation
Low levels of female participation in any area of work has the effect of embedding and multiplying the problem of low female participation. Most obviously, it sends a message that certain jobs are not for women and limits the number of available female role models. The evident predomination of males in any career is likely to be intimidating for a woman who may feel that she will have few female peers for moral support in the workplace. Unequal representation in public life, being more visible, possibly impacts on gender equality even more broadly than unequal representation in other areas. It sends a message that public and political life is not for women, and limits the role models women might otherwise aspire to.

6.8.3 The multiplier effect
Low levels of female participation also has a multiplier effect which can undermine the attempts of some public bodies to achieve equal participation. Marie Crawley's 2005 report *Stepping out as Equals* provides a clear example of the way in which inequalities in public life can be multiplied at a local level. Her study notes low levels of female representation on public / decision making bodies and senior management positions in Fermanagh. In particular, Crawley cites the all but absence of women from public political office at

district level (only one out of twenty-three councillors was a woman). She points out that district councillors hold reserved places on for example, the Western Education and Library Board, the Western Health and Social Services Council, the Local Strategy Partnership, and Fermanagh Enterprise, and concludes: "Attempts by these bodies to achieve a gender balance will be compromised by the regulations on structure which restrict a significant number of places for district councillors". In other words, if almost all district councillors are male, naturally all district council representation on local public bodies will be male, reducing the ability of other bodies to achieve gender balance (Crawley, February 2005, p. 30).

6.8.4 Lower representation groups

It is particularly notable that while the *Get on Board* Programme has succeeded in targeting a high level of female participation, the tutor also notes the significant proportion of middle class, professional and qualified women who have participated on the course. While it is of course essential to continue targeting all women including professional women, there is little doubt that many of the barriers outlined above mean that the public appointments process is doubly inaccessible for women from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have low qualification levels, and insufficient resources to enable them to grapple with the challenges in terms of poor remuneration, and inconsistent support with childcare, travel and transport.

As the EHRC's report *Sex and Power* (2008) points out, the effect is multiplied still further for women from ethnic minority backgrounds and women with disabilities. The report notes: "The glass ceiling is low for most and lower for some", and points to the absence of ethnic minority women from public and political life in the UK as a whole, with for example, only 2 UK MPs being ethnic minority women (p. 16). Only 3% of public appointments in Northern Ireland are held by people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Committee notes that "ethnic and minority women are underrepresented in all areas of the labour market, particularly in senior or decision-making positions, have higher rates of unemployment and face a greater pay gap in their hourly earnings compared to men. Women of different ethnic and minority

communities are also greatly underrepresented in political and public life"
(CEDAW 2008, p. 12).

Women with disabilities are just as invisible at public and political level. Of
1672 public appointments made in 2007/2008, only 8 of these people have a
declared disability – it is not known how many of these are women (*Get on
Board* interview, March 2009).

The figures for the representation of young people at public and political level
suggest that young women are also seriously underrepresented. Only 34 of
those appointed are under 40 years old, and 6 are under the age of 30 (*Get
on Board* interview, March 2009).

6.9 Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (OCPANI)

OCPANI's latest Annual Report (2007-2008) notes the lack of progress on
recommendations developed by its short term working group on diversity in
public appointments (p. 18). In the report the Commissioner notes that: "It
appears to me that there is a need to tackle the diversity issue but no
mechanism to do so" (p. 18). She notes that a new Code of Practice for
Ministerial Appointments is being prepared for 2009 / 2010, which will include
an insistence that the need for diversity should be "rigorously addressed". The
report advises that, in situations where, for example, all female applicants fail
to meet the selection criteria, that selection criteria be reviewed (p. 13).

6.10 The International Perspective: CEDAW

CEDAW's concern over the low levels of representation of women in public
and political life in Northern Ireland is related to what it sees as Northern
Ireland's failure, as a country emerging from conflict, to take account of UN
Security Council 1325 on women, peace and security. In particular it notes
the low level of female membership of the Assembly, and in the institutions
established as a result of the peace process. CEDAW calls on the state to
"take measures, with benchmarks and concrete timetables, to increase the
number of women in political and public life, at all levels and in all areas",

including the introduction of temporary special measures to promote women to leadership positions, and calls for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland (CEDAW 2008, p. 10).

6.11 Good Practice

There have been a range of projects aimed at increasing women's participation in public life over the last 10-15 years in particular, such as Women into Public Life, Women into Politics, the WEA's *Women on the Fringes* Programme, and Belfast Metropolitan College's *Get on Board* programme.

6.11.1 *Get on Board*

This programme has been run by Belfast Metropolitan College for the last three years. It is a part-time, Open College Network accredited course aimed at breaking down the barriers to public appointments in Northern Ireland. It covers issues such as: The Appointments Process; Roles and Responsibilities; Effective Board Meetings; Decision-Making; and Financial Management and Responsibility. So far, fourteen courses have been delivered including five outside Belfast (in Ballyclare, Enniskillen, Cookstown [2] and Dublin), and a further course is due to being in the North West in April 2009. To date, 179 people have completed the course, of whom approximately two thirds were women. This figure is particularly high because a number of programmes were run in conjunction with NIRWN, meaning that some courses were run exclusively for women. On courses not targeted specifically at women, on average 60% of participants were women. As a result of the programme, 30 participants in total (17%) have been appointed to public bodies, voluntary boards or community committees. Of the 30 appointments, 20 were women. Of these women, 8 have obtained public appointments and twelve have obtained voluntary appointments including District Policing Partnerships.

A former rural participant on the *Get on Board* programme, Helen Wilson, remembered feeling conscious that so many boards that she was aware of "seemed to be all men", and she recalled feeling "daunted by this man's

world". She felt that the course had given her an insight into the workings of public bodies, and that visits from the Commissioner for Public Appointments and female politicians had made her feel that participation was possible. As a result, she has joined the District Policing Partnership for her area, and observes that "once you're in there, you realise the men are human too and it's not so difficult". For this participant, the course made the difference between putting herself forward or not. As she put it: "Only for the course, I'd never have gone for it" (Helen Wilson interview, March 2009).

6.11.2 *Women on the Fringes*

This programme, run by WEA, was developed with the aim of increasing female levels of participation in public life through providing women who wish to apply to public bodies with skills training and ongoing support. Ten women from Carrickfergus, Fermanagh and Derry, described as being "grass roots" rather than professional backgrounds, were tracked during a six month period of involvement in the programme and their experiences give an insight into the barriers faced by women attempting to enter public life. Mentoring was an important and valued part of the programme, giving women ongoing support for the challenges of the process of entering public life. The programme also offered Gender Awareness Training to public bodies, with the aim of changing the culture of public life. A small number of public bodies took up this training.

CEDAW recommends this kind of training and "urges the state party to increase the availability of training and capacity-building programmes for women wishing to enter or already in public office and to enhance its awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of women's participation in political and public life" (CEDAW 2008, p. 10).

6.11.3 Action at a Strategic Level

Margaret Ward, in her September 2003 *SCOPE* article, points out that in contrast to the situation in Northern Ireland, "the Scottish Executive has developed specific measures designed to generate more applications from under-represented groups. These include the creation of a Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland, with specific responsibility for promoting

diversity in public appointments; the introduction of a parliamentary notification system for public appointments; notification of specific vacancies to a wider variety of interest groups (in addition to advertising in the press); actively engaging with under-represented groups to understand diversity-related issues and how to address them; providing diversity awareness for officials; the launch of a Public Appointments Work Shadow Initiative". By now, some of these courses of action have been followed in Northern Ireland. However, it is important to keep under review the extent to which action at a strategic level is having an effect, and to introduce and support more effective measures for increasing women's participation in public and political life beyond the 33% at which we seem to be stuck.

Recommendations

- Full implementation in NI of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which provides for women's participation in post-conflict public and political structures;

- The OCPANI Code of Practice to be strengthened as envisaged to ensure steps are taken to increase diversity in public appointments;

- Clear guidance for public bodies on identifying barriers and implementing positive action measures;

- Training and awareness raising for public bodies and board members on diversity;

- Support for public bodies to put in place time-bound, measurable plans for increasing the participation of women, particularly women from disadvantaged and rural communities;

- Public bodies and political structures to review working practices and identify areas where flexibility can be introduced;

- Decision-making bodies to meet in local areas and provide financial support for travel costs;

- Long-term, strategic provision of training, confidence building and support for women to participate in public and political life;

- Opportunities to formally shadow appointment-holders with a view to applying for public appointment;

- The provision of mentoring especially for women from disadvantaged communities, in order to enable them to move confidently from awareness to training, through the application and appointment process, and support with initial board meetings;

- Awareness-raising on the possibilities of becoming involved in public and political life;

- Consistent, mandatory support for childcare, travel and other costs associated with women's participation in local decision-making structures, public bodies and political life;

- Further study on the impact of payments and expenses for public appointments on benefits, and the introduction of schemes if necessary to ensure that benefits of women on low-incomes are not impacted;

- Exchange of experience with other Executives such as the Scottish and Welsh Executives who have also been working to increase diversity in public appointments.

- Gender proof consistently on all activities in relation to the RPA.

- Ensure the involvement of under- represented groups in community planning.

Section 7:
Access: Travel and Transport

Introduction

Because women are less likely to have their own private transport than men, depend more on public transport, and are at an economic disadvantage to men, the accessibility of education, training and work and the cost of public transport are key factors in determining women's participation, particularly, but not exclusively, for those in rural areas.

7.1 Access to Education

Fermanagh Women's Network emphasise the fact that for many women in rural areas, local educational opportunities were essential. The women they consulted were less likely to undertake courses if they had to travel long distances to get to them. This was due to a lack of personal transport, and also problems with public transport, including the poor roads system within Fermanagh and "a lack of joined up thinking between providers – Translink, Rural Lift and FAST". Women pointed to the difficulties of fitting in attendance at a course at one end of the county with the need to do a school run at the other end (FWN, 2 June 2008). Many rural women found that lack of transport, and the resultant inability to participate in education or training, led to greater problems than just "missing out on education". The Network identified lack of locally accessible opportunities and / or appropriate transport as a core contributor to feelings of isolation which were directly connected to mental health problems, particularly depression and associated conditions. They noted that the problem was particularly acute for women with disabilities who lacked personal transport, and they considered the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to have an important role to play in addressing these issues (FWN, 2 June 2008). The problem of the accessibility of courses to women in rural areas is also identified in both the Northern Childcare Partnership (NCP) and Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group (RSCG) reports.

The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group report points out that the tendency for farm males to travel long distances to employment, using what was sometimes the sole household vehicle, meant that female members of the farm household were either unable / reluctant to access employment (p. 36). Getting around is not only a problem for rural women of course. Women in the Shankill, for example, pointed to the problems of "having to attend FE provision two miles in one direction and leave a child in childcare two miles in the other direction". Managing these constraints whilst endeavouring to arrive at a course on time and attend the full session was a challenge. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report on *Women's Centres Community Based Education* points to local provision as an enabler for women: "Centres are located in a community setting therefore transport is not usually a problem whereas travel to FE colleges does prove to be a barrier in terms of accessibility and cost" (p. 13). External evaluations of the Women's Centre Derry bear this out, indicating that the central location of the centre, within walking distance of some of Derry's most disadvantaged wards, and right beside the main bus station, was a large part of its appeal for participants, enabling women to attend courses who otherwise would not (e.g. McLaughlin 2003, p. 57).

7.2 Access to Childcare

The Northern Childcare Partnership study found that 79% of eligible parents had availed of a free place at a Nursery School or Unit, although the NEELB availability rate of free-school places is 95% (p. 21). Many of those who had not taken up free places spoke of lack of an available place locally, which meant the prospect of having to travel to a playgroup or nursery outside their town or village, or having to pay fees. It was discovered that some parents had to drive over ten miles in order for their child/ren to attend Playschool, Nursery etc. For women without access to private or public transport, this was a real barrier (p. 15): "One mother commented: 'No transport arrangements or alternatives to children not allocated places. Impossible to travel 10 miles daily to another playgroup when other children in the family'" (p. 12). The report adds: "…unless a household has access to a car, it is difficult for parents to get their children to and from childcare services and schools" (p. 6).

The Rural Childcare Strategy Group also identifies transport as a key barrier to uptake of childcare: "For those households with more than one adult living in them, access to only one car can present as many difficulties for individuals, particularly women and young people, as where there is no car" (p. 32). The report cites research by Greer et al which found that "only 20% of rural households are within 13 minutes of a bus stop" (Greer 2003 cited in RCSG, p. 33). Clearly, for rural childcare provision to be truly accessible, it has to be local or easily and affordably accessible.

Transport difficulties impact on urban as well as rural women. The Shankill report finds that: "When having to access childcare outside of the local area, a further barrier presents itself – lack of access to transport…Using public transport to bring and pick up kids from a crèche that is not based locally can take up a large part of the day and may not be worth it" (p. 21).

While there was much discussion in the research about access to private or public transport, the real issue seemed to be the preference for local childcare provision. Women in the Shankill study felt that local childcare provision would remove the barriers that exist in terms of no or poor access to transport (p. 22). The location of childcare close to a place of work or training was raised as an important issue by respondents to the Possibilities Development Partnership lone parents study (PDP 2008, p. 56) and many cited difficulties in finding childcare provision sufficiently close to their home or place of work. Employers for Childcare's 2003 report *The Childcare Barrier* points to earlier research which found that mothers who did not have convenient local access to centre-based childcare were almost twice as likely to leave their jobs as those who did (EFC 2003).

It is not surprising then that the provision of childcare onsite at a place of education or work was also raised by some women. The Possibilities Development Partnership study noted the problems caused for lone parents seeking a return to education and employment by the lack of childcare provision on the site of many further education colleges (PDP 2007, p. 59). The popularity of on-site childcare provision in women's centres, as evidenced

in the WCRP's report on *Women's Community-Based Education*, points to the potential of on-site provision. Women in the Shankill study raised the potential for employers to provide childcare onsite, believing that this would also address the problem of lack of flexibility in current childcare provision (p. 23). Onsite childcare provision at a place of education or work not only would address the problem of transport for women: it would mean that time spent travelling to and from childcare provision could not become an obstacle to participation in education or work.

Some FE colleges do offer some on-site provision. Belfast Metropolitan College, for example, states that childcare for pre-school children is available at Castlereagh, Shankill, Tower Street and Whiterock Centres. Their website points out that each crèche varies slightly in services offered, time available and costs.

As indicated earlier, local and on-site provision has the potential to be better for children as well as more convenient for parents. The Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group points out that: "Studies would show that children benefit from having their needs met closer to where they live, play, learn and have social networks" (pp. 11-12). These findings apply as much to urban as to rural areas. Although better transport networks would undoubtedly help women, the research suggests that women's preference is for locally available childcare which does not require substantial travel.

Recommendations
  ➢ Better, more frequent and more affordable public transport, which takes account of women's need to do school drop-offs and pick-ups;

  ➢ More strategic, long-term support for local community transport schemes in rural areas geared towards enabling women to access appropriate childcare, and work, education and training;

  ➢ Public and community transport to take account of the needs of women with disabilities, and women who have children with disabilities;

➢ Further research into childcare provision made by FE colleges in order to establish level of on-site provision, and consistencies and gaps in services;

➢ An emphasis on local provision of services such as childcare;

➢ Decision-making bodies to meet in local areas and provide financial support for travel costs.

Section 8:
Health and Well-Being

Introduction

Problems with women's health and well-being can prevent them from participating in all aspects of life. As well as general ill-health and disease which can affect everybody, there are some health issues which the research suggests have a particular bearing on women. This section will focus on three of those issues: mental health, domestic violence, and teenage pregnancy.

8.1 Mental Health

Women in the Shankill study suggest that that good mental and emotional health was more difficult to maintain than physical health, as this aspect of health is 'invisible'. Participants felt that " 'stress' and 'depression' had a significant impact on mental and emotional well-being. This could range from stress and anxiety about money, to worrying about children" (p. 16). The study also found that: "There was also a belief that 'disillusionment' and 'lack of expectation' permeated the psyche of people living in the Shankill area. In many instances 'people have given up' and cynicism is rife" (p. 13). This was a factor which impacted negatively on women's sense of power and well-being.

The word "stress" emerged across a range of studies. The Possibilities Development Partnership study found that a staggering 96% of lone parents interviewed described suffering from stress. The primary cause was having to cope on their own, but a further significant cause was financial hardship, leading for many to debt, for some, totalling thousands of pounds. Many relied heavily on the Social Fund (PDP 2008, p. 107). The report notes that lone parents who have a disability or who have a child with a disability, and those who lack family support are particularly vulnerable to stress. The stress of managing these challenges means that, for these parents, participation in the labour market is all the more difficult (PDP 2007, p. 60).

Women from ethnic and other minority communities are particularly vulnerable to mental illness, suffering from higher rates of depression and mental illness, with women of Asian descent having higher suicide and self-harm rates. NICEM's 2006 report found a number of mental health difficulties for women from black and ethnic minority groups. These included:

- For both lone parents and women that have arrived with partners, an experience of depression and, in particular, post-natal depression (pp. 17; 22);

- Feelings of isolation (pp. 17; 20; 28);

- Racism, harassment, leading to depression and fear (pp. 21; 24);

- Mental health issues for women in the Muslim community including depression and anxiety, caused by the experience of racial harassment and social isolation, especially among non-English-speaking women, particularly those who were relatively new arrivals (p. 22);

- Stigmatisation or exclusion of those with mental health issues (p. 22);

- Mental health problems for those who have experienced trauma and have had to leave their families in their home country (p. 26);

- High levels of uncertainty, anxiety and stress among asylum seekers who have cases ongoing for long periods (p. 18).

Fermanagh Women's Network identified a number of mental health issues impacting on women living in rural areas. These included: Mental health problems due to living alone and isolation; higher levels of depression and suicide; distance from health services (FWN, 2 June 2008). The issues around transport and the lack of it, and the attendant isolation were felt to impact on women with disabilities, women seeking access to employment, women experiencing mental health problems, and women seeking access to education in particular (FWN, 2 June 2008).

8.1.1 Mental Health and the Conflict

Increasingly, information is emerging about the impact of the conflict on women in Northern Ireland. *Lifetime Opportunities* recognises that the impact was felt most intensely by those in the poorest and most disadvantaged

communities: "There is little doubt that many of the poorest in Northern Ireland live in areas which have suffered greatly during the long years of inter-community strife and conflict" (p. 10).

Damage to women's mental health was a key impact identified in the Women's Centres Regional Partnership report *Women and the Conflict* (2008). The report finds that for some women, thrown into positions of responsibility as a result of the absence of a partner (often due to imprisonment), the conflict led to an increase in their capabilities to cope, to organise, and to take leadership in the community (p. 44). But it also finds that many women struggled to cope with the burdens they carried during the conflict, and as a result some have developed a range of mental health problems including anxiety, panic attacks, and depression, all illnesses which can have a negative impact on a woman's self confidence, self image, and self belief (p. 55). This applies not only to urban but to rural women too as the *Women and the Conflict* report attests.

Falls Women's Centre details the impact of the conflict on women's general confidence and sense of well-being: "Women have had the ultimate responsibility for mediating the effects of violence, poverty and community tensions. Women have also had to deal with women-specific issues such as domestic violence, relationship difficulties, parenting, mental and physical disabilities and health problems, stress, sexualised violence and child sexual abuse. Often the combined effects of these influences leave women feeling isolated and powerless" (WCRP, p. 47).

Participants in the Shankill study too concentrated much of their discussion on health on the importance of emotional health and well-being. The women considered "personal confidence" and "how you feel about yourself" as being important aspects of well-being (p. 16). The study highlights the burden placed on local women as a result of the conflict, and its impact on subsequent generations: "In the 30 years, pre-1996 ceasefire, it is estimated that 5000 men were imprisoned as a result of their role and actions in the conflict. Women and children in the Shankill area have had huge

responsibilities loaded onto their shoulders. As well as coping with their own emotional problems because of separation from their husbands/fathers, many also had to leave education and enter work to gain income for the family. Many women never had the opportunity or support to remain in education… This sense of hopelessness and lack of aspiration has in turn been passed to the next generation" (pp. 27-28).

When women spoke about mental health in the Shankill study, they saw poor individual mental health and well-being as being closely bound to the poor state of the community as a whole. They linked low confidence levels to "the general decline of the community, such as the deterioration of neighbourhoods and economic infrastructure". This included burnt out stores and businesses and "a pervasive sense of hopelessness in the local community, particularly amongst young people". Participants pointed to "an overwhelming need for 'healing' and confidence-building within the community" (pp. 14-15). Women felt that the regeneration of the Shankill Road area itself would have a positive impact on local people "'The area needs to be built up again'" said one woman (p. 15).

As well as historic causes of conflict-related mental ill-health, Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report points out that some young women who participated in the report had been impacted by the conflict by the imprisonment of a parent, some had experienced the death of a family member as a result of a paramilitary killing, and others had experienced a paramilitary attack on the family (p. 41).

Current statistics on mental ill-health, and on suicide and self-harm, suggest that more research is needed on the impact of the conflict on mental health in Northern Ireland. The *Suicide Prevention Strategy*, for example, suggests that people in Northern Ireland have higher levels of mental ill-health than Scotland, England, and the Republic of Ireland. With regard to suicide in particular, it observes that the overall suicide rate in NI is 9.8 per 10000 – but that it is almost double that in deprived areas (p. 12) and considerably higher (17.9 and 18.1 respectively) in North and West Belfast, which it describes as

"constituencies which have historically suffered from economic deprivation and witnessed some of the worst violence of the conflict" (p. 13).

Recommendations

➢ Mental ill-health needs to be recognised as a significant barrier to women's participation in education, training, work and public life.

➢ Further research on extent of the impact of the conflict on women's mental health in particular, and to ensure the provision of appropriate services and support to enable women to deal with that impact. Consideration needs to be given to the congruences and differences between general mental health interventions, and interventions needed to deal with mental health problems which may be conflict-related.

8.2 Domestic Violence

The government's *Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse: A regional strategy 2008-2013* estimates that about 23% of women experience sexual assault as an adult and about 5% of women experience rape. Around 21% of girls and 11% of boys experience some form of child sexual abuse. Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report found that a quarter of their sample spoke of experiences of violence and abuse (p. 31). The regional strategy points out that perpetrators are often known to victims and that many are their victims partners or family members (p. 5). Sexual violence and abuse is most frequently perpetrated by boys and men against girls and women: most perpetrators are male and most victims are female. Current and former partners of the victim commit over half of adult rapes and 55% take place in the victim's home. With domestic violence, multiple incidents of violence and abuse can take place over long periods (p. 20). The Strategy notes that sexual violence and abuse is "both a consequence and a cause of gender inequality" (p. 21). This means that for many women, and children, the home is a place in which violence is experienced, and fear of violence and abuse is a factor in daily life.

8.2.1 The Wider Impact of Violence and Abuse

It is not surprising then that the Strategy points out that "Sexual violence and abuse represent psychological as well as physical violations". According to Foyle Women's Aid, domestic violence "can take many forms and even though the physical or sexual abuse may not happen regularly, other forms of abusive or controlling behaviour may be ongoing, so that you always feel off-balance or anxious about your relationship. All forms of abuse – psychological, economic, emotional, sexual and physical – come from the abuser's desire to maintain power and control over another person" (www.foylewomensaid.org). The Strategy points to the long-term consequences of such abuse: "post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and panic attacks, depression, social phobia, substance abuse, obesity, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide, domestic violence and in some cases offending behaviour. Child sexual abuse may also have a significant impact on the child's school attendance and educational attainment" (p. 5). Young women contributing to the *Still Waiting* report who had experienced violence and abuse had experienced as a consequence disrupted education, a lack of stability in relation to living arrangements, and feelings of stigma and isolation (*Still Waiting*, p. 31). *Our Children and Young People* points to a similar menu of consequences of domestic violence and child abuse (p. 49).

Women living in violent and abusive situations face a raft of additional barriers, then, to accessing education, training and work. Many live with a controlling partner who exercises influence over where they go and what they do, including courses and classes, and many experience mental health consequences from debilitating lack of confidence and self-esteem, to anxiety and depression, making it all the harder for them to engage with mainstream education and training in particular.

Despite an increasing recognition of the extent and impact of such abuse, low levels of reporting and disclosure remain a problem amongst all groups, with even greater difficulties in disclosure experienced by for example women from some black and ethnic minority groups (pp. 20; 29). NICEM's 2006 report notes that in some groups, issues such as domestic violence are not made

public outside of the family because of a fear of a negative perception being created of the whole family or community, with the result that they are not resolved satisfactorily (p. 22).

8.2.2 Addressing the Issue

The work of Women's Aid in supporting and providing refuge for women in these circumstances, as well as raising awareness and lobbying on the issue, is well known. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership report into *Women's Centres Community-Based Education* suggests that for women in these circumstances, women's centres can provide an accessible and supportive route back into education and training. Some provide services directly addressed to domestic violence and abuse. Falls Women's Centre, for example, provides women-specific services to survivors of rape, child abuse, sexualised violence and domestic violence (p. 48). The Waterside Women's Centre acts as an outreach location for NEXUS, so that women can access support services discreetly and safely (p. 88). Many others provide advice, referral and signposting as part of their menu of services. More broadly, however, the supportive learning environment offered by women's centres can be invaluable for enabling a woman emerging from a situation of domestic violence to re-engage with education, training, and ultimately, employment. A case study supplied by Atlas Women's Centre for the Women's Centres Regional Partnership report illustrates the possibilities:

"Liz is in her 30s. She suffered from an abusive background both as a child and as an adult. When Liz left her partner due to the abusive situation she and her child were homeless. She was referred to the Simon Community who helped her find temporary accommodation. With the support of a local politician Liz was able to secure a home for herself and her child. At this time her self-esteem and self-confidence were at the lowest level possible and she was suffering from depression. She was unable to work or interact with others. Liz was referred to Atlas Women's Centre by the Simon Community. Initially she was hesitant about going to Atlas; she was also very frightened about leaving her child in the crèche as up until that point he had never left her sight. However, after meeting the staff in Atlas and experiencing the

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friendly atmosphere in the centre she knew that she and her son would be happy and she could trust centre staff. In Atlas Liz began to rebuild her life through self-confidence courses. The first course she completed was 'Confidence, communication and me'. Then immediately she progressed onto Stress Management and further courses such as Child Protection training. She has now completed Numeracy and Literacy Essential Skills Level 1 and is enrolled on the Level 2 for September 2007. Liz plans to continue her educational and personal development in Atlas Women's Centre. Along with enrolling for further courses she has also recently joined the management committee and has volunteered to help at Atlas public events, which includes public speaking" (p. 31).

The *Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse* Strategy sets out the commitment of government to work in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to adopt "a consistent and long-term approach to the prevention of sexual violence and abuse; and an effective and timely response when it occurs" (p. 6) and an Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence has been established to co-ordinate efforts across governments to address this issue (p. 7). Annual Action Plans set out the specific actions and targets for each year of the Strategy.

Recommendations:
- Sexual violence and abuse should be recognised as factors which impact on all aspects of a woman's life and choices, including her access to education, training and development. Resources should be put in place to support all aspects of the *Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy 2008-2013*;

- Robust long-term support must be put in place for frontline services for women dealing with sexual violence and abuse, and for programmes which enable women dealing with sexual violence and abuse to overcome barriers to education, training, development, and fuller participation in all aspects of life.

8.3 Teenage Pregnancy

Northern Ireland, although having the lowest teenage birth rate in the UK, nonetheless has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe. Young women in disadvantaged areas are particularly at risk. *Our Children and Young People* points out that although teenage birth rates have fallen in all areas of Northern Ireland, the rate in deprived areas was 28.6% per 1000 females aged 13-19, compared to the Northern Ireland average of 16.7 per 1000 females aged 13-19 (p. 2). This is problematic for a number of reasons. The strategy points out the impact that teenage pregnancy and early motherhood can have for both mother and baby, including poor educational achievement for the mother, poor physical and mental health, social isolation and poverty (p. 2). The Strategy emphasises that the teenagers most at risk of becoming parents are those already disadvantaged, with a history of poverty, low educational achievement, sexual abuse, mental problems and offending behaviour, and that areas experiencing higher rates of teenage pregnancy also demonstrate a higher level of deprivation (p. 2).

8.3.1 Contributing Factors

Youth Action's *Still Waiting* report points to what is likely to be the most significant factor in high teenage pregnancy rates: inadequate Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). The report notes that there is no uniform provision of RSE in schools in Northern Ireland, but instead a broad set of guidelines which allow schools considerable latitude in deciding what provision to make (p. 123). The report points to research which has discovered for example that personal relationships and emotional aspects of sexual relationships were less likely to be discussed than conception and pregnancy (p. 123), and that there were gaps in discussion on the issues around emotional aspects of sexual feelings, sexual orientation, contraception and abortion and safer sex (p. 123). The report points to the value of well-delivered RSE, which works well when pupils "are encouraged to recognise their individual needs, to respect the needs and wants of others, and to develop the skills and self-esteem to become confident adolescents" (123).

The young women in the report identified a number of ways in which they felt that their capacity to take confident control of their sexuality and reproduction was compromised, and many were to do with the way that information about sex and relationships is communicated to them. These included: double standards relating to male and female sexual behaviour; limited access to open and honest information and discussion about sex in a family and school setting (even about periods) which many felt covered "just the basics"; a moralistic approach to sex education which conveyed a sense that sex was wrong, secretive or frowned upon; inconsistent information of variable reliability about sex and related matters from peers; an incomplete (or sometimes misleading or inaccurate) picture from women's magazines and other forms of media such as the internet (pp. 123-132). Overall, the report suggests that the way we currently teach our young women about sex leaves them feeling a combination of fear and embarrassment, which in turn prevents them from accessing information, services and advice on sexual health (p. 133). The report suggests that this problem was worse for young women in rural areas, who either felt that they and their families were well-known to GPs, or would need a lift from a family member to get to a GP or family planning centre (p. 134).

Negative judgements placed on sexually active young women (as opposed to sexually active young men) prevented some young women from asking for contraception, or for advice on protection against STIs, as this meant revealing sexual activity (p. 135). The report concludes: "In sum, many of the barriers to good sexual health in Northern Ireland are cultural rather than structural or spatial. The way in which Northern Irish society deals with the issue of sex at a societal level and in our homes and schools has constructed young women's sexuality within a discourse of shame and immorality, which impacts on young women's perceptions of their own sexuality and their sexual health". All of this, it is suggested, leads to uninformed choices being made (p. 135).

The report points to instances of fuller information at some schools, but primarily in youth provision and sexual health services, but also notes that young women continue to have difficulty in accessing these sources (p. 136).

Recommendations

The *Still Waiting* report makes a number of recommendations, the overwhelming direction of which is against ignorance and towards providing young people with all the good, accessible information they need to build healthy relationships and to get their sexual health needs met. They include a call for:

- Challenging cultural attitudes to young women's sexuality;
- Holistic relationship and sex education, which deals with the emotional aspects of sex, and healthy relationships, recognition of non-heterosexual relationships, health issues especially STIs;
- The need to inform and educate women at an earlier age about sex, and to build their confidence in discussing sexual matters;
- Utilisation and development of existing guidance as a starting point for schools on RSE teaching;
- Development of a framework of sexual health education by the youth service (pp. 137-138).

These recommendations echo many in the *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy* and Action Plan 2002-2007 which aimed to reduce the number of unplanned births to teenage mothers and minimise the adverse consequences of those births to teenage parents and their children through: improving communication, promoting educational opportunity, providing user-friendly services for young people, flexible employment opportunities and improved research (summarised in *Our Children and Young People*, p. 38).

Our Children and Young People offers a number of approaches to dealing with the challenges facing young people. Prevention and early intervention is a principle which pervades the report, as is the "whole-child" approach. If

these principles are to be carried through to addressing the high rate of teenage pregnancy, resources must be dedicated to ensuring the provision of early, holistic and ongoing Relationship and Sexuality Education aimed at recognising sex and sexuality as part of young people's identity, and particularly at empowering young women to make clear and informed choices.

Conclusion

In education, training, work and public and political life, women are still not participating equally. The barriers they face are connected to:

- Lack of childcare;
- Lack of skills, qualifications and confidence;
- Poverty;
- Gendered career pathways;
- Lack of flexibility and choice;
- Barriers to public and political life;
- Distance from services and lack of transport;
- Health and Well-being issues.

Each barrier highlighted in this report is related to all of the others. The availability of appropriate childcare has a direct bearing on women's availability for education and training which enables them in turn to update their qualifications and skills. Women seek flexible working options because of childcare responsibilities. Poverty prevents women from paying course fees, or transport costs which would enable them to access education and training. Lack of transport and isolation impacts on women's mental health. It is therefore difficult to think of each barrier as a distinct challenge, and their interconnectedness can make us feel that the task of achieving full participation of women is too great. It is true that resolving any one of these barriers on its own will not on its own make the difference between women from disadvantaged areas participating in education, training, work or public life or not.

What is needed to make a difference is a gear shift away from a society whose working hours, transport system, benefits system and education system was designed for a society in which men worked outside the home 9am-5pm, while women stayed at home or earned "pocket money" in low-

skilled jobs. We have of course moved considerably from the 1950s model, and some distance from the 1970s, and some government departments in Northern Ireland are now using the language of equality. We now need to gear up to become a society, within our lifetimes, in which there is no gendered difference whatsoever in the circumstances, opportunities and choices facing men and women.

If that new fairer future is to become a reality, however, a clear strategic direction is needed. The *Gender Equality Strategy* is a first attempt to set such a direction and is to be welcomed. However, to have any effect, it must be backed up by policies and practices which make a difference. If the production of the *Gender Equality Strategy* raises hopes, the delay in producing the Gender Action Plans raises questions. This report cannot pre-empt the content of the Plans. But it is hoped that its contents signal to government departments some of the key areas requiring action if gender equality is to be achieved.

That said, it was also clear during the course of this research that many organisations whose work connects in some way with women from disadvantaged communities have invested considerable time and energy in producing detailed information about the circumstances of their particular client groups (e.g. lone parents, young women, women from black and minority ethnic groups, urban and rural women). In order to draw together a report such as this, it is necessary to summarise, and it is impossible to do justice to the complexity of the source material. For that reason, readers are encouraged to consult the bibliography for further information on particular policy areas or client groups that interest you. It was also clear that there are some areas in which more research clearly needs to be done, for example on women with adult caring responsibilities, women from ethnic minority backgrounds, and women with disabilities.

There is still a distance to travel before the full and equal participation of women is achieved. Maggie Feeley's 2001 observation holds good today: "Despite the gains of the feminist movement, most women in NI today are still economically, culturally and politically unequal to most men. Women are

economically disadvantaged even within households. They continue to struggle with dominant male values in every sphere of private and public life and are underrepresented in the political arena where change may be influenced and enacted" (Feeley, p. 50). It has been suggested that "years of political violence from the late 1960s to the early 1990s slowed the process of social change by leading to a concentration on security issues in the development of government policy and spending and a low priority for measures in fields of social policy where women were more likely to be major beneficiaries". In the light of those thoughts, it is hoped that this report provides a picture of how women in disadvantaged communities are currently placed, and points to some practical steps we might take to accelerate the journey towards full participation.

Appendix One:

Northern Ireland Legislative Context

Legislation and statutory obligations

The main pieces of equality legislation in Northern Ireland which address the issue of sex discrimination are:

The Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970 (amended 1984)

The Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970 as amended by the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1984, the Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Equal Pay Act 1970 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 provides for equal pay between men and women by giving a woman the right to equality in the terms of her contract of employment where she is employed on:

- **like work** to that of a man,
- **work rated as equivalent** to that of a man, or
- **work of equal value** to that of a man (http://www.equalityni.org/)

The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976

The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (the SDO), as amended by the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, the Sex discrimination (Indirect Discrimination & Burden of Proof) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 and the Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the grounds of his or her sex in the fields of employment; training and related matters; education; the disposal and management of premises; and the provision of goods, facilities and services. The SDO also makes it unlawful to discriminate against married persons in employment.

On 6th April 2008, the Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2008

came into operation in Northern Ireland, and introduced a number of important changes to the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976, including an amendment to the definition of harassment, highlighting employers' responsibilities, and relating to matters around discrimination relating to maternity and pregnancy (http://www.equalityni.org/).

Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

This came into force on 1st January 2000.

It requires public authorities such as Northern Ireland government departments, most non-departmental public bodies, District Councils and other bodies, to have "due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

(b) between men and women generally;

(c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and

(d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

It also requires public authorities to "have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group" (Northern Ireland Act 1998, p. 16)

Schedule 9 of the Act makes provision for the enforcement of duties under Section 75.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) is charged with monitoring the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75 and offers advice to public authorities and others on how to implement them.

Appendix Two:

International Context

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979. This includes a number of articles relating to women's position across a range of areas, including Article 2: Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination; Article 4: Special Measures to Accelerate Equality; Article 7: Political and Public Life; Article 10: Education; Article 11: Employment; Article 12: Health Care; Article 13: Social and Economic Benefits. The convention had 168 signatories by 2005, including the UK and Irish governments. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland produced a response in March 2008 to the UK government's 6th Periodic Report on progress to implement its obligations under CEDAW. It had the following to say:

"The Commission is concerned that the 6th Periodic Report fails to give greater significance to the development of proposals in Northern Ireland to develop single equality legislation, which will benefit women as well as other groups who are vulnerable to discrimination. Although it is essential that the Single Equality Act (SEA) effectively addresses individual and systemic discrimination, the Commission would wish to see a move beyond the anti-discrimination approach, which relies on litigation by individual victims of discrimination, to a more outcome-focused positive approach to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations on the part of employers, service providers and others" (ECNI CEDAW, 2008, pp. 11-12). "The Commission is disappointed at the continued delays in publishing a white paper on the Single Equality Act" (ECNI CEDAW, 2008, p. 11).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995, 2000, 2005). Over 180 governments signed this declaration at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. In 2000, a special session of the United Nations General Assembly, informally called Beijing +5, was convened to review progress

achieved and to identify obstacles remaining to full implementation. Beijing +10 took place in New York in 2005. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reflects an international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for women everywhere and identifies 12 "critical areas of concern" that are considered to be the main obstacles to the advancement of women.

(http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html). These are:

1. the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;

2. inequalities and inadequacies in, and unequal access to, education and training;

3. inequalities and inadequacies in, and unequal access to, healthcare and related services;

4. violence against women;

5. the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation;

6. inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources;

7. inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;

8. mechanisms at all levels to promote the insufficient advancement of women;

9. lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women;

10. stereotyping of women, and inequality in women's access to, and participation in, all communication systems, especially in the media;

11. gender inequalities in the management of the natural resources and the safeguarding of the environment; and

12. persistent discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child.

The *Gender Equality Strategy* notes that the Platform for Action promotes "an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the

monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes as the most effective way of advancing equality for women" (pp. 60-69).

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (1995). 117 national delegations signed up to the Copenhagen declaration. The Summit expressed a range of principles and goals on social development, all of which are relevant to women as citizens and three of which are specific to women (Part B: 26 (j), (o), and (s). The Summit also expressed a series of Commitments. Commitment 5 relates specifically to gender equality:

"We commit ourselves to promoting full respect for human dignity and to achieving equality and equity between women and men, and to recognizing and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development" (Part C: 5) (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/). The Declaration has been subject to a five and ten year review and update process.

The Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) (Articles 2 & 3) created a legal basis for the EU commitment to gender mainstreaming. The treaty sets gender equality as a specific responsibility of the EU and as a horizontal objective affecting all of its measures and programmes. It also requires all policies and programmes of member states to incorporate an equality dimension (http://www.eurotreaties.com/amsterdamtreaty.pdf).

EU Structural Funds 2007-2013

European Union regulations on the Structural Funds (Articles 1, 34 and 35) require that "all measures supported by the Funds be gender mainstreamed" (Crawley and O'Meara, August 2004, p. 21). For 2007-2013, Member States and the Commission are required "to ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of a gender perspective is promoted during the various stages of implementing the Structural Funds (*Gender Equality Strategy*, p. 65).

UN Resolution 1325 (October 2002). By 2000, pressure from a number of organisations including Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and International Alert led to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, for the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace-building and political life. The resolution calls for women's equal participation in all efforts for the promotion of peace and security. This is the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace (http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html).

EU roadmap for equality between women and men COM (2006) 92.

The Roadmap for Equality between women and men for the period 2006-2010 was adopted on 1st March 2006. It combines new actions with successful activities developed under the Framework Strategy 2001-2005. It reaffirms the dual approach of gender equality based on gender mainstreaming (the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities) and specific measures. The Roadmap encompasses six priority areas for EU action on gender equality:

- Equal economic independence for women and men;
- Reconciliation of private and professional life;
- Equal representation in decision-making;
- Eradication of all forms of gender-based violence;
- Elimination of gender stereotypes;
- Promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

For each area, it identifies priority objectives and actions. It will be followed by an implementation report in 2008 and an evaluation with a follow-up proposal in 2010.
(http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/roadmap_en.html).

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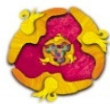United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. New York: UN, 2000.

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