



National Assembly of Women

Bridge House, Newport Street, Hay-on-Wye, Powys HR3 5BG
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Affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation - an NGO with consultative status with ECOSOC at the United Nations and registered in the Special Register of International Labour Organisations (ILO)

EMERGENCY MOTION FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 7TH NOVEMBER 2020

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, women were disproportionately affected by 10 years of government austerity policies. Women constitute the majority of people living in poverty, are more likely to be in low paid or insecure employment and struggling with debt. Women carry out the majority of unpaid work, caring for children, elderly and vulnerable adults and are at a higher risk of domestic violence. The Covid-19 pandemic and the Government's disastrous handling of the crisis has compounded these problems.

- **Health and social care**

77% of health workers and 88% of social care workers are women. The shortage and unequal distribution of appropriate personal protective equipment placed them and their families at risk, particularly for BAME staff. Six in ten health workers killed by Covid-19 in the first phase were from BAME communities.

- **NHS funding and staffing levels**

Years of underfunding of the NHS, staff shortages and privatisation risked our NHS being overpowered by the demands placed on it during the pandemic. NHS workers, including outsourced departments, cleaners and catering staff tirelessly worked long hours and on wages that do not reflect their social worth during this pandemic.

- **Social care provision**

The shocking state of our social care provision was starkly exposed during the Covid-19 crisis with over 20,000 care home residents dying as a result of the virus between March and June 2020. The plethora of private care providers made it difficult to co-ordinate the distribution of PPE and ensure the safety of residents and staff.

- **Young women workers**

The closure of restaurants, retail shops and leisure facilities has affected young women workers to a greater extent than young men - 36% compared to 25% [Institute of Fiscal Studies]. These sectors already operate on low wages so coping on reduced money during the furlough or risk of future redundancy affects women more than men.

- **Domestic abuse**

Calls to the Domestic Abuse Helpline have increased by 25% since the lockdown in March 2020. The Government already estimated that the societal cost of domestic abuse is £66 million each year. The overwhelming majority of those suffering domestic abuse are women – 1.6 million women a year ending March 2019 [ONS] Funding for refuges falls far short of what is urgently needed to support this desperate demand for help.



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▪ **Benefits and Universal Credit**

The benefit system, particularly the roll-out of Universal Credit, was a shambles prior to the lockdown. In July 2019 there were 2.3 million people on Universal Credit of which 53% were women, By April 2020 this had risen to 4.2 million. [Gov.UK]. The huge fall in household income has inevitably led to a massive rise in child poverty.

▪ **Women's employment**

There has been little change in the gender pay gap since 2012 [Office of National Statistics] and despite it being grounds for unfair dismissal 54,000 women a year may lose their job due to pregnancy or maternity. As the lockdown is eased women's employment rights are likely to be at even greater risk. Employers should be mandated to set out their health and safety policies in respect of social distancing and appropriate PPE where needed, fully involving trade unions and/or the Health & Safety Executive. Employees should be free from intimidation in exercising their employment rights if they believe they are at risk. Years of funding cuts to local authorities and the HSE must be reinstated to enable and enforce this.

The National Assembly of Women rejects the corroding values associated with rampant consumerism and avaricious individualism. We have seen how local people have come together to support each other during the pandemic and applaud this desire to act collectively in the interests of the wider community.

We will oppose any attempt by the Government to use austerity as a way out of the economic downturn and demand that the economy is rebuilt through growth including, but not exclusively the following:

1. Investment in environmentally and socially useful industries, businesses and social enterprise including bringing back into public ownership essential utilities and transport.
2. A substantial increase in funding for the NHS. A halt to privatisation and bringing back in-house previously outsourced services. A full salary review and reinstatement of bursaries for student doctors, nurses and other health professionals.
3. The reinstatement of the legal duty and necessary funding for local councils to provide social care and give them the power to take over care providers, employing staff on comparable NHS pay and conditions.
4. A full review of the Universal Credit and sickness benefit schemes to create a strong social security system that ensures people can live without slipping into debt and/or poverty.
5. Fully funded free child care provision including for early years; before/after school provision with proper staffing levels and training support.
6. Funding to support specialist Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) providers and a review of police and criminal justice procedures relating to VAWG.

Motion to be moved by the Executive.

President: Anita Wright; Secretary: Sandra Durkin; Treasurer: Carolyn Simpson

Vice Presidents: Dame Vera Baird QC, Baroness Rita Donaghy OBE, Alice Mahon, Gloria Mills CBE, Frances O'Grady, Ann Scargill