



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P WINTER 2025/6

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women's budget group

wbg analysis of the november 2025 budget

THE Chancellor's second Budget introduced some positive steps to tackle the cost of living. However, to make a material difference to living standards, bolder measures were needed, and these could have been funded through more ambitious changes to the tax system.

The Budget 2025 was presented as part of a plan to "rebuild the economy", although the main economic indicators and public opinion do not appear particularly optimistic. Inflation has fallen but remains above the 2% target, hitting low-income households and women the hardest, while rising unemployment and slowing wage growth continue to squeeze real incomes.

Lifting the two-child limit is one of the most significant policy decisions in this Budget and is expected to lift nearly half a million children out of poverty by the end of this Parliament. Increases to the minimum wage will also support those in low-paid jobs, most of whom are women, but the decision not to uprate the Local Housing Allowance will intensify rent pressures – particularly for women, who already spend a larger share of their income on housing.

This Budget raises additional revenue mainly by extending the freeze on income tax thresholds until 2030/31. Other measures, such as the High Value Council Tax Surcharge and higher taxes on dividends, savings, and property income, acknowledge the need for fairer taxation of wealth, but only go a small way towards equalising the treatment of income from employment and wealth. More ambitious tax reform could raise greater revenue in a simpler and more progressive way.

key policy decisions

abolishing the two-child limit

The decision to scrap the two-child limit on the Child Element of Universal Credit is a landmark step towards tackling child poverty in the UK. Around 450,000 children will be lifted out of poverty by 2029/30 due to this policy change, restoring dignity, hope, and opportunity to hundreds of thousands of families, particularly single parents (most of them single mothers), who currently make up half of the households hit by the limit.

However, some families subject to the benefit cap will not receive the full entitlement at the end of the two-child limit. The Government has announced that the benefit cap will not be increased in line with inflation, representing a real-terms cut for households affected, many of whom are already facing significant financial pressure.

freeze of local housing allowance

We are disappointed that this Budget failed to commit to permanently re-linking

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to local rents. LHA is the benefit that helps private renters with their rent costs under Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and freezing it while rents surge is concerning. A 2020 equality-impact assessment found that 52% of claimants experiencing an LHA shortfall were single women, two-thirds of whom had dependent children. As of April 2025, the average rent for a one-bedroom flat takes up around 47% of women's median earnings, compared with 34% for men. Restoring LHA to at least the 30th percentile of local rents would not only ease rent burdens but also reduce child poverty.

increase in the national living wage (NLW) and national minimum wage (NMW)

Raising the NLW in line with earnings and the NMW above headline inflation is particularly significant for women, who are twice as likely as men to be in low-paid work and continue to bear the brunt of rising prices. The boost will help put more money directly into women's pockets at a time when low pay remains a major barrier to financial security and independence. However, the rise in minimum wages also increases pressure on sectors that already operate under tight margins, especially in care, hospitality, and other female-majority labour-intensive industries.

freeze of income tax thresholds until 2030/31

The freeze on Income Tax thresholds and the National Insurance secondary threshold will raise the lion's share of additional revenue. It is a pity the Chancellor chose fiscal drag over earlier plans to increase income tax rates. A one percentage-point increase in each tax rate would have raised a similar amount and been fairer by ensuring those with higher incomes pay more proportionately. 63% of the people who will now pay taxes due to the freeze, but would not have paid taxes if the rates increased, are women.

additional tax on high-value properties, dividends, savings and income from rent

Chancellor Rachel Reeves introduced a High Value Council Tax Surcharge on homes over £2 million from April 2028, expected to raise £400 million in 2029/30 and shift more tax burden onto wealthier property owners. She also increased taxes on dividends, savings, and property income by two percentage points to ensure asset income is more fairly taxed. These measures are steps towards greater fairness, but they remain limited and highlight the need for a comprehen-

sive reform of Council Tax and effective taxation of wealth.

health and social care

The Chancellor announced 250 new Neighbourhood Health Centres, efficiency savings, £355 million for NHS technology, and a one-year freeze on prescription charges. Although these are welcome measures, they do not constitute major new investments in the NHS. Investment in health and social care remains insufficient, particularly for adult social care, where delays continue to block hospital discharges and disproportionately affect women, as unpaid carers, care workers and care receivers. The government's planned Casey Review into adult social care, with the Phase 1 report due in 2026, underscores the need for long-term reform to establish a national care service and address the significant economic and social costs of the current system.

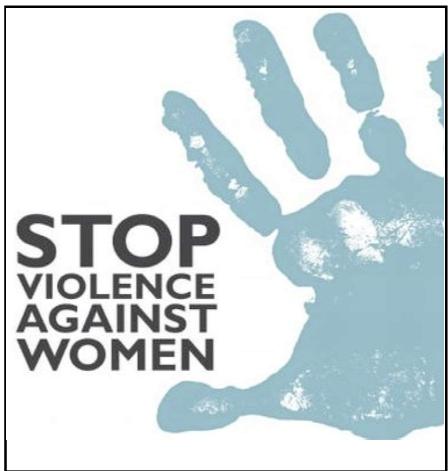
violence against women and girls

The Budget made no mention of measures to tackle violence against women and girls, putting the government's promise to halve VAWG at risk. Specialist women's services remain underfunded, with long waiting lists and short-term funding making it hard for organisations, especially those supporting Black, minoritised, migrant, Deaf, Disabled, and LGBT+ survivors, to provide consistent care. Without a clear, long-term strategy, initiatives like embedding domestic abuse specialists in emergency services or fast-tracking rape cases risk being piecemeal, leaving survivors without reliable access to safe housing, financial independence, legal support, or protection from immigration-related barriers.

Tax is important because it raises revenue that can be used to fund public services and our social security system. Unless the Chancellor is willing to modify her fiscal rules, fair taxation is the only way to sustain public services and ensure individuals contribute fairly to society. Since women rely more on public services due to structural gender inequalities and the unequal distribution of unpaid care, progressive taxation that funds public services and taxes is an important tool to reduce gender inequality.

fairer taxation of wealth

- Wealth inequality has grown faster than income inequality in recent years. Since men on average hold more wealth than women, under-taxing it reinforces gender disparities.
- A wealth tax of 2% on assets over £10 million would raise up to £24 billion a year.
- All forms of income and capital gains should be taxed at the same level as earnings.
- The system of Inheritance and Capital Transfer Taxes should be



reformed so that lifetime receipts, rather than bequests, are progressively taxed at income tax rates.

reform to personal taxes

- For the income tax system to promote gender equality, be fairer, and provide increased revenue, it should be more progressive and inclusive, with a steeper rise in rates from a lower basic rate as well as a lower personal allowance.
- The Marriage Tax Allowance and the Higher Income Child Benefit Charge make one partner's tax liability depend on the other's income, undermining the right to independent taxation. These measures should be abolished. Fairer taxation of companies
- Efforts should continue to be made, despite the current US Government's hostility, to have effective international agreements on tax jurisdiction and minimum levels of corporation tax.
- Permanent methods of taxing excess profits arising from international oil and gas prices should be explored before the EPL expires in 2030.

environmental taxes

- Rises in fuel duty should be reinstated, with financial support given to those in fuel poverty and those for whom reducing their use of fossil fuels is exceptionally costly.
- New ways of using tax to prevent environmental damage in ways that do not increase inequalities, such as a Frequent Flyer Levy, should be explored.

A wholesale reform of the tax system – including how it taxes inheritances, wealth, capital gains, property, earnings and profits and the use of tax allowances – is needed to make it more progressive, fairer, less open to abuse and better able to contribute to the funding of public expenditure. Without such reform gender inequalities will widen.

TAXATION AND GENDER – WOMEN'S BUDGET GROUP BRIEFING SUMMARY

FOR THE FULL BRIEFING VISIT WWW.WBG.ORG.UK

nestlé...

NESTLE PUTS BABIES AT RISK IN AFRICA, ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA

A new report from the Swiss-based global justice organisation Public Eye said that the food giant has been adding sugar to baby food to help boost sales in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This comes after Nestle cut sugar from the products sold in European markets.

The report, called *How Nestle gets children hooked on sugar in lower-income countries*, accuses the company of "putting the health of babies at risk for profit." Discussing the results of an investigation carried out by Public Eye and the International Baby Food Action Network (Ibfan), the report says that added sugar was found in 93% of Nestle baby food products sold in African, Asian and Latin American countries.

The amount of sugar added varied across markets, the study found. Baby cereal sold under the Cerelac brand in Thailand contained six grams of sugar – or about 1.5 sugar cubes – per serving. In Ethiopia, it had 5.2 grams added, while babies in Pakistan eat Cerelac with 2.7 grams of added sugar.

In the main, European markets such as Germany and Britain, Cerelac is sold without any added sugar.

The World Health Organisation advises that foods for children under three should contain "no added sugars or sweetening agents", warning that exposure to sugar early in life can create a lifelong preference for sugary products that increases the risk of developing obesity and other chronic illnesses.

Nestle leads the global baby food market with control of about 20% of the market, which has annual sales of nearly \$70 billion (£53bn).

Public Eye accuses Nestle of advertising "aggressively" in Africa, Asia and Latin America that its products are essential to children's healthy development, according to Public Eye. But it warns, its

3 baby milk action... right!

4 stakeholder pensions?

5 disgraceful ageing

6 sylvia pankurst

investigation "tells a different story."

Public Eye and Ibfan are demanding that "Nestle put an end to this unjustifiable and harmful double standard, which contributes to the explosive rise of obesity and leads children to develop a lifelong preference for sugary products".

A spokesperson for Nestle, which has rejected previous accusations of "double standards" regarding the nutrition of its baby food products in different regions of the globe, branded the investigation "misleading," according to *The Guardian* newspaper.

Nestle said that cereals sweet enough to be palatable to infants was vital for combating malnutrition and the company's recipes are well within limits set by national regulations in the countries concerned.

FULL REPORT WWW.PUBLICEYE.CH

nestle puts profit before jobs

The Unite trade union has slammed Nestle's October announcement of worldwide job losses and has promised to fight for every job at sites across the UK.

The Swiss-based food and drink company announced that it would be cutting thousands of jobs across its worldwide operations including 12,000 administrative staff and a further 4,000 in manufacturing and supply.

Unite represents over a thousand members at Nestle sites in York, Halifax, Dalston and Tutbury as well as additional staff at Buxton Water (owned by Nestle).

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Nestle is a profitable company, selling billions of produce every month. Job losses are simply unacceptable. Unite will not allow our members to be the victims of any attempt to put profits before jobs."

Previous CEOs of Nestle have earned close to £10 million a year in annual salary and share transfers. Nestle annual gross profit for 2024 was \$48.901 billion, a 2% increase from 2023. Nestle boss Philip Navratil said the firm needed to secure its future "as leader in our industry" adding that it would be "prioritising the opportunities and businesses with the highest potential returns". The plans are expected to save the company around one billion Swiss francs (£940 million) each year by the end of 2027.

Although for the first nine months of 2025 the firm, which owns brands such as KitKat and Nescafe, recorded 65.9 billion Swiss francs (£61.5 billion) worth of sales.

Unite national officer for food and drink Paul Travers added: "The new CEO seems to put priorities on larger profit margins compared to the people who work hard to deliver them. His approach is unacceptable and Unite will respond robustly to any attacks on jobs in the UK."

LEFT: BACK IN 1999 NAW CAMPAIGNED WITH BABY MILK ACTION AGAINST NESTLE'S AGGRESSIVE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN THAT RISKED THE LIVES OF BABIES AND INFANTS

widf conference and 80th anniversary



THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN, AFFILIATED TO THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION, SENT THREE DELEGATES TO THE WIDF'S RECENT CONFERENCE AND CELEBRATION. LIZ PAYNE (NAW PRESIDENT), VICKY KNIGHT AND MARY DAVIS (NAW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS) REPORT BACK. WHEN THE FINAL STATEMENTS ARE RECEIVED A FULL REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS IN HAVANA WILL BE PUBLISHED ON OUR WEBSITE.

liz

WHAT a privilege to have attended events in Havana to mark the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Women's International Democratic Federation, together with more than a hundred women from 27 countries! The programme, which stretched over four full days, from Friday 28 November to Monday 1 December, included an extended meeting of the World Steering Committee (WSC), Regional Meetings and a full day of celebration of our special anniversary. There were also cultural activities and time to relax with women from organisations across the world, as well as renew acquaintances and share experiences of our common struggle for equality and justice.

The very fact that we were in Cuba, in a venue not far from the Plaza de la Revolucion, was inspirational, but what was especially moving was to hear from our Cuban hosts of the terrible impacts of the criminal US blockade, now in its sixth decade and currently intensified, and visible in the poverty and environmental deterioration all around. But what was also obvious was the determination with which, in the harshest of times, the

women and people of Cuba are defending and building their revolution and their future.

As Josefina Fidal, Cuba's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and "outspoken advocate for women's roles in the Cuban government and society", stressed in the opening session, the US intends to place the country under total siege to destroy the people's support for the government and "collapse the revolution".

When Cuban diplomat, Antonio Quintanilla, addressed the WSC the following day he noted that no sector of human life was untouched and that it had become clear that whoever was in power in the White House, the blockade would continue. Women, whom he described as the "energy and thrust" of Cuban society going forward, had been particularly impacted by the detrimental effects the siege was having on the formerly world-renowned Cuban healthcare system. Cuba was now unable either to produce or import contraceptives and pre-natal drugs, women could no longer access assisted reproduction services, and medical equipment for gynaecological treatment needed upgrading urgently. But it was not only women in Cuba who were affected. Cuba's work in supporting women and their families in many countries, especially in more remote rural communities was being prohibited as a result of the blockade's restrictions.

All speakers were categoric that the people of Cuba had no choice but to fight on for peace and justice and that they would win. They had, all contributors asserted, the right to choose their own economic, political, and cultural future. They needed international support to do this and Terese Amarelle Boue, president of the Federation of Cuban Women,

thanked all women's organisations present for their "permanent" solidarity.

The agenda of the WSC was structured to allow delegates to identify and confront the biggest challenges currently facing women across the world, to receive reports of the work and achievements of the WIDF and its affiliated organisations in the different regions and to update the "World Work Plan" agreed at the previous WSC meeting in Colombia in 2024. Motions submitted by a number of organisations to enhance the impact of the WIDF going forward were heard, including one put in by the National Assembly of Women on peace. This was overwhelmingly carried and is available on our website www.sisters.org.uk.

Unsurprisingly, the contemporary fight for peace, a founding principle of the WIDF when it was established by pro-peace and anti-fascist working-class women emerging from the horrors of the Second World War, was one of the predominant issues addressed in Havana. Women present emphasised the leading role of the US, its European and other allies, and military arm NATO in perpetuating wars and threats of wars across the globe. "Enforced peace" was also identified as a weapon of choice to deprive the peoples of their sovereignty and open the way for the naked exploitation of transnationals in a new world order. Organisations from conflict zones including Venezuela and other countries of the US-militarised Caribbean, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and Sudan were able to give their first-hand views of the disproportionate, horrific, and lasting impact of current conflicts on women and children.

Intrinsically connected to the failure of

ary celebration in cuba

social democracy and drive to militarisation was the rise of the far right and fascism and the worldwide tsunami of violence against women, together with systemic attempts to once again drive half the population of the world out of the public sphere.

Recognition of the huge contribution young women can and should make to the struggle for equality and justice for women going forward and how to involve them was a topic that everyone agreed could have been given much more time and space than the tight agenda permitted, as a new generation of women and girls faces unprecedented global challenges and deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures. This will undoubtedly be rectified at future meetings.

Many who were there felt that the last afternoon, in which presentations on the history of the WIDF over its 80 years and tributes to just some of the most outstanding and courageous women of our movement were made, surrounded by the banners and insignia of our organisations, was the absolute highlight of our four days together. It was certainly unforgettable.

The final statement of the WSC, the renewed work plan and the inspiring celebration of the 80th anniversary will undoubtedly put the WIDF and its constituent organisations on a firm and united footing – not only as it approaches its forthcoming World Congress in late 2026 (in either Mexico or Cyprus) but also for its next 80 years!

vicky

As delegates arrived on Thursday 28 November at The Hotel Tulipan, Havana, Cuba we were greeted by a 'cultural presentation' comprising a fantastically talented army of local children singing, dancing and encouraging delegates to join them!

Skevi Koukouma, WIDF Vice President (Europe) and a Cypriot MP welcomed over a hundred delegates to the opening session of the WIDF's 80th Anniversary celebration and the meeting of the WIDF World Steering Committee. She thanked the President of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and Cuban sisters for organising the cultural programme.

Teresa Amarelle Boue of the FMC then addressed the meeting, giving a warm welcome to all delegates to "our small island of dignity for all human beings, with a goal of peace, where you will not see wealth, yet will experience our true hospitality – despite the US blockade."

Josephina Vidal, the Cuban Minister for International Affairs followed, by giving a report on the geopolitical situation, starting with congratulations to the WIDF for 80 years of commendable work for peace; human rights, particularly the

rights of women; fighting racism, fascism and discrimination in the pursuit of a better world.

The Minister reflected on the current period being one of "dangerous times for Cuba and other progressive areas of the world, where imperialist forces continue to impose their will – 'Peace by force', ignoring the rights of sovereign nations examples being the genocide in Gaza and the imposition of the moral doctrines of the US being imposed onto the peoples of Latin America. Cuba reaffirms our objections to these aggressions against Cuba and her sister nations."

Josephina outlined a situation where massive challenges faced the Cuban people, US aggressions increasing over the past eight years had grown, including financial siege and a communications war, creating a state of total lack and starving Cuba from any legitimate income. Her plea was for the nations of the world to unite and support security, justice and prosperity for all, delivering a future free from slavery and colonialism. She concluded with a rallying cry that 'international solidarity will ensure the fortitude and liberty of all peoples'.

The final session of day one allowed delegates from each region to break-out and discuss their work and delivery. This gave our three NAW delegates an opportunity in the European Regional forum to share our activities during 2024/25 and discuss priority issues for women such as: poverty, the burden of care; misogyny and violence against women and girls; prostitution; occupational segregation; the rise of the far right and much much more. The production of a unified European plan contributed to the world forum and the NAW's motion demanding welfare not warfare made progress to the final world conference meeting.

mary

THE WIDF as an organisation hides its light under a bushel and the conference and its outcomes deserve wider publicity. The geopolitical environment in which the conference was being held was outlined by the Cuban Minister for Foreign Affairs. She highlighted the very serious threats to world peace posed by the Trump administration, in particular the threat to progressive regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean – especially Venezuela. The blockade of Cuba since Trump's second presidency had been reinforced by 14 new draconian measures. These were having a serious impact on tourism, banking, trade generally, food production and especially on medical supplies.

The regional reports were noteworthy. Three regions were represented – the Arab region, Latin America and Europe.



WIDF PRESIDENT LORENA PENA (CENTRE)

Much to my surprise Israel and Iran were included in Europe! Fortunately, we received a printed draft of the Europe report, and it was thoroughly discussed in the group of which we were part. This was probably not the case with the over long report from the Arab region which we were told reflected mainly the views of the author. However, these shortcomings were mitigated by reports from women's organisations in different regions. For me, this was one of the highlights of the conference. Although this session was often difficult to follow, twelve or so countries gave verbal reports – of particular note were accounts given of the situation facing women in Israel, Palestine, Sudan and Iran. The Sudanese sister report that 2.5 million girls were denied education and that mass rapes and gender related crimes were ubiquitous and unpunished.

The Action Plan and Final declaration should have been the resounding conclusion of the conference. However, since the Action Plan was only available on a screen and was unreadable, it was received unenthusiastically. When a vote was taken to approve the plan, most of the sisters representing national organisations in the Europe group, including the group's President, felt there was no option but to abstain. My notes indicate that this was an important document containing many important decisions to guide the WIDF's work. I remain hopeful that a printed version of the 11 or 12 resolutions will be printed and available for all to see.

Finally, a high spot for me was the tributes paid to prominent WIDF women during its 80 year history – a truly remarkable history, which we can only hope will be emulated in 2026 and beyond.

My ability to write an objective and factual report of this important event is hampered by the unfortunate fact that apart from the agenda there was no other written printed material to which delegates could refer and retain for reference. Therefore, this report relies on my own copious (albeit inadequate) notes and my own personal impressions. The conference was attended by delegates from 27 countries. Unfortunately, a delegate list was not available. This is a pity because it now means that some of the wonderful women delegates are not contactable. However, these criticisms of the shortcomings of the poor organisation of the conference should not be interpreted as a negative judgment of the event itself.

the red dress



WHILE visiting the café at my local theatre in Brecon, I happened upon an amazing exhibition called The Red Dress.

The Red Dress project was conceived by British textile artist Kirstie Macleod, and gave a platform for individuals, particularly women, and communities around the world to tell their stories through embroidery. Stories of poverty; war; genocide; motherhood and violence against women and girls.

From 2009 to 2023, pieces of The Red Dress and later the completed garment travelled the globe being embroidered onto. Constructed out of 87 panels of burgundy silk dupion, the dress has been worked on by 367 women/girls, 11 men/boys and two non-binary artists from 51 countries, earning it a place in the Guinness World Records 2026 for the largest collaborative embroidery project. All 141 commissioned embroiderers were paid for their work and receive a portion of all ongoing exhibition fees and merchandise sales. Further embroidery was added by willing audiences at various exhibitions and events.

The dress' embroiderers include female refugees from Palestine, Syria and Ukraine, women seeking asylum in the UK from Iran, Iraq, China, Nigeria and Namibia, survivors of war in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda and DR Congo, impoverished and disadvantaged women in South Africa, Mexico and Egypt, individuals in Kenya, Japan, Turkey, Jamaica, Sweden, Peru, Czech Republic, Dubai, Afghanistan, Australia, Argentina, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Tobago, Vietnam, Estonia, USA, Russia, Pakistan, Wales, Colombia and England, students from Montenegro, Brazil, Malta, Singapore, Eritrea, Norway, Poland, Finland, Ireland, Romania and Hong Kong as well as artisans from studios in India and Saudi Arabia.

The Red Dress has been exhibited in major galleries and museums worldwide, including Galerie Maeght in Paris, Art Dubai, Museo De Arte Popular in Mexico City, the National Library of Kosovo, War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester, Frick Pittsburgh, Fuller Craft Museum in Massachusetts, National Waterfront Museum in Wales, Fashion and Textile Museum in London, Hampi Art Labs in India, an event at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Premio Valcellina Textiles Award in Maniago, Italy, where it won first prize in 2012.

Funding to support the project came from charities, self-help development projects, social enterprises and various initiatives providing support to women in poverty: Manchester Aid to Kosovo supporting Sister Stitch in Kosovo, KISANY in Rwanda and DR Congo, Missibaba in South Africa, Kitzen in Mexico, Al Badia in Lebanon supporting Palestinian refugees, FanSina in Egypt, the Swansea Women's Asylum and Refugee Support Group in Wales, White Ribbon Alliance in the UK and the War Childhood Museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Seed investment for the project was provided by the British Council Dubai in 2009, with subsequent funding received from the Arts Council England National Lottery Fund, three British Embassies, Contemporary Middle East, Southern Vermont Arts Center, Frick Pittsburgh and Fuller Craft Museum, USA, JSW Foundation, India, hundreds of individuals around the world via three crowdfunding campaigns as well as private donations.

Other women artists, inspired by The Red Dress project exhibited other works including a beautiful ballet tutu, highlighting the staggering number of women murdered each year, often by partners or

family members. Notable was the dress with 100 black ribbons; each embroidered with the name of a woman killed that year.

ANITA WRIGHT NAW EXECUTIVE MEMBER

THE RED DRESS EXHIBITION WILL CONTINUE TOURING UNTIL 2030 WHEN IT WILL THEN BE PERMANENTLY ON DISPLAY AT A BRITISH MUSEUM, YET TO BE DECIDED
VISIT WWW.REDDRESSEMBROIDERY.COM

Women's Budget Group statement on the Government's Violence against Women and Girls Strategy

We welcome the publication [18 December 2025] of the Government's new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and the high level of ambition it sets out, including the commitment to halving violence against women and girls over the next decade.

We strongly support the Strategy's recognition that violence against women and girls is a systemic issue and that a meaningful cross departmental response is required to address it. The commitment of £550 million for victim support services over the next three years, alongside additional funding for health-led responses, safe accommodation and specialist programmes, signals an important step forward.

For the Strategy to deliver the lasting change that we urgently need, it is essential that a significant proportion of this funding is ring-fenced for specialist by and for services.

the rise of the far right

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION ALLIANCE WARNS OF THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT

THE ascent of right-wing politics in north-east England has not been unexpected. The riots of 2024 in the region prompted the publication of a report that underscored the lack of support for women and children both during and after the unrest.

Activists and black women's organisations collaborated to document the consequences, revealing ongoing issues such as violence, exclusion and racism. Meanwhile, anti-immigration protests persist in Newcastle. The affected areas have historically been Labour strongholds – working-class communities managed by Labour councils.

The worsening cost-of-living crisis, which has been escalating since 2008, was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The north-east experienced some of the country's worst health outcomes during this period. Furthermore, the region has been systematically stripped of infrastructure: community developments, youth clubs and health projects have disappeared, with even basics such as leisure centres and libraries vanishing. The streets are visibly neglected.

Consequently, these formerly "red wall" constituencies have shifted their support towards Reform UK and its anti-immigration stance, which is beginning to have a tangible effect.

weaponisation of violence against women and girls

Both the religious right and the far right have exploited violence against women and girls to serve their agendas. The far right has appropriated the discourse around protecting women and girls, stoking fears among many parents.

This approach has proven effective, as people claim they are not racist but are merely seeking to safeguard their families. This manipulation has resulted in significant numbers of women joining far-right demonstrations and these demonstrations often adopt slogans originally used by the women's movement.

Similarly, the religious right uses these moments to reinforce patriarchal control by asserting that women should remain at home for their safety, which can ironically increase the risk of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. In interviews, women reported that confinement to the home during such times, often not at the instruction of the police but due to community pressure, heightened their vulnerability.

A crucial development has been the mainstreaming of far-right rhetoric. Decades ago, figures such as Enoch Powell were relegated to the political fringes for espousing such views. In contrast, contemporary mainstream politicians – including the current Prime Minister – have adopted language around

immigration and identity that echoes these far-right themes. This shift demonstrates how racism and anti-immigration sentiment have become normalised within mainstream politics.

challenges in framing responses: solidarity and division

Current responses to the far right and to racism lack attempts at building solidarity or forming alliances between working-class white communities and migrant and minoritised groups. There is now a noticeable fracture and increased sectarianism within minority communities; some minoritised individuals are even aligning with the far right.

This situation underscores both the extent and the limitations of identity politics and highlights the need for mobilisation around shared political values, with an analysis of class, race and sex at the centre.

The fact that increasing numbers of women and minoritised people are joining the far right highlights this. The lack of relevant political analysis and open dialogue about these trends makes forming effective responses more difficult.

failures of the left and the need for reclaimed narratives

The left has failed to offer a compelling counter-narrative to that of the far right, in part because it has focused on gender rather than sex, leaving it ill-equipped to address the far right's agenda around the family, women's rights and gender politics.

The left's response to the biggest issues raised by the slide to the right is often reduced to labelling the opposition as racist, without tackling the substantive issues or slogans that resonate with working-class communities keen for a rationale to explain the decline in their environment.

In part, this lack of coherence from the left has allowed the far right to 'steal' the issue of women's safety, which has become a rallying cry for their movement, justifying both violent rage against immigrant people and appearing to rally against the idea of violence against women and girls.

Notably, there have been attempts by women's groups – such as recent demonstrations in Glasgow – to craft new slogans and agendas distinct from the far right. However, the left generally continues to focus on statistical rebuttals, such as highlighting the criminal records of far-right figures, without effectively contesting their main slogans around family and safety.

The mainstream left, including Labour councils, have at times been complicit in cover-ups of exploitation and violence against women, often influenced by religious or patriarchal community leaders. This complicity further erodes trust and blurs the boundaries of what constitutes

"the left", which now encompasses a broad spectrum of views, some indistinguishable from the right. Poor handling of high-profile cases publicly labelled "grooming gangs" when involving Muslim men in Bradford (but viewed as an institutional crisis of the church when priests are involved), entrenches the stark double standards at play.

the decline of trust in public institutions

There is an evident decline in trust towards public institutions, including the NHS, police and local authorities, due to consistent evidence of institutional racism, sexism and a lack of effective protection for women and black people both as staff and citizens.

This environment fosters narratives about vulnerable women needing protection, which the right exploits by emphasising traditional family roles and portraying women as inherently vulnerable, weak and at risk.

These dynamics reinforce right-wing arguments about the necessity of strong, traditional family structures, which appeal to both working- and middle-class communities. The left, meanwhile, has proved unable to offer an alternative vision.

the shifting political landscape

The Labour Party has moved rightwards in response to the far-right rhetoric within the Conservative Party over decades, resulting in the dilution of left-wing opposition in the corridors of power. As a result, the Labour Party has lost its distinct identity, ceding ground to right-wing rhetoric even within its own ranks. Recent breakaway parties often exacerbate these problems rather than offer solutions.

Trade unions have not been immune to these trends, struggling with sexism and a lack of effective focus on either race or women's issues. Nevertheless, there are examples of effective mobilisation, particularly among women, drawing on the kinds of arguments and models discussed in recent reports and trade union political education courses.

Disseminating clear, class-based analysis and preserving these insights for wider circulation offers hope for progress. The problems described are not unique to Britain but are echoed across Europe, the US and India – signalling a broader drift towards authoritarianism and the weaponisation of anti-immigration, macho, protectionist narratives.

conclusion

Given the mainstreaming of far-right ideas and the erosion of trust in traditional left-wing parties and institutions, there is an urgent need to develop a new, articulate analysis rooted in class, race and sex, and to build solidarity across fractured communities. Only through such efforts can effective responses be crafted

concluded on page 8

to address the challenges posed by rising authoritarianism and the manipulation of social issues for political gain. The WLA has a crucial and unique role to play in this respect. The WLA is clear that it is dishonest to use immigration, violence or race as a focus for political resolution to economic disparities. Instead, we must analyse the real reasons for the cost-of-living crisis and the decline of our increasingly privatised public services – housing, transport, health, education, security.

Identity politics works to atomise, minimise and individualise social, political and economic struggles. The WLA understands this to be part of the problem. Only in solidarity and with an understanding that resistance to class exploitation and women's oppression is what must bind us, especially during the harshest times, can we expect to defeat the far right and build a world in which private greed is replaced by public need.

WWW.WOMENSLIBERATIONALLIANCE.ORG.UK



The voices of division in our country are growing louder.

Over 50 organisations, including celebrities, trade unions and the NAW, have come together to oppose the rise of the far-right and will be holding a national demonstration on Saturday 28 March.

WWW.TOGETHERALLIANCE.ORG.UK

Let's continue fighting for women's rights in 2026 and for a peaceful and kinder world

poem: a thing about angels



There is a thing about angels. You do not discover gender, race, purpose or whence they came. Why they flew away. So quickly, so slowly, or the reasons for the gaps in their visits.

Why are they so informed? Why they seem to know you? It is an unfamiliar familiarity but then – there is a thing about angels.

Their frequency remains an unsettling and surprising thing. Carrying you when lame or ashamed, frightened. Weeping when you weep. Giving you coffee or strong drink. They are gone before you work it out. Forgetting to say thank you or pretending it is not such a big deal, but then – there is a thing about angels.

I have named some. Beautiful surprise, belly laughter, love, caring, holding close, friendly, picking me up, unreasonable, turning me away or around.

Taking me to places that are different. Like Macclesfield, Broken Cross. Here today and many other days, but then – there is a thing about angels.

ALIFT HAREWOOD
2004

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to *all* members. The next one (online) will be on Tuesday 13 January at 17.00. For more information about the meetings please contact the Secretary, Sandra Durkin, on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, 72 Beaconsfield Road Coventry CV2 4AR

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is:

£20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)

Name _____

Address _____

postcode _____

Organisation _____

phone _____

email _____

Send to: Carolyn Simpson, c/o 26 Birchanger Road, London SE25 5BB