

FEMINIST SCORECARD 2022

Tracking Welsh Government action to advance
women's rights and gender equality





FOREWORD

Our previous Scorecard was published as we entered what can only be described as an unprecedented global upheaval in the shape of a pandemic. This was a time when the unfair workload placed on women was truly laid bare for all to see; a responsibility that grew as women took on an ever-increasing load as the primary carers of our society. Now, amid a global cost of living crisis, women's workload is once again escalating dangerously.

To reflect these serious setbacks on gender equality, the score in two areas, Fair Finance and Caring Responsibilities, has moved from Amber to Red. Some positive promises have been made, such as the commitment to gender quotas and to a women's health plan in Wales. But due to the limited progress overall, the other areas remain graded as they were in 2020. Despite rhetoric, Wales has some way to go to meet its goal of being the safest place for women in Europe. Lack of improvement for the dire situation faced by women with no recourse to public funds, and the continued absence of a sustainable funding model for specialist services on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV), has led us to include a Red sub-score for these areas.

The pandemic has shown us that gender inequality cannot be compartmentalised and that the little progress we had made was fragile and not strongly embedded. Oxfam Cymru and WEN Wales believe that the Welsh Government should have redoubled their efforts on implementing the Advancing Gender Equality action plan. Instead, at the precise time that work on intersectional gender equality should have been accelerated, the plan was put on ice and progress slowed down, with disastrous consequences for many women in Wales.

Now is the time for Welsh Government to create the role of a Women's Commissioner, who would champion and be the guardian of women in Wales, as the Children's Commissioner and the Older Person's Commissioner are for their respective constituents. The role would provide cross-governmental leadership and help drive out the systemic misogyny and inequality that women in Wales continue to face. If we don't act now, progress on gender equality will be lost for another generation of women.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Fookes'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Catherine Fookes
Director of WEN Wales

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Rees'. The signature is bold and stylized, with a prominent 'S' and 'R'.

Sarah Rees
Head of Oxfam Cymru

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INTRODUCTION

This is the third iteration of Oxfam Cymru and the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales' Feminist Scorecard, a series of snapshots of Welsh Government's performance in six key areas for women's equality in Wales.

Following on from the last scorecard, published in February 2020 just before the pandemic hit the UK, this scorecard includes reflections and lessons from the pandemic as well as progress made against the new Programme for Government published in 2021. It shows clearly that much needs to be done still to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman, and a feminist nation. Whilst Welsh Government has made progress in some areas, in others Covid-19 has thrown into sharp relief the challenges women and girls face and has exacerbated inequalities, particularly for women who have intersecting identities.

The scorecard highlights areas of urgent action, particularly with regard to Fair Finance and Caring Responsibilities, which have both regressed from Amber to Red since the last report. Whilst this regression is partly due to the impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis, it is up to Welsh Government to take swift and decisive action to ensure that women and girls in Wales will not be held back for many years to come.

It is important to note that some of the language, focus and terminology has changed compared with the 2020 report. This reflects our collaborative approach to writing this report. The content and the key terminology used is based on the input from grassroots organisations and communities with whom we work.

FEMINIST SCORECARD 2020/2022

Tracking Welsh Government action to advance women's rights and gender equality

RATING KEY: GREEN = SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS AMBER = SOME PROGRESS RED = LITTLE PROGRESS

FAIR FINANCE

2022 Rating - Red
2020: Rating - Amber



Some positive steps, such as hybrid working, have been made but overall progress has been undone by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The gender pay gap increased and women are still more likely to work part-time or be economically inactive. While some factors lie outside Welsh Government's control, urgent action is needed.

CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

2022 Rating - Red
2020: Rating - Amber



The impact of unequal caring responsibilities has been felt sharply during the pandemic, with sometimes disastrous effects on women's mental health and finances. Welsh Government has made positive commitments around childcare and social care, but the pace of action does not reflect the urgency for change.

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

2022 Rating - Amber/Red
2020: Rating - Amber



Welsh Government provided swift emergency funding during the pandemic, but structurally, much needs to be done to ensure women feel safe in Wales and all VAWDASV survivors can be effectively supported. There is a critical need for sustainable funding for specialist services, especially for women with no recourse to public funds, which scored Red in this section.

GLOBAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS

2022 Rating - Amber
2020: Rating - Amber

Welsh Government's funding programme since 2020 has been welcome and is appropriately targeted to empower overseas partners. However, urgent action is needed to support sanctuary seekers and those affected by climate change globally for Wales to be a nation of sanctuary and global solidarity.



EQUAL REPRESENTATION & LEADERSHIP

2022 Rating - Amber
2020: Rating - Amber



The commitment to gender quotas in the Senedd is a crucial step forward. In local government, women's representation has improved since the 2022 elections but is still far from equal. The pandemic has led to some positive changes in working practices, but much more must be done to ensure political institutions fully reflect Wales's diverse population.

TACKLING GENDER HEALTH INEQUALITIES

2022 Rating - Red
2020: Rating - Red

Welsh Government's recent commitment to a women's health plan is vital as little progress has been made. There are some positive steps, such as the opening of a perinatal Mother and Baby Unit and menstrual well-being being a mandatory element of the new curriculum, but overall the urgency of improving women's health is still not reflected in policy or action.



FAIR FINANCE

SCORE: RED

Jobs and pay equality

There is much positive intention within the Welsh Government to ensure fair and equal finance in Wales. However, much work needs to be done to turn those positive intentions into positive realities in the lives of women.

Financial inequality of women continues to be driven by unequal caring responsibilities and occupational segregation. They continue to be a key factor behind the higher rates of part-time work and economic inactivity among women and this was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. 72% of working mothers worked fewer hours and cut earnings during the first lockdown due to the need to care for and school their children. In 2021, 40.6% of women worked part time, compared to 13.8% of men. Between June 2020 and July 2021, 27.6% of women were economically inactive compared to 21.6% of men. The gender pay gap widened from 11.8% in 2020 to 12.3% in 2021 due to a larger increase in men's hourly wages. The same is not true across the UK as a whole.

72% of working mothers worked fewer hours and cut earnings during the first lockdown due to the need to care for and school their children.

Overall, the Covid-19 crisis has also been an inequality crisis. More men were furloughed overall (44% men vs 35% women). However, women aged 45-54 were over twice as likely to have reduced their hours due to caring responsibilities. Parents were more than twice as likely to report reduced income. Disabled people and those from racialised

communities were more likely to have lost working hours (31% and 48% respectively, vs 23% of the white, non-disabled populations). 18% of women lost their jobs due to business closures vs 11% of men, and 28% of racialised individuals felt they were more likely to be chosen unfairly for furlough compared to 6% of white people. 37% of children living in a household with a disabled person live in relative poverty compared with 24% of children in households with no disabled person. Helping to create equal economic opportunities for marginalised women needs to be a priority for the Welsh Government.

LOSS OF WORKING HOURS DUE TO COVID-19

Disabled people 31%

Racialised communities 48%

White, non-disabled population 23%

The increased flexibility from remote/hybrid working has been positive for many, but it is important to remember that many jobs cannot be done from home and not everyone prefers to work from home. Often these are the very front-line jobs where workers were

most at risk during the pandemic or where women needed to leave work to care for children during lockdowns. Frontline sectors such as retail, social and health care, and childcare and education have workforces that are predominantly female, particularly in the lower paid roles. Mothers in those jobs had to juggle demands of remote schooling, especially during the first lockdown when key worker school hubs were focused on childcare rather than education. 61% of middle-class workers say they wish to continue

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working from home partially or fully, **compared with 33% people from working-class households**. The Welsh Government therefore needs to ensure that investments into new ways of working do not disproportionately favour already advantaged groups over marginalised groups of women.

The statistics above and other generalised data hide the reality for some groups of women. For example, early anecdotal evidence suggests that increased opportunities to work from home have had **a small positive impact** on disabled women's employment rates, but that employment initially seems to be in low-paid work still. Much more work is needed to ensure true fairer finance for disabled women.

Employment rates for white men and women are higher than for racialised men and women, with statistics showing racialised women are most disadvantaged. In 2021, 75% of white men **were in employment** compared with 73% racialised men and 70% white women compared with 56% racialised women. Women from racialised communities face much greater rates of unemployment compared to other groups of women and compared to men from the same communities. More needs to be done to ensure research and evidenced-based policy recognises and understand the experiences of different groups of racialised women as well as those facing intersecting discrimination, for example on the basis of racialisation, disability, and gender.

IN EMPLOYMENT IN 2021 IN WALES

White men 75%

Racialised men 73%

White women 70%

Racialised women 56%

Trans women are another group of women who are likely suffer disproportional economic inequality, but an acute lack of data undermines evidence-based policies to address this. Past reports for Ireland have shown that **51% of trans people were unemployed** in 2016, but we do not have specific data on Wales or indeed the UK.

These figures suggest that the overall picture for women hides the different challenges faced by different groups of women, including disabled women, racialised women and trans women. We are hopeful that Welsh Government's new Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Unit will address some of these issues. But the unit's work needs to include a key focus on gender equality and inequality of women facing intersecting discrimination, to inform a truly intersectional approach to policymaking in everything the Welsh Government does.

Budgets and Taxation

The Welsh Government's commitment to **policy and legislation on pay gaps** and to a **basic income pilot** is greatly welcomed. However, these positive steps do not address the fundamental issues. We believe that to truly address gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps, change is needed at a socio-economic level that addresses the intersecting issues women face.

The Welsh Government needs to make affordable and accessible childcare from the age of six months a priority in its expenditure budget, as much of women's economic inequality comes back to inadequate childcare. This needs to come alongside initiatives

to ensure that employers commit to flexible and part-time working in ways that do not exacerbate the gender pay gap or continue to favour white, non-disabled men. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that undervalued, predominantly female workforces in areas such as education/early years, social care, and healthcare are paid fairly and that local government and private companies in these sectors address low pay. Women are still more likely to be **in work and claiming social security benefits** such as Universal Credit, highlighting the financial issues created for women by low pay and part-time work. 55% of Universal Credit claimants in Wales are women, with 43% of women claimants being in work. While the social security system is outside the Welsh Government's remit, issues with low pay in key state sectors are not. More radical changes are needed in fiscal policy.

**UNIVERSAL CREDIT
IN WALES**

55% of claimants
are women

43% of women
claimants
are in work

In 2022, The Budget Advisory Group for Equality (BAGE) was replaced by the **Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group (BIAG)** with a widened remit including climate and nature emergency. It is crucial that the new group retains a key focus on gender equality and inequality of women facing intersecting discrimination while recognising the impact of climate change on women in Wales and globally.

There are important positives. Some of the measures taken during the pandemic to try to ease the financial impact on children are to be applauded, such as **issuing electronic devices** for remote schooling and free school meal vouchers during term times and **school holidays**. The commitment to expand free school meals to **all primary children** over the next few years is greatly welcome. It is also positive that the Welsh Government has committed to **implementing targets** around gender budgeting. However, progress in this area has been slow and we are yet to see a truly intersectional gender budgeting approach.

Although meaningful action is constrained by the UK social security, taxation and budgetary systems, the Welsh Government should continue to work with third sector and grassroots organisations to find both realistic and innovative solutions that consider the needs of all women.

RECOMMENDATIONS – WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Take meaningful action to achieve the target to reduce the (full-time) gender pay gap to 7% by 2028;**
- **Address the prevalence of women in part-time work through better investment into childcare and social care, so that unpaid care work truly becomes a choice;**
- **Monitor and report annually on the effectiveness of the Economic Action and**

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Employability Plans and Economic Contract in narrowing the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps;

- **Legally require and enforce all public bodies listed in the Well-being of Future Generations Act to report on their gender pay gaps alongside collating and publishing ethnicity, disability and LGBTQ+ pay gaps;**
 - **Make it a requirement that all businesses in Wales accessing business support provide gender pay gap information in line with that of public bodies and ensure that they demonstrate a commitment to advancing equality for all;**
 - **Encourage employers to develop and improve flexible working policies to suit the needs of different employees, including women with caring responsibilities, disabled people and working-class women;**
 - **Integrate an equalities mainstreaming approach across all budgets by 2025;**
 - **Develop tools for analysing the impact of any taxation decisions on women in Wales including investing in data capacity to enable reporting on progress in key indicators;**
 - **Ensure both the Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group (BIAG) and the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Unit include a key focus on gender equality and inequality of women facing intersecting discrimination, to help us understand and address the impact of budget and taxation decisions on all women in Wales;**
 - **Use devolved policy-making powers to introduce a progressive Council Tax system in Wales.**
-

GLOBAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SCORE: AMBER

Wales aims to be a globally responsible nation and we call for it to be a nation that sees global women's rights as a matter of social justice, be it standing in solidarity with women overseas, with those seeking sanctuary within Wales, or acting on climate change as a feminist issue.

Global Solidarity

The Welsh overseas funding programmes that empower overseas partner organisations to lead the way on how funds are being used is very positive and the Welsh Government deserves credit for its strategy and approach. An example of the good practice is the gender equality grant for organisations in Uganda. Organisations within Uganda have chosen to direct that funding to projects on gender-based violence, tree planting, and sustainable livelihood programmes such as women and beekeeping,

However, funding must not remain static. The Welsh Government needs to continue with collaborative partnerships, with partners as equals who lead the application of the funding. The Welsh Government could expand its strategy and input to support the

resources, skills, and abilities of those working in other countries, making efforts not to take a 'white saviour' approach and recognising much of the work to be done is driven by harms caused by imperialistic actions.

The Welsh Government needs to continue with collaborative partnerships, with partners as equals who lead the application of the funding.

The Welsh Government's position on fair trade is welcome but more work needs to be done to ensure supply chains reflect global solidarity. The Social Partnership and Procurement Bill must include global solidarity in general, and human rights and women's rights specifically. The **Welsh Government's commitment** to incorporate the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as the Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (CRPD) is welcomed as this will enshrine strong human rights obligations for women and disabled people in Wales. We would also like to see greater knowledge sharing alongside solidarity with indigenous knowledge, for example between medical professionals and the intersecting issues relating to health inequality. This currently happens with the project on wells run through the **Wales and Africa Health Links Network**, which could act as a model for future work.

The First Minister has been supportive of the calls from the People's Vaccine Alliance to ensure that the Welsh Government does not simply watch while a **vaccine "apartheid"** develops and pledged support to partners in Lesotho, Namibia and Uganda. Still, not enough global solidarity has been shown during the peaks of the Covid-19 pandemic. The gendered aspect of women often being on the frontline and hit the hardest, and the impact on their families, was not given sufficient consideration. Although PPE was sent to other countries, it was not directed based on need but based on contact networks and ease of transportation. For example, Namibia was supplied with **£7.2m PPE equipment from Wales** but it is a wealthy African nation with the resources to source such equipment relatively easily. In future PPE should be sent to those countries that need it most.

Solidarity and partnerships with other countries should involve supporting local infrastructures and knowledge. For example, the Welsh Government could work to support countries in developing their own vaccines rather than perpetuating colonial legacies of dependence by solely **shipping UK vaccines** and healthcare equipment from elsewhere. Local development of medical provisions would also potentially help address mistrust of medical products provided by former colonisers.

Still, not enough global solidarity has been shown during the peaks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Welsh Government's recent recognition of **Wales' role in colonisation** is welcome and now more collaborative connections need to be made. Global solidarity needs to be seen as a matter of social justice to be truly feminist and move away from financial 'help' towards procurement partnerships and holistic ways of working.

Nation of Sanctuary

The Welsh Government has taken a clear position that asylum seekers and refugees are welcome in Wales, and that is to be applauded. The clear rejection of sections of the

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Nationality and Borders Bill is also a positive. Although the Bill still passed in the House of Commons, the position that asylum seekers and refugees are welcome in Wales had important significance for many, most notably those who have sought sanctuary in Wales.

The Social Justice Minister requested in a [letter to the UK Minister for Future Borders](#) and Immigration that the UK Government removes the prohibition on asylum seekers working

in the UK for any individual who had been waiting for six months or more for a Home Office decision. While this is a positive move, it falls short of the Welsh Government's commitment to integration from the day of arrival in its [Nation of Sanctuary Plan](#). The introduction of the [free travel scheme](#) for refugees from March to September 2022 was very welcome and we urge the Welsh Government to retain this provision and expand it to asylum seekers.

The introduction of the free travel scheme for refugees from March to September 2022 was very welcome and we urge the Welsh Government to retain this provision and expand it to asylum seekers.

The Welsh Government has taken some action to address issues of access to education and employment for sanctuary seekers, which is much needed in light of the fact that [30-40% of refugees](#) are facing unemployment. The [ReStart project](#), integration centres and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) hubs are great initiatives, but there is still work to be done. In Cardiff, for example, the hub is based in a college which provides a barrier of transport and childcare – two well-known barriers to learning ESOL or getting an education in Wales that

disproportionately affect women seeking sanctuary¹.

While we welcome work that the Welsh Government has done there must be continued action in the face of the [Nationality and Borders Act 2022](#) and the [Home Office's Rwanda plan](#).

Climate Justice

While the Welsh Government clearly takes the issue of climate change seriously, we would like to see it adopt an approach of climate justice as a feminist issue more clearly. Neither the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 nor the Climate Change (Wales) Regulations 2021 explicitly recognise climate change as a human rights or a women's rights issue and therefore fail to adopt a social justice approach.

Seeing gender and climate justice as integrated issues is vital when women and children may be [14 times more likely to die or be injured](#) in a natural disaster than men. Disabled and trans women are disproportionately impacted by [climate displacement](#), particularly in relation to healthcare.

Seeing gender and climate justice as integrated issues is vital when women and children may be 14 times more likely to die or be injured in a natural disaster than men.

A gender climate justice approach also requires more focus on the rights and lives of indigenous women. This could include specifically addressing supply chains that involve

deforestation which impacts women's livelihoods, lives and rights. The [Wales and Africa programme](#) is a good example of a social justice-based approach that should be extended more widely.

In discussions around the net-zero transition, the lack of inclusion of women's rights is further reflected by a focus on industries that tend to be male-dominated in Wales (for example, agriculture and heavy manufacturing). Research suggests that [investments in the care sector](#) would not only benefit women in Wales, but is also consistent with the transition to a low carbon economy, as jobs in care produce only a small proportion of the emissions of the average current job and use fewer imported inputs. Overall, net-zero policies need to take a global feminist lens when considering trade, investment, and procurement domestically and internationally.

Research suggests that investments in the care sector would not only benefit women in Wales, but is also consistent with the transition to a low carbon economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Conduct human rights and gender equality assessments of existing and emerging trade policies;**
- **Share vaccine technology through the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Covid Technology Access Pool, to reduce the estimated (in 2021) wait of 57 years for everyone to be fully vaccinated;**
- **Support greater number of ESOL Classes and provide free childcare to enable women to attend them;**
- **Include Women's Rights and Global Solidarity with women in the Social Partnership and Procurement Bill;**
- **Commit to training international trading staff in gender equality, safeguarding and ethical procurement;**
- **Recognise and provide appropriate support for climate refugees;**

- **Ensure that the potential of investments in female-dominated, low-carbon sectors such as care and education is adequately considered in the transition to net zero, both domestically and internationally;**
- **Act swiftly to fulfil its commitment to the enshrinement of CEDAW and CRDP principles into Welsh Law and commit to incorporating the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) to strengthen the protection of the rights of women who experience intersecting discrimination.**

CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

SCORE: RED

In 2022, women carry a heavier and unequal workload in caring for children and other family members. The pandemic has made the imbalance worse with serious knock-on effects on women's finances and mental health, while also shining a spotlight on the nation's dependence on women's unpaid care work.

Childcare

In Wales, 86% of single parents are mothers and 63% of mothers in two parent households say they are solely or mainly responsible for childcare (compared with just 17% of fathers). Lack of childcare is one of the most frequently cited barriers to women's employment, resulting in lower economic participation and curtailing women's career options. 73% of Welsh families who do not use formal childcare say they cannot afford to use it. 81% of participants in a 2021 WEN survey did not agree that current childcare provisions in Wales sufficiently support parents, particularly mothers, to enter, remain and progress in employment.

73% of Welsh families cannot afford formal childcare

The current Childcare Offer, which provides 30 hours a week of early education and childcare for parents of three and four-year-olds is a crucial support. But it only becomes available once key decisions about women's working lives have already been made. The UK shared parental leave policy covers the period between a child's birth and first birthday, leaving an evident lack of provisions between ages one to three which is not covered by either UK or Welsh Government provisions. The Flying Start scheme, which is accessible to two-year-olds in certain areas, provides insufficient interim support as it is limited both geographically and in terms of available hours (12.5 per week).

The updated Programme for Government includes a positive commitment to fund childcare for more parents who are in education or training and expand early years provision to all two-year-olds. However, the only expansion announced to date is for 2,500 additional children under the age of four starting September 2022 under the Flying Start scheme. By comparison, there were 28,781 children born in Wales in 2020. Childcare expansion needs to be implemented at pace or will deliver too little too late to reverse the detrimental impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

The Childcare Offer is also seriously limited due to insufficient availability and flexibility and inconsistent provisions across Wales. In 2021, only 6% of Local Authorities (LAs) reported having sufficient childcare for parents working atypical hours in all areas. 15% of LAs lack sufficient provision for families in rural areas across the local

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

6% have sufficient childcare for parents working atypical hours

15% lack sufficient provision for families in rural areas

38% do not have enough childcare for disabled children

authority. 38% of LAs report not having enough childcare for disabled children anywhere in their local authority. This shows that childcare is often unavailable to those who need it most –such as women on insecure, low-paid employment who need childcare outside core hours and are currently being hit hardest by the cost-of-living crisis.

There are currently no plans to extend the offer to mothers who are unemployed, which means mothers may be unable to re-enter employment as childcare responsibilities do not allow them to search and apply for work. It also means the offer, although available to individuals with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), is not currently available to asylum seeking mothers who are not allowed to work, which acts as a barrier for their attendance at ESOL classes and preparation for getting refugee status.

Unpaid Care

While the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of **unpaid care work**, it has also brought to the fore the connections between **care, gender, and poverty**. Prior to the pandemic the Welsh Government recognised that **96% of care work in Wales** was unpaid. Nearly **60% of unpaid carers** in Wales are women.

In the early months of the pandemic 80% of unpaid carers in Wales reported an **increase in their caring work**. It was estimated that unpaid carers were saving the Welsh economy **£33million every day**, yet only 7% of adults were aware that unpaid carers had any legal rights. The same data revealed that 91% of the adults polled in Wales thought that unpaid carers had played an important role during the pandemic. There has undoubtedly been a national care crisis in Wales, with significant financial and mental health impacts. In 2021, **over a third of carers in Wales** were struggling to make ends meet and 34% rated their mental health as bad or very bad.

£33million

The amount unpaid carers save the Welsh economy every day

The Welsh Government has taken some important steps to address these challenges, including its 2021 **Strategy for Unpaid Carers** and the establishment of a Carers Support Fund in response to the financial impact of the pandemic. We particularly welcome the most recent announcement of **£4.5m investment over the next three years**, which includes £300 cost-of-living support grants that are not linked to Carers Allowance, pensions or other benefits. Yet these figures pale in comparison to the **estimated £8.1bn** that unpaid carers already saved the Welsh economy prior to the pandemic.

Unpaid care work is essential for our economy and the well-being of our society, yet it is still chronically undervalued with a detrimental impact on carers. This disproportionately affects women, particularly marginalised women such as single mothers, women who are racialised, and older women. The increase in unpaid care work and the lack of respite for carers during the pandemic must be seen as a priority. A focus on a resumption of support services is an urgent priority. The Welsh Government Strategy is committed to collaboration with unpaid carers, their representatives and service providers and that collaboration is needed now more than ever.

The Paid Care Workforce

Social care is absolutely critical to our economy and society and this was highlighted further by the pandemic. Yet the sector is in crisis, with staff recruitment and retention issues leading to unmet care and support needs as well as **delayed hospital discharges**. This includes the poor support for transitions to adulthood **for young people with learning disabilities** and the **lack of support for disabled people** in line with the Social Services and Well-being in Wales Act 2014. **Six out of seven health boards** in Wales announced, in the second half of 2021, that they would not be able to honour previously agreed care packages.

Six out of seven health boards in Wales will not be able to honour previously agreed care packages

The sector is known for issues with low wages and insecure contracts, as highlighted by the **Fair Work Commission**. The **workforce is 80% female** with racialised women being overrepresented in the lowest-paying, most insecure roles. While the move towards a real living wage is welcome, it needs to be implemented in all areas of the sector, not just for those employed directly by public social care services. Many care services are provided through self-employment contracts with local authorities or private employers where minimum wage is still used. When workers can earn more working in retail, office administration or in private or self-employed cleaning, maintaining an adequately skilled and experienced workforce is hugely problematic.

Many of these concerns apply across the social care and **childcare workforce**. The childcare workforce is predominately female, however racialised women tend to be underrepresented in this sector. The sector struggles with low pay, poor terms and conditions and insecure contracts, leading to staff shortages that ultimately affect the quality of the care and education for children in Wales. **The increase in hourly rates** for childcare providers from £4.50 to £5 per head was a welcome step towards improving the conditions and sustainability of the sector. But it is likely to be insufficient to lead to an improvement in pay and conditions that corresponds to the responsibility of the role or to significantly improve the lack of provisions across Wales.

Affordable, accessible social care and childcare run by well-paid, well-trained staff is a key pillar of gender equality in Wales and should be an issue of central concern in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Invest in a care-led recovery as part of building back greener and fairer and to address the cost-of-living crisis (key overarching recommendation emerging from the above as well as the section on Global Solidarity);**
- **Make the Childcare Offer affordable and accessible for parents of all children from six months;**
- **Invest in nursery and early education provisions to ensure they are accessible to all parents who are eligible, when and where they need them. This should particularly**

address the lack of provision during atypical working hours, provisions for disabled children and those with additional learning needs as well as provision in rural areas;

- Expand childcare provisions to unemployed parents to support them in seeking employment and to asylum seekers to allow them to take ESOL classes and prepare for getting refugee status;
 - Collect robust equality data as part of the evaluation and monitoring of the Childcare Offer to ensure equality of access and eligibility;
 - Contribute to a cultural shift whereby unpaid care work for all ages is recognised and valued appropriately;
 - Ensure unpaid carers are involved in designing and delivering policies and services that affect their lives;
 - Progress and build on existing plans to ensure social care and childcare as a profession is valued and improved, through measures like a sector-wide real living wage, better career progression, support for mental health & well-being of care workers.
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EQUAL REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP

SCORE: AMBER

Senedd

The 2021 Senedd elections again saw an increase in women appointed to the Welsh Labour Government, with 9 out of 14 Cabinet Members being female. The election **further returned:**

- 43% women MSs - an increase of one MS from 2016 but lower than in previous years;
- The first woman MS from a racialised background since devolution, with 3 MSs (5%) from a racialised background overall;
- 3 (5%) openly LGBTQ+ MSs, but no openly trans women or non-binary MS.

Of the 470 candidates for the 2021 Senedd elections, **only 31% were women** (29% among constituency candidates and 32% on regional lists). Women's overproportionate success clearly demonstrates their ability to win elections once they have been selected as candidates. But it also shows that more needs to be done to ensure women as well as other underrepresented candidates stand for election in the first place.

% OF WOMEN MSs

Labour 57%

Plaid Cymru 38%

Conservative 19%

Results vary greatly **between different parties**, with women making up 57% of Labour MSs, 38% of Plaid Cymru MSs and 19% of Conservative MSs. This shows that women's representation in the Senedd is highly dependent on the voluntary initiative of individual parties, such as Labour's use of all-women-shortlists. While such

initiatives are laudable, they cannot protect equal representation in a robust and long-term manner.

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To address these issues, the [Diverse5050 Campaign](#) has called for legally binding diversity and gender quotas as part of an electoral reform process that delivers an enlarged Senedd. The [joint position statement](#) by the First Minister and Plaid Cymru Leader made a very promising commitment to introduce legally binding gender quotas as part of a Senedd expansion from 60 to 96 members. This has also been endorsed by report of the [Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform](#), which was recently approved by the Senedd.

However, further work is needed around other mechanisms to encourage the election of a more diverse Senedd, such as introducing job-sharing opportunities, retaining hybrid working provisions, supporting candidates with caring expenses as well as robust measures to support the election of women who are racialised, disabled, and/or LGBTQ+. Globally, [intersectionally embedded quotas](#) are emerging as best practice to ensure diverse representation across different protected characteristics and ultimately the Welsh Government should work towards these as the gold standard. Such quotas use intersectional demands within group-based quotas, for instance, through requiring gender parity within quotas for other characteristics, e.g. within a 20% quota for disabled people, an intersectional requirement could ask that half of these candidates need to be men and half of them women.

Local Government

The 2022 local elections returned some positive results. Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan became the first councils to achieve gender balance. Overall, [36% of councillors](#) returned by the 2022 elections were women, an increase of 8% from 2017. The council with the lowest proportion of women councillors is now Ceredigion with 18%, followed by Pembrokeshire with 22%.

Again, there is great variation [between different parties](#). Labour was leading the way with 44% of elected councillors being women, followed by the Liberal Democrats (35%), Plaid Cymru (34%), Conservatives (29%), Independents (26%) and the Green Party (25%).

Overall, the results showed a positive impact of the Wales Local Government Association's (WLGA) [Diversity in Democracy](#) programme. The programme saw councils across Wales adopt diversity declarations and action plans ahead of the 2022 elections, with some like Monmouthshire committing to a [gender parity target](#). The permanent enshrinement of remote working in the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act](#) is another positive step that provides better access for women with caring responsibilities and disabled people.

Yet, there is still much work left to do to ensure local authorities are representative of the communities they serve, not only in terms of gender but also for racialised, LGBTQ+ and disabled communities. [Wider encouragement for job-sharing](#) is imperative for helping more women and other marginalised groups into local politics. In addition, better data is urgently needed as a lack of reliable candidate diversity data at the local and national level makes it difficult to monitor progress.

% OF WOMEN ELECTED COUNCILLORS

Labour 44%
Liberal Democrats 35%
Plaid Cymru 34%
Conservatives 29%
Independents 26%
Green Party 25%

Public Sector Boards

The percentage of women appointed and reappointed to **boards in Wales** was 48.5% in 2020/21, down 15% from the peak of 63.5% in 2018/19. The percentages of people who are racialised, disabled or identify as LGBTQ+ were each below 5% in 2020/21. Again, this falls below earlier figures such as 8.1% of racialised board members in 2019/20 and 7.6% of disabled board members in 2017/18. For each of these characteristics, figures vary greatly from year to year, showing that progress has not been linear.

The launch of the Welsh Government's **Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments**, together with the **Year 1 Action Plan**, in 2020 was set to improve this. We were pleased to see that the **Strategy** recognised and seeks to alter the poor experience that many women from marginalised groups had on boards. Specific actions are particularly welcome, such as challenging barriers faced by protected group and making the appointment process more transparent and accessible. The strategy further includes a commitment to improve data collection, including intersectional data. It also raises the option of setting targets across all boards for racialised, disabled and LGBTQ+ people, in addition to the existing 2020 target of 50% women in public life.

48.5% *Number of women appointed and reappointed to boards in Wales 2020/21*
15% *decrease compared to 2018/19*

Given the mixed success in recent years and the continued lack of intersectional data, these steps are urgently needed. Yet at the same time as improving data collection, the Welsh Government needs to be more proactive about implementing programmes to support and encourage more women, of all intersections, into leadership positions. More work is needed to address unconscious bias in leadership and to make the appointment process more transparent and accessible.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Ensure the Senedd Reform Act contains legally binding gender quotas with sanctions for non-compliance;**
- **Ensure that political parties have due regard to the diversity of their candidates lists representing all protected characteristics, including race/ethnic minority status, disability, age, sexuality and gender identity;**
- **Explore the introduction on intersectionally embedded quotas, in line with emerging global best practice to ensure fair representation of disabled women, racialised women, LGBTQ+ women and younger women;**
- **Introduce legislation that permits job-sharing candidates in the next Senedd election;**
- **Extend the legal enshrinement of remote working to the Senedd level;**
- **Provide childcare facilities in the Senedd;**

- **Extend the Access to Elected Office fund to cover caring expenses and explore how it can be expanded to support candidates with other protected characteristics, in particular socio-economic disadvantage;**
 - **Encourage executive job-sharing in local government to be used by a wide range of elected members, not only women;**
 - **Continue to support the Equal Power Equal Voice mentoring programme to support women and other underrepresented groups into political and public life;**
 - **Improve the collection of candidate diversity data across the Senedd, local government and public boards.**
-

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

SCORE: AMBER / RED for women with no recourse to public funds and sustainable funding

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) remains a key concern that disproportionately affects women and is primarily perpetrated by men. Across England and Wales, 73% of domestic abuse crimes, and 93% of crimes of sexual offences **are perpetrated against women**. In Wales, **only 28% of women** feel very safe walking alone after dark compared to 48% of men.

The pandemic saw an increase in VAWDASV in Wales. Data from Welsh Women's Aid showed a 22% increase in contacts from survivors and 43% increase in contact from concerned others to the Live Fear Free Helpline in 2021. Due to a lack of capacity or resources, neither refuge nor community-based services could match the increased demand, leading to a 22% and 23% increase in the number of survivors who could not be supported by these settings.

There was also a **significant increase** in the number of survivors who had to be refused from refuge as their specialist support needs could not be met – a 61% increase in refusal for support needs around mental health and a 27% increase for support needs around substance addiction. Compared to the previous year, the number of survivors who were refused due to limited or no recourse to public funds increased by 29%.

There is a lack of specialist provision both in terms of staff, refuges, and information for disabled women who may have accessibility needs or be dependent on their abuser as their carer. **Women with learning disabilities and neurodivergent women** may also find themselves receiving inappropriate services or inaccessible information, yet they may

ACROSS ENGLAND & WALES

73% of domestic abuse crimes

93% of crimes of sexual offences

ARE AGAINST WOMEN

also be at increased risk from targeted abuse and violence. Hate crime against trans women is a further key concern, with [half of trans people](#) having experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in 2017.

Overall, specialist organisations report that current short-term funding models continue to cause [issues with recruitment and retention of staff](#), in turn affecting quality in

continuity of support and care. Short-term funding prohibits much needed coordination for preventative work and on responses to the long-term negative impacts of VAWDASV.

% increase of survivors refused from refuge as specialist support needs could not be met:

61% MENTAL HEALTH

27% SUBSTANCE ADDICTION

Across the UK, the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) was a significant step forward with many provisions applying to Wales. The Act creates a cross-government statutory definition of domestic abuse and strengthens rules on specific forms of VAWDASV. But it includes disappointing gaps, most significantly the failure to safeguard and support women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

An important achievement of the UK Act is the recognition that children living in abusive households are victims in their own right. It is crucial that this recognition is implemented across social services and courts in Wales. [Research from Scotland](#) also demonstrates that social services can fail to acknowledge the experience of mothers in the context of domestic abuse interventions. The failure to support mothers can be especially acute in the context of NRPF where mothers' needs for housing and safety [are not addressed](#).

The Welsh Government's refreshed [VAWDASV Strategy for 2022-26](#) brings some welcome improvements, including a focus on prevention, cultural change and collaborative work across governments and the public and private sector. We especially welcome the commitment to intersectionality and coordination across policy areas like substance misuse, housing, social services and education. But in light of the continuing lack of a sustainable funding model and the woefully insufficient support for survivors with NRPF, this year's scorecard contains a specific red rating to highlight the urgent need for action in these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Prioritise the establishment of a secure and sustainable funding model for VAWDASV specialist services including making clear how additional funds will benefit women with complex needs, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women and 'by and for' specialist services for racialised women;**
- **Ensure the commitment to joined-up working across substance misuse, housing, social services and education is reflected on the ground, extends to the legal system and is supportive, rather than punitive for mothers leaving abuse;**

- Urgently develop a Welsh solution to supporting survivors with no or limited recourse to public funds;
 - Provide comprehensive and relevant information provided in a variety of formats on the full range of services available to help victims and survivors navigate the fragmented system of current services;
 - Ensure the VAWDASV Strategy's commitment to intersectionality is meaningfully embedded to ensure the voice of marginalised survivors can feed in at the highest level.
-

TACKLING GENDER HEALTH INEQUALITIES

SCORE: RED

The picture around women's health has improved very little since the last scorecard. Women continue to be more likely to have a long-term health condition, are more likely to rate their general health as "bad" or "very bad" and to report that their daily activities are limited by poor health. Covid-19 restrictions have compounded pre-existing health inequalities and further reduced access to healthcare as procedures were postponed and waiting lists became significantly longer.

While the pandemic has exacerbated the disparity, the driving factors behind it remain unaddressed. Women are more likely to receive delayed diagnosis and care across a range of conditions, including heart attacks. Their health issues continue to be misdiagnosed or dismissed due to a combination of unconscious bias and normalisation of troubling symptoms like pelvic pain, hormone-mediated mental health symptoms or hot flushes. A 2020 study found that the UK has the largest women's health gap among the G20, the countries with the largest economies in the world. Across Wales and the UK, medical trainees may spend as little as six weeks on women's health across a three-year course.

A 2020 study found that the UK has the largest women's health gap among the G20

A 2019 report by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) recommended the creation of women's health plans across the UK to address the areas of unmet need. Such work has been completed in Scotland and is well underway in England. The Welsh Government committed to follow suit in May 2022, announcing a 10-year plan on women's health to be published in autumn. This is a positive signal as the plan is sorely needed to provide a programme of health services for all stages of life that focuses on the specific needs of women. The announcement follows the publication of a Quality Statement for the Health of Women, Girls and those Assigned Female at Birth. The statement, which was co-produced by a coalition of patients, clinicians, professional bodies and health charities provides an excellent overview of what the Welsh Government must do to make real progress tackling gender health inequalities.

Research and Education

Women continue to be **under-represented in medical research** which results in a lack of clinical understanding of how conditions affect them differently. Diagnostic models for conditions that affect women and men must cease to be based solely on men's symptomatology (for example, cardiac disease, heart attacks, autism, abdominal aortic aneurysm) and white bodies (for example, skin rashes, gum disease, jaundice). The Welsh Government and companies conducting clinical trials have a responsibility to ensure trials recruit equal numbers of women and men, and a proportionate number of differing ethnicities.

Women continue to be under-represented in medical research

Following the launch of the **Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan**, the Welsh Government has taken positive steps to ensure periods are understood, accepted and normalised. It launched **Bloody Brilliant**, a website, an online period health resource for young people and made menstrual health and well-being over the life course a mandatory element of the new **Curriculum for Wales**. The focus must now be on monitoring the quality of that teaching to ensure this is provided in a consistent and inclusive manner that debunks myths and encourages openness rather than reinforces taboos.

Access to Healthcare

All women in Wales should have equal access to the health care services they need, regardless of geographic location and other demographics. Unfortunately, this is still not the reality for many, including disabled women, racialised women, and trans and nonbinary people. Disabled people made up **68% of all deaths** involving Covid-19 in early 2020 and **63% of disabled women** did not attend their cervical screening appointment because of their disability. Black women are over four times more likely to die in childbirth and to die **from a Covid-19 related death than white women**. Women from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and mixed ethnic background also had a higher risk of death involving Covid during the pandemic. Waiting times for initial appointments in Wales' only **gender identity clinic** range between two and two and a half years, leaving many trans and nonbinary people without access to essential services. Many trans men report finding access to gynaecological services very challenging as messaging is often geared towards cisgender women.

Information is not always available in accessible formats with inclusive language. There is a need to improve social and cultural understanding and challenge unconscious bias among professionals, as well as training to ensure equal access for all women is provided through appropriate communication.

Maternity care has been a **difficult experience for many women** during the pandemic and sometimes has had serious mental health impacts. Whilst some health boards were quick to remove restrictions on visits to maternity units, others retained them **until February 2022** and women were undergoing induction processes alone as late as April 2022. Staffing issues in maternity care have been **exacerbated by the pandemic** and must be resolved while addressing the rate of midwives currently **leaving the profession**.

Information is not always available in accessible formats with inclusive language.

FEMINIST SCORECARD 2022

2022 saw the opening of [the first perinatal mother and baby unit](#) in Swansea Bay. This is a crucial step towards ensuring women can receive specialist mental health support without being isolated from their infants. But more units are needed to avoid geographical divides and allow women to remain in proximity to their support networks.

There is still no dedicated recurrent miscarriage unit in Wales to address the high level of distress and lack of support that many women experience in this situation. The lack of this provision particularly impacts Black women, who are [40% more likely to miscarry](#) than white women.

10% *Number of women of reproductive age that Endometriosis affects*
9 *Number of years it takes to be diagnosed in Wales*

Women's health conditions are still not being treated as a priority by the Welsh healthcare system. Endometriosis affects [10% of women](#) of reproductive age in the UK. Wales has [the longest period of time](#), at nine years, to diagnosis for endometriosis in the UK. The recruitment of specialist endometriosis nurses in each health board is an important step forward, but more needs to be done to reduce diagnostic times and to support women living with endometriosis.

Due to a lack of professional training as well as public education, access to appropriate menopause services remains a postcode lottery for many women in Wales. While increased numbers of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) prescriptions suggest some improvement in public and professional understanding,

[recent HRT shortages](#) have led to extreme anxiety for women with some having to [restrict their usage](#) or borrow medication from friends. The issuing of a [Serious Shortage Protocol \(SSP\)](#) to allow pharmacists the flexibility to safely substitute high-demand products with appropriate alternatives has helped the situation and the Menopause Task and Finish Group is to be welcomed.

[Worsening symptoms and lack of access to treatment](#) were of major concern to women living with chronic or recurrent health conditions in Wales, alongside deteriorating mental health. Overall, women in Wales experienced [worse levels of mental health problems](#) than men after the onset of the pandemic, [due to issues](#) such as the uncertainty around work, managing childcare and home schooling, money, and the nature of the crisis itself. This was during a time when [one in five people in Wales](#) reported being unable to get the mental health support they needed. Further research is needed to fully understand the longer-term impact of this, but the situation is unlikely to improve for many women who now suffer under the continuing pressure of the cost-of-living crisis.

Worsening symptoms and lack of access to treatment were of major concern to women living with chronic or recurrent health conditions in Wales.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Prioritise the development and implementation of a women and girls' health plan for Wales that is informed by the Women's Health Coalition's quality statement and**

-
- co-produced with women who have lived experience of various health conditions;
- Invest in high quality research into women’s health and treatment and ensure that Wales-based clinical trials have a 50:50 gender split;
 - Make menopause the subject of a dedicated Public Health Wales campaign and ensure there is a menopause specialist available in every GP surgery in Wales;
 - Open at least two dedicated recurrent miscarriage clinics in Wales;
 - Open an independent perinatal mental health unit for mother and babies in North Wales;
 - Improve endometriosis healthcare in Wales through a comprehensive and up-to-date set of guidelines, public awareness-raising and allocation of appropriate funding;
 - Increase funding for the Welsh Gender Service;
 - Ensure all patient facing health care practitioners receive mandatory training to include specific health conditions and processes related to the health needs of people with protected characteristics;
 - Improve data collection and mental health provisions to understand and address the longer-term impact of the pandemic on the mental health of women in Wales.

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Welsh Refugee Coalition

Welsh Women's Aid

Researched and written by Laura Shobiye, PhD researcher

Edited by Dr Jessica Laimann, WEN Wales

METHODOLOGY

For each policy area, we considered relevant Welsh Government statements, the Programme for Government, legislation, policies and practice, examined evidence from specialists in each field, analysed statistics where available and spoke to experts in each of the fields. We are very grateful to everyone who shared their time, knowledge, and data. We rated each area using a traffic light system (red, amber and green), indicating the level of progress towards equality for women and girls in Wales.

ABOUT WEN WALES

Our vision is a Wales free from Gender Discrimination.
Join our coalition to help deliver that vision.

<https://wenwales.org.uk/join-us/>

Charity number: 1145706

Company number: 07891533

ABOUT OXFAM

At Oxfam, we put women at the heart of all we do to help
end the injustice of poverty for everyone, for good.

<https://oxfamapps.org/cymru/>

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