

Manifesto for Closing the Gap on gender inequality, December 2019

The Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales and the organisations listed below call on all political parties and candidates to put gender equality at the heart of the election and UK policy making until we close the gap and live in a UK free from gender discrimination.

In this manifesto we:

- Call on all political parties and candidates to commit to advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality;
- Call for action in six key areas including ending violence against women and girls, closing the gender pay gap, equal representation and ensuring women's rights are protected post Brexit

1. EQUAL REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP

Women are under-represented in UK politics at all levels and action is needed to change this. Just 32% of MPs are women and only 4% of these are BME women in the House of Commons. At council level, only 36% of councillors in England are women. Britain ranks 39th in the world in terms of women's representation in Parliament.¹

We are calling for:

- At least 50:50 candidates for all political parties in all seats, and specific measures addressing lack of candidates BME and disabled
- Legally binding quotas by Government in all future elections for at least 50:50 candidates in all elections from local government to mayoral elections and national elections
- Commitment to a 50:50 cabinet
- Implementation of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring every political party to collect equality monitoring data on their candidates including in local elections
- Commitment in principle to a Joint Standard of Conduct, protecting candidates during an election campaign
- An independent process with meaningful sanctions to deal with allegations of violence or harassment in all political parties

2. END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Crime Survey² for England and Wales found in the year ending March 2018, an estimated 1.3 million women experienced domestic abuse. In Wales, 1 in 3 women experience some form of violence and abuse in their lifetime.³ It is estimated that

¹ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01250/SN01250.pdf>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018>

³ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

domestic abuse costs over £66 billion in England and Wales.⁴ In 2018-19, there were 106 convictions for rape and 534 convictions for sexual offences in Wales.⁵ Rape charges, prosecutions and charges in England and Wales have fallen to their lowest levels in more than a decade.⁶

We are calling for:

- Reintroduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill as a matter of urgency, ensuring it enables the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention
- Implementation of the ILO convention on violence and harassment to enable all women to work free from violence and harassment
- In all family, criminal or civil proceedings involving domestic abuse, sexual abuse, stalking or harassment:
 - Banning of direct cross-examination
 - Changing the presumption of parental involvement where the parent has a history of perpetrating abuse

3. FAIR FINANCE

We need a finance system that is fair so that women can lead independent lives. The mean full-time gender pay gap is 13.9%.⁷ There is a productivity gap with women working beneath their potential, under-represented in senior roles, and many trapped in low paid part-time work. BME women have seen virtually no progress since the 1990s in closing the gender pay gap with White British men, with a full-time pay gap of 21.4% in the 1990s and 19.6% today.⁸

Between 2010 and 2015 there were £26bn of welfare cuts, £22bn of which were borne by women.⁹ A recent EHRC report found that cumulative changes to tax and social security had a disproportionately negative impact on disabled people, BME people and women.¹⁰

We are calling for:

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf

⁵ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cps-vawg-report-2019.pdf>

⁶ Based on CPS figures obtained through an FOI by the Guardian
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/06/prosecution-rate-in-england-and-wales-falls-to-five-year-low>

⁷ Office for National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2016, Provisional Results, (2016). This data refers to mean hourly pay gaps excluding overtime.

⁸ Anthony Breach and Yaojun Li, 'Gender Pay Gap by Ethnicity in Britain.'

⁹ Fawcett Society, Where's the Benefit, An independent inquiry into Women and Job Seekers Allowance 2015

¹⁰ Poorest Hit Hardest by tax, social security and public spending reforms, 2017, EHRC Independent report

- Lowering of the threshold for statutory gender pay gap reporting to companies with 100+ employees by 2025
- The national living wage to be increased and brought up to the level of the real living wage
- An assessment of the impact of welfare reforms on domestic abuse survivors and an immediate reversal of the two-child tax credit limit
- Split payments as default for Universal Credit and an exemption for survivors, who have a change of circumstances due to violence and abuse, from repaying advance Universal Credit payment
- The abolition of tribunal fees which act as a barrier to justice in sex discrimination and pregnancy discrimination cases
- By end 2020 a detailed and cumulative Equality Impact Assessment on the impact of all tax and social security changes on women and on domestic abuse survivors
- By 2020 provide a 'bridging' pension as an income for women impacted by changes to the state pension
- By 2021 review the legal aid criteria to ensure women can have equal access to legal aid across civil and family court systems

4. CARING RESPONSIBILITIES ARE VALUED AND SHARED

Women run our care economy in the UK. We must change our culture to recognize the enormous value of care and redistribute responsibilities so that men and women take equal responsibility for caring for the elderly and children. For example, parental leave should be shared equally and remuneration for paternity pay should be equalized with maternity pay.

We are calling for:

- By 2021 an increase in paternity leave pay to 90% of full pay and 12 weeks of non-transferable paternity leave to enable both parents to take their full share
- Self-employed people to have equal access to maternity and paternity leave
- Research into how unpaid care work can be recognised through new ways of measuring GDP, as well as initiatives such as Universal Basic Income
- Review the potential for legislation for workers to have 5-10 days paid care leave entitlement per year

5. TACKLING GENDER HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Health commissioning and service delivery must recognize and respond to the needs of diverse women and girls in the UK. Disabled people are more likely to experience health inequalities and major health conditions and are likely to die younger than other people.¹¹ We need to ensure that we tackle health inequalities in three areas: health information and education, health services and health research.

We are calling for:

- 50:50 clinical trials where both women and men equally participate in research trials involving new drugs and therapeutic interventions

¹¹ Being disabled in Britain: a journey less equal, EHRC, 2017

- Compulsory education in schools on menstrual health, reproductive rights and consent
- Equal access to health services for women
- Strengthening of health and safety protections to ensure that employers cannot ignore the health, safety and welfare of women with menopausal symptoms

6. WOMEN'S RIGHTS MAINTAINED AND ADVANCED POST-BREXIT

Many hard-won women's legal rights are currently underpinned by EU law and will be under threat post-Brexit. Equality policies are among the most developed areas of social policy in Europe, and equality is foundational to the European Union. Equal pay for equal work was one of the founding principles in 1957 and it was, and continues to be, embedded in EU Treaties and Directives. EU laws have been underpinned by the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which have promoted and protected women's rights in several areas, including the rights of part-time workers, the rights of pregnant women, and protections for women and girls who experience violence.

As the UN Committee for the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW) has noted in its recent concluding observations, the UK should ensure that 'future changes in legal provisions do not constitute a retrogression in the protection of women's rights and adopt measures to ensure that its domestic legislation keeps pace with progress on women's rights in the European Union.'¹²

We are calling for:

- The incorporation of the UN Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into UK law
- The enshrinement of all the rights women currently enjoy from the EU into domestic law
- A commitment that the devolved nations will continue to receive identical financial support as provided by the EU, through the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund
- The Shared Prosperity Fund to be allocated across the UK by the time of Brexit and that it is re-distributive and maintains a focus on tackling poverty and inequality

This manifesto is endorsed by:

- BAWSO
- Chwarae Teg
- Disability Wales
- Electoral Reform Society, Cymru

¹²Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – Advance unedited version. CEDAW, March 2019. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fGBR%2fCO%2f8&Lang=en

- Llamau
- Soroptimist International
- Women Connect First
- Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
- Women4resources
- Welsh Women's Aid