



Response to the Draft Budget 2011-15

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1.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation whose mission is to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change'. The organisation was established in 1983 and continues to focus its efforts on working with and women and through community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities. WRDA is a membership organisation with over 400 members comprised of Women's Groups, Organisations, and individual members.

2.

Paragraph 1.2 of the Draft Budget states this draft is consistent with an emerging draft Programme for Government. However, as this is not published as yet, it makes it extremely difficult to respond to such a generalised, high-level budget. Without information on the strategic priorities for government, it is extremely difficult to determine what services and funding areas are to be reduced or cut altogether. The Draft Budget lacks clarity and is dependent on the various Departments to identify services and areas to be affected by the reduction in funds. What will be affected is also unclear in many of the departmental budget proposals.

3.

WRDA is concerned that much of this budget will impact disproportionately upon women. The Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are not complete therefore it is difficult to know if there are any measures in hand to alleviate the negative impact upon women. Due to the brevity of any gender assessment and the lack of proposals to deal with the disproportionate impact on women, Professor Tomlinson of Queen's University suggests that the Executive could be "open to legal challenge for failing to have due regard to equality of opportunity"¹. Women, throughout the United Kingdom, have already been disproportionately affected with the social security cuts imposed by the Westminster government. Research undertaken by the House of Commons Library shows that of the £8 billion of cuts and changes to tax and welfare payments, 72 per cent will be shouldered by women, in comparison to 28 per cent by men².

4.

WRDA notes the mention of the Social Investment Fund to help disadvantaged communities and the Social Protection Fund to assist those most in need. However, the lack of detail around these funds is disconcerting, especially the Social Protection Fund, as it appears that this could be bid for by departments thus diluting any efficacy that this might have. We would like to see these funds being used to proportionately

¹ Tomlinson, M. And Kelly, G. (2011) *Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: Response to Northern Ireland's Draft Budget*

² House of Commons Library (July 2010) *Gender Audit of Budget*

alleviate the negative impacts of the Budget among disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

5.

At a time when the coalition government are placing an emphasis on getting more people into work, including lone parents (compulsory when the youngest child is seven), we are troubled to notice the lack of any cross-cutting issues such as the childcare strategy within the budget and departmental plans. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)³ identified a lack of appropriate childcare as the single biggest barrier to women's participation in education, training and work, as well as public and political life. This is a matter of real concern as we remain uncertain of how any progress will be made on this issue.

6.

Public spending cuts are estimated to lead to a loss of 38,000 jobs, half of which will be from the public sector.⁴ Due to women making up 2/3 of the public sector workforce, this will inevitably have a disproportionate effect upon women. Women make up 51.6% of total Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and are concentrated in the lower paid jobs - 76% of women are in a low pay grade (less than grade 5)⁵. The NICS pay freeze is likely to disproportionately affect women despite the annual payment of £250 to those earning less than £21,000 as this payment is much lower than the annual rate of inflation.

7.

As many private sector enterprises are dependent on public sector contracts, the loss/reduction of these is undoubtedly going to increase job losses in the private sector. As women are often found in lower paid and part-time employment, it is a matter of concern that women will bear the brunt of many of these cuts and that this will result in an increase to the numbers of women living in poverty, which in turn will impact on child poverty. Of those paid less than £7 per hour in Northern Ireland, 59% are women⁶.

8.

WRDA call upon the Executive and DFP in particular to undertake a full and comprehensive equality impact assessment to ascertain the real impact the spending

³ H McLaughlin (2009) *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*, Report written on behalf of WCRP, pg 37.

⁴ Tomlinson, M. And Kelly, G. (2011) *Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: Response to Northern Ireland's Draft Budget*

⁵ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/UKhtmls/NICS.htm>

⁶ <http://www.poverty.org.uk/i51/index.shtml?2#g2>

proposals will have on women. This will enable the Executive to put measures in place to minimise the disproportionate impact of the Budget is likely to have on this significant and potentially vulnerable group. We urge the Executive to ensure that cross-cutting issues such as the Childcare Strategy and the Child Poverty Strategy are included in spending plans and are stipulated as a priority for our devolved government.