

10 November 2022

Dear Members of the Equality and Social Justice Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of the **Gender Network**, a policy forum of 50 organisations, activists and academics that aim to strengthen women's rights and gender equality for all women and girls in Wales.

On 5th October 2022 the Gender Network held a meeting on the **impact of the cost-of-living crisis on women's rights**, with a particular focus on women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination.

I would like to draw to your attention the following core themes that emerged in the discussion:

- **Women are at the centre of the cost-of-living crisis.** This is largely due to the strong link between caring responsibilities and financial inequality. For instance, almost half (46%) of single parents live in poverty, with around 86% of these being women.
- **We urgently need investments in childcare and social care** as an economically sound recovery stimulus that prevents more women and children from falling into poverty and improves conditions for those that have been worst affected.
- Rising costs make women more vulnerable to being trapped in abusive situations. **Women who experience intersecting discrimination**, including disabled women, ethnic minority women, trans women, and women with no recourse to public funds, are being hit hardest by rising costs.
- Rising costs are affecting support accommodation providers for survivors of VAWDASV. **There is a need for Welsh Government to be flexible to accommodate rising bills because estimates have been based on previous years.**
- **Many food banks are only open during working hours and are therefore not accessible to an increasing number of women who are experiencing in-work poverty.** There is, therefore, a need for more streamlined information on what support is available for people who are struggling financially during these times. Local authorities should actively advertise the support available.
- **Welsh Government should use gender budgeting and progress the recommendations laid out in the Gender Equality Review**, to ensure budgetary decisions responding to the cost of living crisis, and policies and laws in general, do not disproportionately impact women or favour men.

It clearly emerged that women who experience intersection discrimination face additional challenges from the cost-of-living crisis. For example, participants highlighted the following challenges for ethnic minority women and disabled women:

- Many ethnic minority women who have been working have faced **tremendous difficulties with Universal Credit (UC)**, especially women over 50 and single mothers. They often worked part-time and UC affected income, rent, council tax reductions, and carers allowance without clear communication about these impacts. Many have left work and cancelled their carers allowance as a result.
- Disabled homeowners struggle to keep up with mortgage payments and face the additional challenge that their homes may have adaptations that they need, making it hard to relocate. **There has also been a notable increase in ableist hate speech on social media**

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targeting disabled people in receipt of benefits. There is a need for Welsh Government to intervene to challenge these misconceptions.

- **In the context of social care, there is a need for additional support for equipment maintenance and running costs, which is not currently provided.** With rising costs, these could be very expensive, and many people were unable to use their equipment as a result.

I would like to meet with you to explore how we can work together to ensure that the response to the rising costs of living leaves no woman in Wales behind. I would be grateful if your office could contact me at jessica@wenwales.org.uk to arrange a suitable date for a meeting.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Laimann

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