

**Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the  
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the  
Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General  
Assembly (2000)**

**UNITED KINGDOM RESPONSE**

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## Acronyms

<b>BAME</b>	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
<b>CEDAW</b>	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CPS</b>	Crown Prosecution Service
<b>DECC</b>	Department for Energy and Climate Change
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DPKO</b>	UN Department for Peace Keeping Operations
<b>EET</b>	Education, Training or Employment
<b>ECHR</b>	European Convention on Human Rights
<b>EHRC</b>	Equalities and Human Rights Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FCO</b>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>GEO</b>	Government Equalities Office
<b>MP</b>	Members of Parliament
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Government Organisations
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>PHSE</b>	Personal, Health and Social Education
<b>PSA</b>	Public Service Agreement
<b>PSO</b>	Peace Support Operations
<b>SARCs</b>	Sexual Assault Referral Centres
<b>SDVCs</b>	Specialist Domestic Violence Courts
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UNSCR 1325</b>	UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
<b>VAW</b>	Violence against women
<b>WAG</b>	Welsh Assembly Government
<b>WNC</b>	Women's National Commission

## **Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment**

The fifteen years since the Beijing World Conference on Women have been important for the United Kingdom in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, with significant advances for women made in key areas of concern. The United Kingdom's (UK's) Gender Equality work is guided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which are regarded as constituting the most comprehensive set of international commitments to gender equality and women's rights drafted to date.<sup>1</sup>

The UK has had long-standing comprehensive legislation in place on sex discrimination, equal pay and workplace rights. Over the last 15 years it has strengthened and built on this, and has introduced a range of non-legislative policy measures to tackle inequalities and to support the empowerment of women. It has focused in particular on improving equality in the areas of employment, representation in public and political life, education and healthcare, and addressing violence against women, among others. Further details are set out below.

### **Overview of achievements in main policy areas**

There are now **more women in employment** in the UK than ever before, and more opportunities for women and men to balance work and family life thanks to family-friendly employment policies including in the areas of flexible working, increased availability of high quality child care, and related child and working tax credits and child benefits (covering up to 80 per cent of childcare costs for low to middle income families). For example, the introduction of the Work and Families Act (2006) greatly improved statutory leave and pay available to pregnant workers and introduced a new right for carers to request to work flexibly. To date 3.6 million parents and 2.65 million carers have benefited, with an additional 4.5 million parents benefiting from April 2009 when the right was extended to many parents of children aged 16 and under. In January 2006, a Carer's Strategy was published for Northern Ireland to better support carers.

In the area of **childcare**, in England, over £25 billion has been allocated to child care provision since 1997, and the number of registered childcare places has doubled to more than 1.3 million. In England and Wales, all children aged three and four years are guaranteed free part-time education.

Extensive **pension reforms** have also been introduced through the provisions of the Pensions Act (2007), which apply and/or have been replicated across the UK and which are of direct benefit to women - as of August 2008, 3.3 million individuals (two thirds of whom are women) were receiving Pension Credit.

There are now a greater number of women in the UK represented in both **public and political life**, including in national and local government. In 2002, the Government introduced the UK-wide Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act, enabling political parties to take special measures to boost the number of women standing in local, national and European elections. The use of women-only shortlists has been one of the most effective mechanisms in increasing the representation of women in Parliament, with women currently making up 20% of MPs compared to just 9% before 1997. In Northern Ireland, in 2008 women comprise 18% of the Assembly and 32% of public appointments (22% of Chair appointments) to public bodies. In Scotland women make up 33% of MSPs and 34% of those serving on public bodies. In Wales following elections to the National Assembly for Wales in 2008 of the 60 members elected 28 were female.

Women and girls in the UK continue to outperform boys at all levels of **education**, and overall women make up a larger proportion of higher-education graduates than men.

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<sup>1</sup> **The UK Government and Devolved Administrations.** In reporting on matters that pertain to the United Kingdom (UK), it is critical to be aware of how the UK Government is structured, namely in regards to role of Central Government at Whitehall and its relationship with the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In 1999, following a series of referendums, devolved governments were established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, named respectively: the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales and; the Northern Ireland Assembly. These devolved governments have responsibility for a range of policy and legislative matters (devolved matters), where arrangements are different for each administration, reflecting their history and administrative structures. The UK government remains responsible for national policy on all matters that have not been devolved (reserved matters), including foreign affairs, defense, social security, macro-economic management and trade.

In regards to equal opportunities, such matters are largely reserved in respect of Scotland and Wales (with certain exceptions). In **Scotland**, the Scotland Act (1998) gives the Scottish Parliament power to encourage (other than by prohibition or regulation) equal opportunities. In Northern Ireland, equality issues are a transferred matter under the UK's devolution settlement. Each devolved administration has good examples of successful gender equality policy initiatives.

Women are also benefiting from better preventative **health care**, including early breast cancer detection, intervention and treatment. Survival rates for breast cancer are improving. Thirty years ago, the five year survival rate for breast cancer was around 50%. Today, it is around 80%. The government has increased its investment in sexual health provision resulting in improved access to information and services for women and girls backed by a national campaign.

Women at-risk of or affected by **violence** now have access to more integrated protection and support measures in the UK, including stronger protective legislation, support from specially trained professionals, and access to multi-agency support services. For example, the government has introduced stronger legislation on domestic violence through the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act (2004), has established 122 Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC's) and has conducted specialist training for prosecutors, magistrates and related officials. The numbers speak for themselves: in 2003, only 46% of domestic violence cases charged and brought to court resulted in a conviction; now that figure stands at 72.5% (October to December 2008). In addition, the British Crime Survey reports that there has been a 58% decline in the incidence of domestic violence between 1997 and 2007/08.<sup>2</sup> Action plans covering England and Wales have been published for all major strands of work on violence against women (i.e. domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, forced marriage, and trafficking), and in 2005, the Government set up a Forced Marriage Unit which in 2008 assisted 400 victims and potential victims. Greater support for victims of violence has included the establishment of 36 new Sexual Assault Referral Centres and over 100 Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and 200 Domestic Violence risk assessment schemes across England and Wales. Specialist protection and support is in place for victims of human trafficking: the UK has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings; invested in specialist refuge and re-integration schemes; and established a National Referral Mechanism to enhance our existing multi-agency approach to identifying and supporting victims. In Northern Ireland, cross-departmental strategies have been published for tackling Domestic Violence, and Sexual Violence and Abuse, and £5m is invested each year in providing a range of support services for victims of domestic violence and their children, and a new regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre is being built. In Scotland, over £44m has been invested between 2008-2011 to enable women and children to access frontline support including through 73 violence against women projects, a network of rape crisis centres and the SARCs and domestic abuse and rape crisis help-lines.

### **Promoting Gender Mainstreaming through Policy and Legislation**

During this reporting period, the UK has introduced key **equality legislation and related policies** that have resulted in significant progress on the promotion and mainstreaming of gender equality throughout all levels of government and across the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This includes the introduction of the Equality Act (2006), and the resulting **Gender Equality Duty** (2007) (covering England, Scotland and Wales), and the introduction of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), which represent the largest changes in gender equality legislation in the UK in 30 years. They place a legal obligation on all public bodies, when carrying out their functions, to be proactive (rather than reactive) in eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment, including on the grounds of sex, and to promote equal opportunity between women and men, including by streamlining gender equalities into the strategic functions and policies of government departments. In mid-2009, a major new reform in equality legislation – the **Equality Bill** - will be introduced in England, Wales and Scotland. The new Bill will streamline and significantly strengthen existing discrimination legislation in order to increase transparency about inequalities, strengthen enforcement and extend the scope for action to assist under-represented groups, including women. The Bill will directly contribute to promoting gender equality including by increasing the scope for positive action, extending women-only short lists, increasing transparency in pay and promoting the scope for employers to increase workforce diversity, among others.

The role of the UK **Minister for Women and Equality** has been central to pushing the women's empowerment agenda forward at a national level by raising awareness across Government and with the devolved administrations of the need for gender equality and of the wider benefits of addressing gender inequalities. In July 2007, the Minister for Women and Equality set out three priority areas for action (for England and Wales), namely: to support women and families who are caring for children, elderly and disabled relatives; to tackle violence against women, and to change the way women offenders are treated; and to increase the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women in public life. Advances in each of these areas, as well as future challenges, were reported on in a one year progress report in July 2008, and are summarised in Part 2 below.

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<sup>2</sup> This measure counts what survey respondents themselves say has happened to them, rather than what is reported to the police.

## **CEDAW**

The UK ratified CEDAW in 1989 and the CEDAW Optional Protocol in 2005. In July 2008 the UK was examined by the CEDAW Committee on its 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic reports. The Committee's resulting Concluding Observations and related recommendations have been disseminated across UK Government departments, and concrete steps are being taken to address them. This includes efforts to institutionalise greater cross-UK coordination on implementing CEDAW and related gender equality initiatives through the establishment of a four-Nations Gender Directors Network comprised of the four gender policy lead officials from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as through a cross-departmental group to ensure action on gender equality across sectors is coordinated on the policy front.

## **Working with Non-Governmental Organizations**

The UK has established strong partnerships with UK non-governmental organizations to take forward the gender equality agenda. This relationship is institutionalised through strong bi-lateral partnerships across all regions of the UK. In particular, the **Women's National Commission (WNC)**, an official independent advisory body that is fully funded by government and is respected as an independent commentator on Government policy, plays a key role. The WNC serves as a key interlocutor by sharing the views of its vast network of women's non-government organisations (NGOs) with the Government.

## **International Work to Support Gender Equality**

In addition to prioritising gender equality on the domestic front, the UK Government has made the elimination of gender discrimination a key component of its **international** work and takes every opportunity to promote and actively participate in international forums on women's rights, including through relevant United Nations (UN) and European Union mechanisms. To this end, the UK has been one of the main supporters of key UN resolutions such as the General Assembly resolution on eliminating all forms of violence against women and actively participates in annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, the main inter-governmental forum for women's rights. In addition, the UK has been effective in utilising its role as a member of the UN Security Council to champion women's rights, for example through its recent work in support of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 to end sexual violence in armed conflict. The UK's international development policy, as outlined in its third White Paper, underlines the UK Government's commitment to give greater priority to support gender equality and women's rights in its international development assistance. To this end, eliminating gender discrimination and ensuring women's equal rights are seen as fundamental to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and as key components of the UK Government's broader commitments to tackle world poverty.

## **Ongoing Challenges and the UK Government's Response**

While important advances for gender equality and women's rights have been realised in the UK, persistent challenges remain. These include the continuing pay gap between women and men and related occupational segregation, the continued under-representation of women in public and political life, especially in leadership and decision making positions, and in particular among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women, the high rate of teenage pregnancies, the continuing prevalence of violence against women and girls and the low prosecution and conviction rates of sexual violence cases, among others.

The UK Government is working to address these challenges by, for example, ensuring that women have greater **access to economic resources**. For example, in 2004 a Women and Work Commission was established to carry out research on the gender pay gap and how to close it, and in 2006 the Government published an Action Plan to take forward the Commission's recommendations. In 2006, the then Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government) published its response to the recommendations and set up a cross-departmental (now cross-directorate) working group as the main vehicle for taking forward its work to tackle gender stereotyping and occupational segregation – and to implement the Commission's recommendations which were relevant to Scotland. The group reported in 2008. In 2007, the UK Government introduced a three-year Equalities Public Service Agreement (PSA) which includes a cross-governmental commitment to address the gender pay gap. A similar commitment is reflected in the Northern Ireland Executive's current 3-year Programme for Government. In June 2008, a Carer's Strategy was launched for England and Wales, investing £255 million to support carers, including providing breaks for carers, support for young carers and helping carers enter/re-enter the job market. Initiatives across all four administrations are underway to help lone parents (the majority of whom are women) move into work. In February 2009, Northern Ireland launched a pilot programme called 'Booster' to stimulate growth of existing businesses run by female entrepreneurs and encourage them to explore export opportunities.

The government is also putting in place measures to increase the diversity of women – including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women - in **power and decision making** at all levels, and is implementing programmes to better understand and address multiple barriers to their career and education success. In May

2008, the Government launched a cross-party taskforce to take practical action to increase the numbers of BAME women local councillors (who currently make up less than 1 per cent), including through a programme of outreach events and evidence gathering. In 2009 the Government announced its intention to extend the positive action on all women shortlists to 2030 in recognition of the need to accelerate progress. District Councils continue to support the Northern Ireland Local Government Staff Commission's "Women in Local Councils" initiative to identify and respond to all forms of gender under-representation in decision making, employment practices, service delivery and partnerships. All administrations continue to work closely with their respective Offices of the Commissioners for Public Appointments, in particular with regards to equal opportunities and diversity.

Closely tied to the issue of representation is that of **economic independence**. The employment rate among BAME women in the UK (at 52.8 per cent) remains 17.5 percentage points below the overall female employment rates. In 2007, the Government introduced the Partners' Outreach for Ethnic Minorities scheme in England which has helped into work almost 2000 non-working partners of low income earners from minority and ethnic communities. It has also introduced a Working Neighbourhoods Fund, which works with local councils and communities across England to develop a more concentrated community-led approach to getting people in the most deprived areas back to work. In 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government announced a £4 million initiative to help tackle the barriers faced by people from black and minority ethnic communities trying to find a job. It will be led by the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association and will provide work and skills opportunities for over 1,000 people across West Wales and the Valleys area.

In attempts to respond to high levels of **teenage pregnancies**, the Government developed a multi-faceted Teenage Pregnancy Strategy with a goal of halving the under 18 conception rate by 2010 and increasing to 60% the proportion of teenage mothers in education, training or employment (EET) to reduce their long term risk of social exclusion. Between 1998 and 2007, there has been a 10.7 percent decline in under-18 conception rate, within which there has been a 24 per cent reduction in teenage births. The percentage of 16-19 year old mothers in EET has increased from 22 per cent (1997-1999) to 33 per cent (2006-2008). To further strengthen the strategy, in October 2008, Government announced the intention to make Sex and Relationships Education a statutory part of the school curriculum within Personal, Social and Health Education. In February 2009, Government also announced an extra £20.5M to improve young people's access and uptake of effective contraception. To monitor implementation of the Strategy, a Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group - a non-departmental public body - was established which publishes an annual report to Government.

While the response to protect women affected by violence has increased, the government remains aware of the remaining challenges and to this end is investing in ways to address the root causes of violence and strengthen its prevention interventions, including through life-skills education in schools and by training professionals in identification and response to risk factors. It is also working to improve prosecution and conviction of sexual violence cases. England and Wales invests over £30 million a year for Victim Support and has invested over £60 million in refuges and Sexual Assault Referral Centres where victims receive medical care and counselling and can assist the police investigation through forensic examination. In March 2009, an England-wide consultation on violence against women was launched and will inform a national strategy on violence against women, including greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention. In Northern Ireland an inter-Ministerial Group provides political leadership to ensure that strategies to tackle domestic and sexual violence receive the priority they deserve and to ensure joint working across Government on implementation of the two strategies, through preventive, protection and justice and support measures. Its 2008-2011 Strategy includes setting up a new specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), launching a public information campaign and investing £150 K for counselling services. In Scotland, Scotland's National Group to Address Violence Against Women is the key driver for work to tackle violence against women. The Scottish Government's document, *Safer Lives: Changed Lives*, details Scotland's approach to violence against women, including by strengthening prevention, providing improved support for women and children with diverse needs, and focusing on data collection to ensure Scotland has an effective means of measuring the extent of - and progress in addressing - violence against women. Work is also being undertaken to improve how perpetrators are dealt with.

Since 2008 the UK has been deeply affected by the **global economic and financial downturn**. This has the potential to raise a host of new challenges to achieving gender equality, as it will have particular effects on women. The Government is committed to gathering an evidence-base on the differential impact of the downturn on women and ensuring that this informs any policies developed to mitigate the negative impact of the downturn. It recognises the importance of supporting women and families through this crisis, and is working to build a fair, flexible and family friendly labour market which will use the skills and talents of both women and men fully in the future. The Beijing Platform for Action will continue to remain an important tool to help ensure that women's rights remain on the agenda.

## **Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly**

### **The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women**

The UK Government recognises the often unequal burden of poverty on women, which is often intrinsically linked to child poverty, and is working to address both work and pension-related poverty issues to alleviate this disparity.

The UK Government has made specific commitments to address women in poverty through its broader framework to address social exclusion. In 2006, the UK Government set up a **Social Exclusion Task Force** to focus more closely on the problems of severe deprivation and those who are most at risk of social exclusion.<sup>3</sup> This led in 2008, to the **Socially Excluded Adults Public Service Agreement** and the related publishing of 'Working Together' the UK's fourth **National Action Plan on Social Exclusion (2008-2010)** which assesses progress and sets out the government's strategies and programmes for tackling poverty and social exclusion over a three year period. The key objectives of the Action Plan are to increase labour market participation, tackle child poverty, improve access to quality services, and to tackle inequality - including gender inequality.

The UK takes a comprehensive approach to addressing **poverty and social inclusion**. For example, in 1999 the Government introduced targeted 'in-work' support, including through the **Working Families Tax Credit**. In 2003, the latter Tax Credit was replaced by the **Working Tax Credit** and **Child Tax Credit**. These measures encourage paid work and, have increased the minimum income that both women and men can expect when moving into work and have had an impact on substantially reducing the gender pay gap at the very bottom of the earnings scale, where women are more likely to work in lower paid and often part-time jobs than men. The Government has also introduced a **New Deal for Lone Parents**, which provides targeted employment support for lone parents (the majority of whom are women) who often face a higher than average risk of poverty. This includes providing help for lone parents to move into work by rolling out 'In-Work Credit', 'In-Work Advisory Support' and an 'In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund'. As a result of these measures, the Government has achieved an 11.6 per cent increase in employment rates for lone parents since 1997, with over a million lone parents in work, out of which 90 per cent are women.

The Government is also committed to eradicating **Child Poverty**, and has, increased financial support for families with children through the child and family element of the Child Tax Credit, and through Child Benefits for the first child, which has increased by nearly 40 per cent since 1997. Since 1997, the Government has succeeded in lifting 600,000 children out of poverty, and in 2008, the Government announced its intention to ensure in law the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020, including by targeting workless lone parents. To this end, the Government is implementing a series of pilot projects including a London-based pilot aimed at helping mothers balance work with parental responsibilities and a pilot aimed at tackling poverty among teenage parents.

The UK Government recognises the disparities women face in accruing adequate **pensions** and since 1998 has introduced a range of measures that are of direct benefit to women. These include the introduction of Pension Credit in 2003 that ensures a minimum income for pensioners. Since 1998/1999, the Government has helped to lift 900,000 pensioners out of relative low income (measured after housing costs), and as of August 2008, 3.3 million individuals (two thirds of whom are women) were receiving Pension Credit. Provisions to improve State Pensions were introduced through the Pensions Act (2007), which will enable more women to build up a State Pension based on their own contributions. For the first time paid and credited contributions for caring will be recognised equally for basic State Pension and State Second Pension purposes, meaning women should no longer have to rely on their husbands' (or civil partners') contributions. This will give women greater reassurance about their future security.

In addition to addressing poverty within the UK, the UK's **international development policy** aims to contribute to the elimination of world poverty where the elimination of gender discrimination is seen as a key component of this effort. This is reflected in the Department for International Development's (DFID) 2006 White Paper '*Eliminating World Poverty: Making Governance Work for the Poor*' which recognises how important it is to help women fulfil their economic potential, help girls enrol and stay in school, and tackle social and cultural

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<sup>3</sup> The Task Force is leading on the delivery has taken forward the *Socially Excluded Adults Public Service Agreement* which aims to support socially excluded adults into a job and a home, and cross-Government work to improve services and systems for families at risk of exclusion.



discrimination that prevents women accessing health care. It builds on commitments already made in development strategies on girls' education, HIV and AIDS, and maternal mortality to increase spending in these areas, to improve women's access to services, and to promote women's rights in developing countries.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Social Security Agency delivers a range of services to ensure that people are advised of their potential **entitlement to benefits**, with the aim of reducing social exclusion and the risk of poverty. The Department for Social Development together with the Department for Employment and Learning has played a key role in reducing poverty to date, primarily through supporting individuals into employment, and including helping lone parents back to work. Women **pensioners** are at greater risk of poverty compared to male pensioners and around twice as many pensioners who are poor are female. The ongoing Pensions Reform Programme is delivering fairer outcomes for women and carers and The Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 will introduce a number of measures from April 2010 that will help redress the pension effects of labour market differences and the pension impact of child care responsibilities.

In **Scotland**, in 2004/2005 the Working for Families Programme was set up to help parents, including lone mothers, overcome difficulties in entering the labour market. It invested in initiatives to remove childcare barriers and improve the employability of disadvantaged parents where a total of £46m was allocated to the programme. In November 2008, the Scottish Government published 'Achieving our Potential: A framework for tackling poverty and income equality in Scotland', which sets out the joint approach of the Scottish Government and the Council of Scottish Local Authorities to reduce poverty and income inequality in Scotland. Key actions include launching a campaign to raise awareness of statutory workers' rights, such as maternity pay, and supporting people, particularly women, who find it hardest to get into jobs or use public services.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Assembly Government is working in partnership with the Wales Trade Union Congress (Wales TUC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales (EHRC Wales) to deliver several phases of the 'Wales Close the Pay Gap' campaign which aims to: raise awareness of the gender pay gap and action that can be taken to address it; train union officers and representatives on equal pay issues; encourage all employers to carry out equal pay reviews and; campaign for employers to address long working hours and to promote flexible working.

EHRC Wales is developing a project, supported by the Wales TUC and the Welsh Assembly Government, to measure and illustrate – through drawing on a case study - the benefits of settling equal pay in order to influence public authorities to improve the pace of change.

### **Education and Training of Women** **- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training**

The UK Government is committed to ensuring equal access to education, delivering non-discriminatory education and training, and promoting life-long education and training for women and girls throughout the cycle of life-long learning opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

In primary education, national assessments of student performance reveal **that girls on average outperformed boys** across core subjects. In secondary education, achievement of girls was consistently higher. While these trends are positive, some groups of children continue to struggle with school performance. The Government is committed to raising attainment levels in literacy for boys, in particular those who are in low socio-economic status categories. In 2008, the UK Government launched a Gender Agenda initiative, "**Narrowing the Gap**" which focuses on improving the achievement and progress of underperforming girls and boys in schools including by supporting schools to take action research on gender issues and use the findings to inform policy making.<sup>5</sup>

The Government is investing in developing the Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) framework in schools, which includes sex and relationships education and is seen as a key tool in equipping children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to lead healthy and successful lives. In October 2008,

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<sup>4</sup> For information on early childhood education, see section on the 'Girl-Child'

<sup>5</sup> A key feature of the Gender Agenda is the participatory model whereby policy makers work together with university researchers from the field of gender and education, senior leaders and teachers from schools, local authority staff and relevant government agencies so as to improve co-operation between policy, practice and research.

the Government announced its intention to make PHSE education statutory, and is carrying out a full public consultation in this interest (expected to be finalised by 2011).

The UK Government is working with delivery partners to tackle gender stereotyping and segregation in education and training through information, advice and guidance in relation to subject choices and careers, and through ensuring that work experience and work-related learning give both girls and boys an opportunity to expand their horizons by trying out non-traditional work. It is also working to increase the number of girls studying science in both academic and vocational education, thus helping to address the skills shortage in science and engineering.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment for Northern Ireland has issued guidance to teachers on gender issues, most recently "Gifted and Talented Pupils", which provides teachers with teaching methodologies for both boys and girls. Advice includes ensuring girls have leadership roles, and are routinely part of traditional "male" activities. Schools are also advised to monitor that girls get an equal share of resources.

A range of measures are in place to address the poor learning outcomes experienced by **teenage mothers** and their children, including financial support to meet childcare costs for teenage parents who want to return to education through the 'Care to Learn' initiative. Local Authorities are required to provide education to all compulsory school age children including students who are pregnant or are parents, and guidance has been issued which requires Local Authorities to consult the pregnant pupil, their parents or carers and their school to secure a package which is suitable for their age, ability, aptitude and individual needs.

In **higher education**, overall, women make up a larger proportion of the student body, are more likely to receive 'good' degrees (upper second or a first) and less likely to drop out than men. Higher Education has a successful track-record of providing flexible provision for learners including part-time courses, distance learning, or blended learning to suit different learner needs, including lone-parents. The Government has introduced grants for mature students with children, and in particular to **lone parents**, to help with the costs of Higher Education, including part-time education. The Learner Support Fund provides additional hardship and childcare support funds for adult learners.

Gender intersects with race, disability, sexuality and age. As such, direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of race and gender present clear barriers to the education and career progression of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women at all levels. The Government is piloting a Train to Gain programme, which includes helping women, especially from ethnic minority groups, to progress to supervisor/first tier manager level in non-traditional areas where they are under-represented. Additional barriers **to education are faced by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds**. The UK Government is working to support the wider participation of marginalized groups in education, including women. This includes through the Aim Higher Programme, which aims to address under-representative participation in Higher Education by people from lower income/social class backgrounds. Aim Higher has played a significant role through its mentoring projects to help raise the aspirations and achievement levels of young people including women.

Challenges remain in ensuring that more socially isolated sectors of the population easily access education provisions. The Government is currently considering a new approach to help local partners identify and plan for people, including women, with 'English Speakers of Other Languages'.

### **Women and Health**

The UK Government's Department of Health is committed to tackling gender inequalities within the health and social care sector by recognising the specific health needs of men and women. There has been increased awareness amongst healthcare professionals of the correlation between gender and health and its impact on access, quality of health care and medical treatment for men and women.

The cross-Government national health inequalities strategy ***Tackling Health Inequalities: A Programme of Action (2003)***, sets out a comprehensive programme across four themes, including effective prevention, early detection and improved access to effective treatment and care. The Government has also introduced the (first ever) national health inequalities target to reduce inequalities in health outcomes by 10% by 2010, as measured by infant mortality and life expectancy. Following the report of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (*Closing the gap*, 2008), Professor Sir Michael Marmot of University College London – and chair of the Commission – has been asked to undertake a review of health inequalities for the Department of Health. The review is expected to be completed at the end of 2009.

The Department of Health has undertaken a number of **initiatives** to support the National Health Service (NHS) to tackle gender health inequalities. These include specific Pacesetter projects to improve data collection and analysis across all equality strands and to improve access to health services. The Department has also recently published a study looking at the different ways in which women and men access health services which provides an evidence base to help determine key gender health priorities for the Department and the NHS.

In order to address the difficulties in **accessing health services** experienced by women, especially Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women, the Government is working to give women **more choice** about how, when and where they receive treatment. The Department also continues to fund innovative programmes involving places of worship and voluntary organisations, in order to develop their capacity to undertake a range of health promotion initiatives aimed at reaching and engaging BAME groups.

The Government is committed to raising awareness about **sexual health** among young people. In 2003 the Government established a multi-disciplinary Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV to advise the Department of Health on implementation of the Government's 'Sexual Health and HIV Strategy'. In November 2006, the Department of Health launched an awareness raising campaign *Condom Essential Wear* for 18-24 year olds, which focuses on the main sexually transmitted infections and includes gender specific material. The NHS is also providing £26.8 million in funding to Primary Care Trusts in 2008/09 (concurrent with funding for 2009/10 and 2010/2011) to improve women's knowledge of and access to contraception, in a bid to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and abortion.

The national programme on **gender equality and women's mental health** was established in 2003/04 to support the *Implementation Guidance: Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Mental Health*. Its focus has been the specific delivery of differentiated high quality services for women service users and the development of a gendered context for mental health and social care. Routine enquiry about domestic violence when taking a social history has now been rolled out to all adult mental health settings.

The United Kingdom's **maternal, perinatal and infant mortality rates** remain amongst some of the lowest in the world. The Department for Health is committed to the principles of woman-focussed, family centred maternity services, as set out in the *Maternity Standard of the National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services* (NSF), published in September 2004. The Maternity Standard aims to promote every woman's experience of having choice and control in giving birth to her baby, and particular emphasis is placed on improving services for vulnerable women. The NSF is supported by *Maternity Matters: Choice, access and continuity of care in a safe service*, published in 2007, which sets out a clear framework for the development of maternity services. In addition, a new maternity indicator was included in the *Better Care for All Public Service Agreement*, announced in 2007, which aims to ensure that all women have seen a midwife or maternity healthcare professional for a health and social care assessment of needs, risk and choices by twelve completed weeks of pregnancy.

The Government recognizes that many cases of **domestic abuse start during pregnancy** and in 2006, the Department of Health published *Responding to Domestic Abuse: A handbook for health professionals*, which gives practical guidance to healthcare professionals on working with service users experiencing domestic abuse. Routine enquiry about domestic violence has now been rolled out to all pregnant women when taking a social history and providing information during the antenatal period, irrespective of the response, with the intent of raising awareness around support services.

In 1999 the Government launched its **Teenage Pregnancy Strategy** in response to concerns about England's high rate of teenage pregnancy. Since then, the Government has achieved a 10.7% fall in the under-18 conception rate and a 6.4% fall in the under-16 rate, reversing the previous upward trend. Within the overall reduction in teenage conceptions, teenage births have fallen by 23.3%.

In **Northern Ireland**, the regional *Hidden Harm Action Plan*, and the on-going development of local *Hidden Harm Action Plans*, emphasise the importance of appropriate advice and support for women who are known to have alcohol and/or drug problems. The local action plans help facilitate good communication and joint planning between adult addiction services, maternity services and children's services. In addition a public information campaign was launched in March 2009 to communicate the risks to women (particularly in relation to breast cancer) associated with alcohol consumption.

In **Scotland**, in 2005 the Scottish Government established 'Fair for All – Gender', a national partnership between NHS Scotland and the Equal Opportunities Commission, which aimed to support NHS Scotland in implementing the Gender Equality Duty.

In April 2008, the Scottish Government established an Equalities and Planning Directorate within one of its national support health boards, NHS Health Scotland, to support NHS Scotland to take forward work across all statutory equality grounds, including by: progressing gender equality impact assessments; building the evidence base on gender health inequalities; and improving gender monitoring across key health topics and conditions. NHS Scotland is committed to tackling gender-based violence including by focusing attention on mental health, sexual and reproductive health, accident and emergency, primary care, addictions, and maternity services, where those affected by gender-based violence are likely to be concentrated.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has a NHS Centre for Equality and Human Rights (NHS CEHR) which is a national, strategic resource for NHS Wales designed to build capacity and capability to ensure that patients and staff are treated fairly and in accordance with their needs and to support the delivery of the equality and human rights dimensions embedded within 'Designed for Life', the WAG's 10-year vision for creating world-class health and social care in Wales.

### **Violence against Women**

Combating violence against women is one of the UK Government's key priorities. In the UK, nearly one in three women have experienced domestic violence, which accounts for 16 per cent of all reported violent incidents,<sup>6</sup> nearly one in four women have experienced some form of sexual assault, and on average more than one woman a week is killed by a current or former male partner.

The past ten years have transformed the way the UK criminal justice system deals with domestic and sexual violence, including through the introduction of new legislation to better protect women and manage perpetrators. This includes the Sexual Offences Act (2003), the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003), the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004), and the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act (2007). In December 2008, the UK Government ratified the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings which entered into force on 1 April 2009.<sup>7</sup> The UK Government is increasingly focusing on the demand side of the sexual exploitation equation, and is introducing a new (strict liability) criminal offence of paying for sex with someone who is trafficked or pimped. The new offence is included in the Policing and Crime Bill currently going through Parliament.

Since the last reporting period the UK Government has stepped up integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women (VAW). This includes through the development of linked, cross-government national action plans on specific VAW issues namely: sexual violence and abuse, domestic violence, forced marriage and crimes committed in the name of 'honour', and human trafficking. These cross-Government commitments are overseen by three inter-departmental ministerial groups which provide strategic oversight and guidance. In addition to cross-government action, sector specific policies on VAW exist. For example the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has a Violence Against Women Strategy, and has designated coordinators in all CPS areas to deliver the Strategy locally. The CPS introduced a VAW indicator which has facilitated the monitoring of successful prosecutions and published its first VAW Crime report on performance in 2008.

During the past reporting period, the UK Government has invested in support services for victims of violence including over £60 million for refuges and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)<sup>8</sup>, £30 million a year for Victim Support, as well as funding for help-lines and for Rape Crisis and the Survivors Trust. From 2009-2011, the Department of Health will also provide £1.4 million to fund a multi-disciplinary Sexual Violence National Support Team that will support the opening of new SARCs. £75K has also been provided to facilitate the implementation of a new Diploma in Forensic and Clinical Aspects of Sexual Assault. The Government has also invested in supporting and protecting victims engaged with the criminal justice system and in bringing more offenders to justice including through: the establishment of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC's); the provision of Witness Care staff and Witness Protection arrangements in court; the provision of specialist training for prosecutors, police and court staff in dealing with women who have been attacked or abused; and the establishment of a network of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors to provide support for victims of rape cases. In addition, new multi-agency arrangements have been established to case-manage the most vulnerable victims and the most dangerous offenders.<sup>9</sup> The Government is also investing in prison and probation programmes to rehabilitate and manage perpetrators.

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<sup>6</sup> Walker, A., Kershaw, C. and Nicholas, S. (2008) Crime in England and Wales 2007/08. Home Office Statistical Bulletin. London: Home Office

<sup>7</sup> This includes the introduction of a forty-five day minimum reflection period for all identified victims of trafficking and temporary one-year renewable residence permits in certain circumstances (this goes beyond Convention requirements).

<sup>8</sup> Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) provide victims with medical care and counselling and can assist the police investigation through a forensic examination. The Government has committed to providing 38 SARCs throughout England and Wales by 2011

<sup>9</sup> Between 2005 and 2009, 122 Specialist Domestic Violence Court systems (SDVCs) have been established (building on success of pilot SDVCs in 2004). Victims in each SDVC are supported by Independent DV Advisers (IDVAs); and 200 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) have dealt with 19,000 cases..

Local public authorities are encouraged to be pro-active in tackling VAW as per their obligations under the Gender Equality Duty, and have been provided with resources from central Government to develop a range of accommodation options for victims of domestic violence. These measures are making a difference: there was a 58 per cent decrease in the prevalence of domestic violence between 1997 and 2007/2008. Similarly, homicides committed by partners/ex-partners have fallen from 143 in 2004/2005 to 106 in 2007/2008. There is also a small but steady increase in conviction rates.<sup>10</sup> By 2008, 72.5 per cent of domestic violence cases charged and brought to court resulted in conviction, compared to just 46 per cent in 2003. In 2008, the Forced Marriage Unit directly intervened in over 400 cases and gave advice or support to over 1600 cases of possible forced marriage. Such successful outcomes have been contributed to a range of factors including the introduction of multi-agency approaches, increased specialist training of key professionals, and performance management, among others.

On the prevention end, the Government is taking a number of initiatives including working closely with schools to help educate young people about how to develop mutually respectful personal relationships, and to make violence against women and girls unacceptable.

In **Northern Ireland** the inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence plays a key role in taking forward co-ordinated action to tackle violence against women. The five-year domestic violence strategy *Tackling Violence at Home* has provided a framework for taking forward key initiatives in collaboration with statutory and non-statutory organisations.

Northern Ireland is investing in key VAW initiatives including: over £260K in media campaigns targeting the general public (to change public attitudes about domestic violence), victims (to provide information about services, such as the Government-funded 24-hour domestic violence helpline), as well as perpetrators; approximately £300K a year to support the regional expansion of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) which bring together key agencies to identify and support high-risk victims; and £120K per year to deliver education programmes to school-aged children to encourage the development of healthy non-violent relationships. Recent research among young people suggests that work remains to be done to change attitudes regarding the acceptability of domestic violence. Future media campaigns targeted at young people will address this.

The Northern Ireland five-year cross-departmental regional strategy "*Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse*" (2008-2013), delivered in partnership with voluntary sector bodies, aims to address sexual violence and abuse (including of both female and male victims). Outcomes of the Strategy will include: investment of £2m to build a new specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) (expected 2011); A Public Information Campaign to increase awareness of the issues and dispel myths about sexual violence and abuse; and £150K for counselling services (to March 2011). A study on VAW in Northern Ireland will report on results in 2010. Joint working by government departments and agencies and voluntary sector bodies has been crucial to the successful development of this Strategy and is critical to ensure effective implementation.

In **Scotland**, the Government's approach to tackling violence against women is framed by the *Safer Lives: Changed Lives* document, and its work is taken forward by the (Scotland) **National Group to Address Violence Against Women**, which includes key statutory and voluntary sector organisations. The Government has allocated over £44m between 2008-2011 towards enabling women and children to access frontline support.<sup>11</sup> This includes a substantial programme of activity to address the needs of **children and young people** experiencing domestic abuse, with young people participating in the process. Work has also been undertaken to improve how perpetrators are dealt with and a public awareness raising campaigns on domestic abuse and rape are underway. The Government has also invested in improving the capacity of agencies to identify and deal with violence against women, including routine enquiry in the health sector and a network of training consortia.

The Scottish Government has worked to strengthen the legal response to violence against women including by: introducing the Sexual Offences Bill; developing a domestic abuse toolkit for local criminal justice partners across Scotland; introducing new legislation in the Criminal Justice and Licensing Bill to provide police with specific powers to close premises associated with human trafficking or child sexual exploitation; and consulting on the potential role of civil legislation to address the issue of forced marriage.

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<sup>10</sup> 37 per cent in cases prosecuted as rape result in convictions, and 59 per cent of cases prosecuted as rape result in a conviction for rape or another offence

<sup>11</sup> This includes through 73 violence against women projects across Scotland, a network of rape crisis centres and a Sexual Assault Referral Centre, the Scottish domestic abuse and rape crisis help-lines. It also channels funding to Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Assembly Government launched the All Wales Domestic Abuse Strategy in March 2005. This Strategy provides an important framework for the development of local action and emphasises the need for joint agency working where information and best practices are shared. The Strategy focuses on 5 key outcomes: to reduce the number of domestic abuse homicides; to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse; to increase the rate that domestic abuse is reported; to increase the rate of domestic abuse offences that are brought to justice and; to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are adequately protected and supported.

The Domestic Violence Services Grant scheme provides funding for organisations that provide services on a national level or local services that have relevance to the whole of Wales, all of whom assist with the delivery of the All Wales Domestic Abuse Strategy. A total of £1.5 million was added to the grant for 2007/08 and 2008/09. The allocation included funding for the development of a safe house for women fleeing prostitution from across Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

In April 2007 Safer Wales was awarded £500k capital funding in 2007/08 and on going revenue costs of £150k there after to develop a two bed gateway accommodation which consists of three stages of housing linked support to meet the needs for women fleeing prostitution or trafficked women.

While progress on addressing violence against women has been made, the UK Government is not complacent and believes that much more remains to be done. Persistent **challenges** include: the need to provide children and young people with life skills, such as anger management, to prevent VAW; challenging society perceptions which may, in some circumstances among some audiences, see violence against women and girls as acceptable; finding better ways to safeguard children affected by family violence, and identifying and responding to early signs of violence; keeping better track of the most serious offenders; improving specialist health and social services; and working with local government to promote better consistency and quality of service provisions for VAW. In March 2009, the UK Government launched a **nation-wide consultation** on potential cross-government action to combat violence against women and girls. The consultation will examine some of the challenges outlined above, and will aim to identify gaps in prevention, service provision and protection services. The results will be used to inform a national strategy (for England) to combat violence against women and girls and to improve their safety.

The UK Government has been one of the main supporters of key **United Nations** (UN) resolutions on VAW such as the General Assembly Resolution on Eliminating All Forms of Violence Against Women. In 2006 the UK Government lobbied heavily for the development of a global common set of indicators on VAW and the establishment of the new UN database designed to provide empirical evidence on violence against women, which includes practical tools and best guidance on how to combat it. In 2008 the UK Government worked with **European Union** (EU) partners to develop Guidelines on tackling Violence Against Women through their Common Foreign and Security Policy. These guidelines mean that the EU will conduct systematic lobbying and reporting on this issue as well as using EU funding to tackle it. The UK currently sits on the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which is looking to develop a related Convention.

### **Women and armed conflict**

The UK Government is committed to ensuring the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, and to protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts.

The UK played a leading role in the drafting and development of **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), and UN Security Council Resolution **1820** on Sexual Violence as a Tactic of War (UNSCR 1820). In 2006 the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the Department for International Development (DFID) launched a joint UK National Action Plan<sup>12</sup> linking humanitarian conflict, defence and diplomacy work to implement UNSCR 1325. The Plan aims to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into full account in all Security Council mandates for peacekeeping and Peacebuilding operations.

The UK provides Peace Support Operations (PSO) training to a wide array of potential and existing Troop Contributing Countries, Regional Training Centres and Multilateral Organisations, such as the African Union. These capacity-building activities include aspects of UNSCR 1325, as they are covered in UK PSO doctrine and training. The UK is also funding a package of projects for the UN Department for Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) to build capacity for gender mainstreaming in DPKO and its peacekeeping missions. The UK is continuing to work closely with the central Gender Adviser at DPKO in New York to promote the work and impact of the gender advisers in peacekeeping missions. DFID provides core-funding to the European Peace-

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/unscr-1325-uk-action-plan>

building Liaison Office (EPLO) in Brussels, which has initiated the EU 1325 Partnership to bring together interested in parties from the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission and NGOs. The UK has also participated in the work on gender mainstreaming of UNSCR 1325 in NATO. The Ministry of Defence's current pre-deployment planning currently covers social and cultural issues tailored for particular operations, and includes specific gender issues that should be taken into account.

The UK Government is working to mainstream gender equality into its development work on conflict resolution and peace-building, including supporting and increasing **women's role in peace-building**. In Northern Uganda, DFID in partnership with UNIFEM supported women's engagement in the Juba Peace negotiations by securing them official observer status and by supporting the Gender Adviser to the UN Special Envoy. As a result, women provided substantive inputs to the implementation protocols and have seen their efforts publicly acknowledged by both negotiating parties. In February 2007, DFID commenced funding of a new £32m programme with UNIFEM to support women's engagement in peace-building and reduction of gender violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. This global programme aims to support community-based approaches to gender-sensitive peace-building and preventing sexual and gender based violence in the contexts of Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda and Timor-Leste.

While much good work is being done, significant **challenges** remain. For example, in post-conflict situations, after demobilisation and disarmament, gender violence goes up not down. This emphasises the need to work with men as well as women, and particularly the importance of offering alternative models of masculinity rather than those very aggressive ones which dominate in highly militarised societies. Sensitivity to culture and environment is required to ensure that support to women's initiatives does not inadvertently put them at risk, either physically or socially. Raising the profile of women, for example, as intermediaries or role models may pose increased risks to their personal safety. It is also important to be aware of and address the practical barriers to women's participation in decision-making forums (for example at meetings) which may include problems over travel, child care, or appropriate timing.

Within **Northern Ireland** UNSCR 1325 is widely acknowledged as an important international commitment to women's equality and empowerment, particularly as regards women's access to politics, public life and decision-making. Consistent with this responsibility, the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland identifies linkages to UNSCR 1325 in terms of objectives and related actions to redress imbalances in representation and participation (including participation in the workforce). A PSA target in the current Programme for Government commits Ministers to implementing the Gender Equality Strategy. A report on implementation and supporting Gender Action Plans for Men and Women, which will shortly be considered by the Northern Ireland Executive, will outline actions by Departments to implement the Gender Equality Strategy. £2.8 million has been awarded to the Positive Relations project, to help build the capacity of women to participate actively in post-conflict arrangements through clusters of community-based groups working with women. Various government departments provide funding towards the work of women's groups providing services to the community. Over the past few years, considerable progress has been made, for example through the Women's Centres Regional Partnership, to develop a more effective regional infrastructure organisation to support women's organisations in disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland

### **Women in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources**

The UK Government recognises that those women who wish to work make a critical contribution to the economy, both in their role as workers and as primary carers, and has made advancements to address the barriers that prevent some women from meeting their full potential. Following a number of initiatives, there has been strong growth in the level of female participation in the labour market over the last few decades, where women now make up 46 percent of the work force, up from 38 percent in 1971.

The UK Government is committed to helping mothers and fathers **balance work and family life** and has introduced a series of family friendly employment policies, including through the Work and Families Act 2006, which built on entitlements for working parents introduced in 2003. These include extending the right to request flexible working to all parents of children aged 16 years and under, all parents of disabled children aged under 18 years, and individuals that care for adults<sup>13</sup>, and increasing the length of Maternity Leave, Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance.

Since 1997, the UK Government has invested over £25 billion in providing **high-quality childcare** in England, which can enable primary care-givers to work. The Ten Year Childcare Strategy (2004) and Action Plan (2006)

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<sup>13</sup> This allows employees to continue to work in the same post as their caring role changes, for example after maternity leave, by adjusting their hours to fit their caring roles instead of having to down-skill to a lower paid position.

include commitments to deliver universal affordable childcare for 3 to 14 year-olds, and a Sure Start Children's Centre for every community. The Children's Act (2006) gave statutory force to these key commitments. The Government is also investing in extending out-of-hours services in schools (see 'Girl-Child'), which can help carers and parents to work outside of core school hours.

The UK Government recognises the numerous barriers carers face in balancing work and caring commitments and the impact that this can have on income, pension accumulation and the development of social networks. In June 2008, the Government published a 10-year **Carers' Strategy**, underpinned by £225 million in funding, with the aim of improving the lives of carers, the majority of whom are women.

The Government is also working to **encourage men to play an equal role** in caring responsibilities, including through ensuring that service provisions that affect families support the caring role of fathers.

The UK Government continues to address the ongoing challenge of the **gender pay gap**, which currently stands at 22.6 per cent. In 2004 the Prime Minister established the 'Women and Work Commission' to conduct research and consider how to close the gender pay gap. In 2006, the Government issued an Action Plan<sup>14</sup> in response to the recommendations of the Commission and in April 2007 published a progress report<sup>15</sup> on the implementation of the recommendations. In 2008, the UK Government introduced a **cross-departmental target** to reduce the gender pay gap through the Equalities Public Service Agreement (2008-2011). Additional Government actions to reduce the pay gap include: increasing the availability of quality part-time jobs and giving part-time workers the same rights as full time workers (80 per cent of whom are women); providing incentives for employers to reduce the gender pay gap; investing in training of women for non-traditional jobs and management/supervisory positions; and investigating barriers to employment by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women and introducing the National Minimum Wage.

Despite progress, the gap between **female and male entrepreneurship** rates remains wide where only 16 per cent of the 4.7 million UK enterprises are majority women-led. The Government's Enterprise Strategy<sup>16</sup>, published in March 2008, recognises the importance of women's enterprise to economic growth and contains a range of measures designed to promote the development and growth of such enterprises.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) published its carers' strategy, *Caring for Carers*, in January 2006. In May 2008 the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister for Social Development gave a commitment to undertake a joint review of the support provisions for carers. In addition, the Department for Social Development is examining issues in relation to carers' benefits as part of the review and DHSSPS is examining the position in relation to health and social care support for carers. The review is expected to report by Easter 2009.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has undertaken a number of measures in order to address the **imbalance in levels of entrepreneurial activity** between women and men (which in 2007 stood at 2.1% for females compared to 7.7% for males). These include: establishing the *Investing in Women* programme to specifically target women in entrepreneurship; running the *Pathways to Female Entrepreneurship* programme in 2006-8 which saw 26 pre-enterprise programmes delivered to 232 participants and a business growth programme delivered to 40 women already in business, amongst other initiatives; and establishing the 'Booster' pilot programme in 2009 to stimulate growth of existing businesses run by female entrepreneurs and encourage them to explore export opportunities.

In **Scotland**, *The Early Years Framework* recognises the need for parents to have access to high quality and affordable **childcare** services and sets steps to be taken at national and local level to overcome accessibility and affordability challenges.

Since 2001, the Scottish Government has taken action to close **the gender pay gap** and **tackle occupational segregation**, largely via its participation in *Close the Gap*, a partnership project to raise awareness about the gender pay gap and its causes and to encourage action by employees and employers to close the gap. In 2006, the then Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government) set up a cross-departmental (now cross-directorate) working group to consider the recommendations of the Women and Work Commission and to assess the effectiveness of current policies to address gender stereotyping and occupational segregation. The Scottish Government is currently implementing actions identified by the working group, including widening its

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/WWCgovtactionplansept06.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/WWCTowards%20a%20Fairer%20Future.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/enterprise/enterprisesmes/enterprise-framework/index.html>



dialogue to public, private and third sector organisations which is key to identifying and progressing further work to tackle occupational segregation and career choices.

In **Wales**, in 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government announced a £4 million initiative to help tackle the **barriers faced by people from BAME communities** in trying to find work. This three-year initiative will be led by the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association and will provide work and skills opportunities for over 1,000 people across West Wales and the Valleys area. It will also help people furthest from the labour market, particularly women, to gain new qualifications and enter further education.

The Welsh Assembly Government is also working with providers to ensure that they have appropriate policies, procedures and skills to identify and support the needs of **women in business**.

### **Women in Power and Decision-Making**

The UK Government understands the implicit value of a society that has an equal representation of women and men in positions of power and decision-making in reflecting the value and needs of that society, and is wholly committed to working towards this goal.

In the last five years, the Government has undertaken a number of key measures to advance the equal representation of women and men in decision-making.

The use of **women-only shortlists** has been one of the most effective mechanisms in increasing the representation of women in Parliament. The introduction of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 has enabled political parties to take special measures to boost the number of women standing at local, national and European elections. The number of women Members of Parliament (MPs) has increased from 9 per cent before 1997 to the current figure of 20 per cent. The time limit on this measure will be extended to 2030 through the new Equality Bill which was introduced on 24 April 2009 in the UK Parliament.

The under representation of **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women** in UK political and public life remains a challenge with BAME women comprising less than 1% of councillors. The Minister for Women and Equality is committed to addressing this issue and has made increasing the representation of BAME women in public life one of her key priorities for action. In May 2008, the Government launched a **cross-party Taskforce**, made up of 16 former and current BAME women councillors, to take practical action to increase the numbers of BAME women local councillors. Taskforce activities to date have included awareness-raising, outreach events, and the launch of a mentoring/shadowing scheme. The Government is also working to strengthen the evidence base on women in decision-making by carrying out research into the routes that BAME women take into positions of power and investigating effective models to help women from under-represented groups become active in local decision making. The House of Commons convened an enquiry ('Speakers Conference') in November 2008 to examine the under representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in Parliament and make recommendations for action.

The Government is targeting young people, with a view to promoting educational programmes (including through citizenship lessons in UK schools) in which women and girls are equipped with the necessary knowledge to enable them to participate equally in decision-making processes in all spheres of life and at all levels. Opportunities for young people to engage in political activities include through membership in school councils and participation in the **UK Youth Parliament (UKYP)**. In 2006, 53 per cent of UKYP's members were female.

The UK Government recognises the importance of promoting women in decision-making bodies outside of the political sphere, and is taking forward a range of actions on increasing the diversity of those on the **boards of public bodies**. This includes plans **to set targets on gender, ethnicity and disability in public appointments**, and an accompanying programme of action.

In **Northern Ireland** the Government believes that it is important that people from a wide range of backgrounds take up public appointments. District Councils support the Local Government Staff Commission's "Women in Local Councils" initiative to identify and respond to all forms of gender under-representation in decision making, employment practices, service delivery and partnerships. This initiative involves both elected representatives across the political parties, and council officials. A number of public bodies facilitate or provide women-only training and other measures to promote women's participation at senior levels. The Northern Ireland Civil Service plans to undertake an in-depth review of the gender composition of its staffing, where women are currently under-represented in senior roles.

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Government continues to work closely with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPAS) to encourage women to apply for positions on public bodies.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) is working with organisations representing BAME communities to encourage applications for public appointments. The WAG Public Appointments Unit has designed a training course to assist people who are thinking of applying for public appointments to better understand the application process. The course has been supplemented with an advertising campaign which features public appointees from BAME communities as role models. The course has been well received within BAME communities, especially by the women, who have reported that the course has given them more confidence to apply for public appointments.

Following the elections to the National Assembly for Wales in 2008, of the 60 members 28 are female.

The UK Government has achieved a degree of progress on women's representation but there is clearly still some way to go. It continues to take action in this crucial area, where identified obstacles include: personal barriers – many people wish to participate but don't have the confidence either to put themselves forward for elections, or to deal with the media scrutiny that comes with a public role; cultural barriers, including the lack of role-models for under-represented groups; practical barriers, as work and family commitments can be difficult to balance with long hours; Institutional barriers – including the selection and election processes, and the ways in which Parliament and Councils operate; and financial barriers, including lack of investment from political parties, and lower economic levels experienced by underrepresented groups.

The UK Government and its **overseas missions** also work bilaterally to support the greater engagement of women in the political process. For example, in **Guatemala**, the UK Embassy supported "Mas Mujeres, Mejor Politica" (More Women, Better Politics), which developed female representation in the Guatemalan congress to ensure that women's rights are more effectively tackled in the legislature. The UK Embassy in **Sierra Leone** is ensuring that women's voices are heard by working with the Global Rescue Mission to encourage women in Kenema in eastern Sierra Leone to get involved in politics at a local level. The Embassy funded a project that brought together groups of local women to monitor the work of councillors in their chiefdoms and hold them to account.

### Human Rights of Women

The UK Government's work on gender equality is guided by key human rights instruments, including UN CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. The UK has ratified additional human rights instruments which include equality and non-discrimination among their fundamental provisions. This includes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art.2.1), the International Covenant on Social Economic and Cultural Rights (Art 2.2), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art.2.1).

The UK ratified CEDAW in 1986 and has since made important progress on implementing the provisions of the Convention. In 2004 it acceded to the CEDAW Optional Protocol which came into force in 2005. In July 2008, the UK was examined by the CEDAW Committee on its 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Reports, and has since been following up on the recommendations of the Committee as outlined in the Concluding Observations. This includes responding to a call for greater coordination across government to implement the provisions of CEDAW by establishing a working group of the four gender policy leads from England and the devolved administrations (the 'Gender Directors Network') and by holding regular cross-departmental meetings of policy focal points to ensure regular follow up and monitoring of the CEDAW Committee's overall and sector-specific recommendations.

The UK is signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (ratified in 1950) which includes Article 14 on the prohibition of discrimination, including on the basis of sex. In 1998 the UK passed the Human Rights Act (which came into force in 2000), which gives further effect to the rights of the ECHR within the domestic context.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of key independent bodies within the UK with a mandate to both promote awareness of the importance of human rights and to monitor the implementation of human rights legislation at the domestic level. These are: the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in England and Wales (a statutory body created through the Equality Act 2006); the Human Rights Commission in Northern Ireland (a statutory body set up in 1999 following the Northern Ireland Act (1998)) and the Scottish Human Rights Commission (a statutory body formed in 2008 following the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006).

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<sup>17</sup> In particular, the Act makes available in UK courts a remedy for breach of a Convention right, without the need to go to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In addition to promoting human rights domestically, the UK mainstreams human rights throughout its **foreign policy and development work**, including through efforts to ensure that gender equality is promoted and protected. The UK Government believes that effective women's participation in public and economic life is a pre-requisite for good governance and effective democracy.

Some UN Member States remain reluctant to translate their international commitments into positive changes on the ground. The UK is encouraging efforts to strengthen effective gender mainstreaming throughout the entire UN system, including through actively supporting current proposals to reform the UN Gender Architecture in order to ensure a more strategic, effective and coherent approach to addressing global gender inequality and to progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Good Friday agreement and subsequently the Northern Ireland Act 1998, task the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) with advising the Government on "the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the ECHR, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland". The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission submitted advice to Government on 10 December 2008, proposing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which would specifically acknowledge the various aspects of the rights of women and encompassing a wide ranging set of new, legally enforceable rights.

### **Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to, and participation in, all communications systems, especially in the media**

The UK Government recognises that the media can play an important role in helping to ensure the elimination of stereotypes, and that increasing the number of women in senior posts in broadcasting can result in a more positive portrayal of women in the media.

The UK Government strongly believes that a press free from State intervention is fundamental to democracy. However, there are various **regulatory mechanisms** for addressing media content. Under the **Communications Act (2003)**, Parliament placed a duty on the broadcasting regulator, Ofcom to draw up a **Broadcasting Standards Code** which prohibits discriminatory treatment or language on the grounds of sex, as well as other issues. The first Broadcasting Code came into effect in July 2005, which states that Member States shall ensure that broadcasts do not contain any incitement to hatred on grounds of (among other issues) sex. Breaches of the Code are published by Ofcom and deliberate, serious or repeated breaches of the Code may lead to statutory sanctions against the broadcaster. There are also strict rules in place to cover broadcast and non-broadcast advertising. These include the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) code and the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) code, administered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which include a call to avoid causing offence including on grounds of sex.

In January 2008 the Government Equalities Office published *Women Not For Sale*, which highlights the scope and scale of advertising of women and services supplied by women in personal classifieds. The Minister for Women met with the Newspaper Society to discuss working together to tackle this issue. The Society has revised its guidance to members to ensure it reflects concerns about trafficking and a number of regional newspapers have banned these type of adverts.

### **Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment**

The UK Government recognises that we face unprecedented challenges to our environment, our economy, and the future security of our energy supplies – and that the decisions we make now will affect the planet and our way of life for generations to come. The Government also recognises that the impact of climate change can have differential impacts on women and other groups.

In order to effectively forecast, assess and respond to these potential differential impacts, the newly created Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), which was established in October 2008 to bring together energy policy with climate change mitigation policy, will be establishing Equality Schemes (including a Gender Equality Scheme), and under-taking Impact Assessments (including on gender) on all environment and climate change policies, as required by the public sector duties.

The UK Government is committed to addressing climate change and sustainable development through its **international development work** carried out by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Women are particularly vulnerable to the risks of climate change yet also have the least access to resources that enable them to diversify their livelihoods in response to climate change.

DFID is currently developing a climate change implementation strategy which aims to establish a 'fair and effective global framework' that addresses inequalities in climate change, including gender inequalities. DFID will be spending £100 million over the next five years to fill knowledge gaps in climate change, including research on its effects on the poorest and most vulnerable people, of which women form the majority. This research will be used to mainstream gender in DFID's climate change work and to influence multilaterals.

DFID are co-funding work with the World Bank's Social Development Department on the social dimensions of climate change, of which gender is an important cross-cutting theme. This evidence will be used to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in the Bank's work on climate change.

DFID is also committed to building women's leadership capacity in DFID-funded Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) projects, which aim to draw women into the management process by equipping them with skills (e.g. literacy, information and leadership training) and by establishing forums and committees in which women are actively encouraged to participate.

DFID's work through RNRRS projects has highlighted the challenges in engaging women in decision-making processes where men often prevented women from attending. This points to the need to also engage men in discussions about the benefits of women's involvement in management processes.

### **Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl-child**

The UK has demonstrated its international commitment to promoting and protecting children's rights, including the rights of the girl-child, as evidenced through its ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1991.

In England, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) takes forward work on children, as outlined in its Children's Plan<sup>18</sup> (2007-17). Over the last ten years, much progress has been to support children – including the girl-child – by tackling under investment and low aspirations in early years, schools, colleges and other services for children. Since 1997, the number of registered childcare places has more than doubled so that there is now a registered childcare place for 1 in every 4 children under eight years of age in England. All three and four year olds in the UK are now guaranteed free, part-time early education for up to two years before reaching compulsory school age. This not only benefits girls in terms of learning opportunities but serves as a childcare function, enabling parents, including single mothers, to return to work. A wide range of extended services in schools are now available outside of core hours, including activities for children, childcare, study support and a range of family learning and parental support, with over 16,500 schools in England (77% of the total) participating. In England, standards in schools have risen across the board, with results at ages 11, 14, 16 and 19 now at, or about, their highest ever levels, far fewer weak or failing schools, and more young people than ever before going on to university. Girls now attain higher results than boys in all key stages and in all subjects except Mathematics at Key Stage 2.

In England, the number of children in relative poverty has fallen by 600,000 and teenage pregnancy rates are at their lowest levels for 20 years. The Government has also introduced a range of measures to support teenage mothers and their children, including: tailored ante-natal services and intensive health visitor support; assigning a lead professional to provide intensive support for individual mothers; financial support to meet childcare costs for teenage parents who want to return to education; and accommodation with support for all mothers under -18 who cannot live at home or with their partner.

As a result of Every Child Matters – the Government's programme for a national framework to support the "joining up" of children's services across education, culture, health, social care, and justice in England- local areas have begun to change the way they manage their services for children and young people. Examples of success include the Sure Start programme which aims to provide children under five years old and their families with information and holistic integrated services including education, childcare, health and family support. In March 2009, the UK Government established nearly 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres in England for over 2.3 million young children and their families, including the most vulnerable.<sup>19</sup>

In 2003, the government introduced the Female Genital Mutilation Act, which makes it an offence for UK nationals or permanent residents to carry out Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) abroad or, to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad, even in countries where practice is legal. A 2007 report estimates

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/downloads/The\\_Childrens\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> A 2008 evaluation revealed that children participating in Sure Start programmes had more positive social behaviour and greater independence. Parents were less likely to show negative or risky parenting and were more likely to encourage creativity and learning at home.

that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are potentially at risk of FGM in England and Wales.<sup>20</sup> A cross-Governmental Steering Group brings together government and voluntary organizations to develop a coordinated response to develop actions and tools to assist victims of FGM. In 2007, Project Azure was set up within the Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Investigation Command Unit, specifically to deal with this potentially fatal child abuse practice. There are at least 12 specialist clinics in the National Health Service (NHS) which treat women and girls who have been mutilated.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Northern Ireland Executive has included a specific target to ensure central role of the rights of the child in its Programme for Government 2008-11. A Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People has been established, chaired by two Junior Ministers with specific responsibility for children and a three year action plan is being developed to implement the rights based cross-departmental ten year strategy for children and young people and deliver improved outcomes for all children.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland has a number of statutory duties. The principal aim of the Commissioner is to 'safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons'.

In **Wales**, the Children's Commissioner for Wales works to make sure that children and young people are kept safe and that they know about and can access their rights. The Commissioner presents an annual monitoring report to the National Assembly for Wales on the position of children and young people in Wales and the overall provision of services available to them.

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Government is implementing *Getting it right for every child*. The *Getting it right for every child* approach is the foundation for work with all children and young people, including adult services where parents are involved. It builds on universal health and education services, and is embedded in the developing early years and youth frameworks. Developments in the universal services of health and education, such as Better Health Better Care and Curriculum for Excellence, are identifying what needs to be done in those particular areas to improve outcomes for children. Changes across culture, systems and practice are taking place across services for children and a national Information Technology (IT) framework is being developed that will support a common coordinated approach to meeting the needs of children through *Getting it right for every child* with a strong focus on early years and early intervention.

While there are more opportunities for families and children now than ever before, the realities of a rapidly changing world poses new challenges for parents. This includes the challenges of balancing work and family life, fears for safety for children who go outside alone, rises in child obesity as a result of a video/television and fatty food lifestyle, persistent under-achievement for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, among others. The Children's Plan attempts to address some of these concerns including by strengthening support to families, investing in safe places to play, committing to eradicating child poverty by 2020, closing the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children, and helping children to develop personal and social skills, among other actions.

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<sup>20</sup> 'A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales' FORWARD, UK, 2007.

## **Part Three: Institutional Development**

The importance that the UK Government places on promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is demonstrated by the existence of dedicated national mechanisms to take the gender equality agenda forward. This includes through: the appointment of a Minister for Women and Equality; the establishment of dedicated equality offices, directorates and units to take the gender equality agenda forward; the commitment to statutory and policy frameworks to promote gender mainstreaming as well as to address gender equality in sector-specific policies; the development of relevant indicators to measure progress, and; support to independent bodies to monitor and promote gender equality throughout all levels of government. A notable development during the past reporting period is the introduction the Equality Bill (2009) - a major reform in equality legislation which will streamline and strengthen anti-discrimination legislation and in so doing will directly strengthen the promotion of gender equality.

### **Institutional Mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality**

The UK's national response to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is led by the **Minister for Women and Equality** and a Deputy Minister for Women and Equality which have a specific role to raise awareness across Government of the need to, and the benefits of, addressing gender inequalities. The Ministers sit on a broad range of Cabinet Committees covering areas such as public health, children, ageing, asylum and migration and violence against women to make sure that the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account in a strategic way when national policies and programmes of action are being developed. The Minister also participates in and/or chairs key inter-Ministerial groups directly relating to policy on gender equality issues, including domestic and sexual violence, and on reducing numbers of women offenders. In July 2007 the Minister for Women and Equality set out three priority areas for action (for England and Wales), namely: to support women and families who are caring for children, elderly and disabled relatives; to tackle violence against women, and to change the way women offenders are treated; and to increase the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women in public life.<sup>21</sup>

The Minister for Women and Equality is supported by the **Government Equalities Office (GEO)**, a self-standing Department responsible for Government's overall strategy on equality as well as for promoting women's issues across Government. Established in July 2007,<sup>22</sup> the GEO leads on mainstreaming gender equality policy across Government and promotes gender equality within wider UK society.<sup>23</sup> It also takes the lead on co-ordinating joint work and cooperation between the devolved administrations on gender equality and related issues.<sup>24</sup> GEO is responsible for delivering the priorities of the Minister for Women and Equality and leads on and supports the fulfilment of the UK's gender equality obligations internationally, including with the United Nations (under CEDAW and under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), and within the European Union (including the EU Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men (2006-2010)).

In **Northern Ireland**, the **Equality Directorate of the 'Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister'** has an advisory, consultative and reporting role in respect of international human rights obligations and statutory equality duties across government.

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Government has a dedicated **Equality Unit** to help take forward its work to promote equality. The Unit supports Scottish Ministers and officials throughout the Scottish Government in mainstreaming equality, including gender equality. In order to develop the equality evidence base, a dedicated Analytical Unit has been established within the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government also works in partnership with the Equality Proofing the Budget and Policy Group (set up in 2001) to map the pathway between evidence, policy and spend. It is working to improve the presentation of information about equalities issues in the Government's budget documents, as well as raising awareness about the need to mainstream equalities into both policies and resource allocation.

The Welsh Assembly Government **Equality and Human Rights Division** provides support, advice and guidance on mainstreaming equality into the policies, strategies, programmes and practices of the Welsh Assembly Government and liaises with internal and external groups to identify specific initiatives, including those around gender, to take these forward.

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<sup>21</sup> The Minister reported on progress towards these priorities to Parliament in a written Ministerial Statement and produced a one-year-on progress report in July 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Previous to the establishment of GEO in July 2007 the Minister for Women was supported through the Women and Equality Unit.

<sup>23</sup> GEO's gender equality work is implemented within the broader context of GEO's cross-cutting equality work which aims to reduce discrimination and disadvantage and to improve equality for all, at work, in public life, in family and social life, in the delivery of public services, and in people's life chances.

<sup>24</sup> Related areas of work covered by GEO include equal representation in public life, gender equality and work, sexual orientation, and gender reassignment.

The **UK Parliament** plays an important role in taking forward the gender equality agenda. For example, the all-party Associate Parliamentary Group for Sex Equality campaigns for the achievement of gender equality in the UK. Both Houses of Parliament also host an annual debate marking International Women's Day. In 2009, the debate focused on the impact of the economic downturn on women.

In the **Scottish Parliament**, the cross-party Equal Opportunities Committee considers and reports on matters relating to equal opportunities and upon the observance of equal opportunities within the Parliament.

### **Independent Bodies to Promote and Monitor Gender Equality**

The **Women's National Commission** (WNC) acts as an official, independent advisory body presenting the views, needs and concerns of women from over 500 women's member organizations across the UK to Government. It is a non-departmental public body, set up in 1969, fully funded by Government but able to comment freely on Government policy. Since 2003, the WNC has facilitated regular meetings between women's organisations, Ministers and senior officials (mainly London-based, but with a growing regional voice) on a range of issues of relevance to women, such as violence against women and migration and asylum policy, which has helped to inform Government policy and action. It has also published a series of independent reports on relevant women's issues, and has produced shadow reports in response to the UK's Periodic Reports to the CEDAW Committee.<sup>25</sup>

The Scottish Government funds the **Scottish Women's Convention** (set up in 2003) which provides opportunities for women to engage in debate about specific issues of concern and, through consultation, influence policy decisions in Scotland. It has also commissioned other strategic partners to help take forward its gender equality objectives.

The **Equalities and Human Rights Commission** (EHRC) is a non-departmental public body, established under the Equality Act 2006, accountable for its public funds but independent of government.<sup>26</sup> It serves as an independent advocate for equality and human rights in England and Wales, and aims to reduce inequalities, challenge prejudice and disadvantage, and enforce equality legislation, including on gender. The Commission is mandated to monitor the effectiveness and effects of equality and human rights legislation – including legislation related to Gender (see below) - and makes proposals to Government for change. The EHRC is sponsored by the Government Equalities Office.

The equivalent bodies in Northern Ireland are the **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**, and the **Northern Ireland Commission on Human Rights**.

In Scotland the equivalent body is the **Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland**.

### **Statutory and Policy Frameworks for Gender Mainstreaming**

The **statutory framework** for addressing gender equality in England, Scotland and Wales (separate arrangements apply in Northern Ireland) is found in the **Equality Act** (2006) which introduced the **Gender Equality Duty** ('the Gender Duty') in 2007. The Gender Duty requires that all public bodies, when carrying out their functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender, and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men. It represents the largest change in gender equality legislation in the UK for 30 years, and for the first time places the onus on public bodies to be proactive in eliminating inequalities between women and men rather than relying on individuals to take action after discrimination has occurred. The equivalent statutory duty to promote gender equality in Northern Ireland was introduced through Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Order 1998 (effective from January 2000).

The Gender Duty requires all public bodies to prepare and publish a **Gender Equality Scheme**, which sets out how individual bodies will mainstream gender equality issues throughout their functional areas including in policy-making, service provision, employment matters, statutory discretion and decision-making. The scheme is to be reviewed and revised at least every three years. Government Departments are also required to undertake and publish **gender equality impact assessments** on all new programmes and policies, with the aim of ensuring that equality is considered as intrinsic and incorporated into all actions, programmes and policies from the outset.

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<sup>25</sup> The WNC agrees its annual work programme with the Minister for Women and Equality, has a Chair and Board of Commissioners, and is sponsored by the Government Equalities Office.

<sup>26</sup> The new commission brings together the work of three previous equality commissions (Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, and the Disability Rights Commission) and also takes on responsibility for the other aspects of equality: age, sexual orientation and religion or belief, as well as human rights.

The Gender Duty is actively enforced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which is empowered to assess the Gender Equality Scheme's produced by public authorities against five procedural criteria and is also mandated to take targeted enforcement action against public authorities who do not comply. For example, in January 2009, the EHRC drew attention to gaps in services to address violence against women and of the responsibility of local authorities, in light of the Duty, to respond.

On the cross-cutting **policy** front, gender equality in England and Wales is promoted through the **Equality Public Service Agreement** (Equality PSA) (2008-2011) which is a cross-government commitment to address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.<sup>27</sup> The five key priorities identified within the Equality PSA are to: narrow the gender pay gap; tackle barriers that limit disabled people's choice and control; address under-representation in public life; reduce discrimination in employment; and understand and address unfair treatment by public services.<sup>28</sup> In Northern Ireland, the equivalent policy framework, PSA 7, includes actions and targets to implement the Northern Ireland Executive's 10-year gender equality strategy (see below) and a commitment to tackle the gender pay gap.

Other cross-cutting Public Service Agreements (PSAs) have elements that directly support women including: PSA 23 to Make Communities Safer - which includes a priority action to reduce serious violence, including tackling serious sexual offenses and domestic violence; PSA 19 to Ensure Better Care for All - which includes a priority to ensure safe, high quality maternal care for all, and; PSA 29 to Reduce Poverty in Poorer Countries through Quicker Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals – which includes a specific indicator on gender equality.

The Northern Ireland Executive's 10-year **Gender Equality Strategy 2006-16** provides the policy framework to mainstream gender equality and tackle gender inequalities throughout the work of the Departments, building on their activities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Cross Departmental Gender Equality Action Plans, one for men and one for women (2008-11), give a wider picture of focused actions across government to promote gender equality.

The **Scotland** Act (1998) gives the Scottish Parliament power to encourage (other than by prohibition or regulation) equal opportunities and the Scottish Government continues to be committed to promoting equality for all and to mainstreaming equality, placing it at the heart of policy-making. The cross-directorate **Gender Equality Scheme 2008-11** sets out objectives and actions across government to progress gender equality in Scotland. In 2008, Scottish Government's Strategic Board approved a new corporate Equality & Diversity Plan, which seeks to embed equality practice further into Scottish Government policy making and procedures, a key focus being to increase the number and quality of Equality Impact Assessments.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Assembly Government has a **statutory duty** under the Government of Wales Act (2006) to ensure that equality of opportunity is embedded in its work. Under section 77 of the Government of Wales Act (1), Welsh Ministers must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that their functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people. In March 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government published its first Single Equality Scheme (SES) and Departmental Action Plans, covering all six of the equality stands, as well as transgender issues.

### **Sector-Specific Responses to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

The above-mentioned efforts to mainstream gender equality across government have in turn **strengthened sector-specific responses to gender equality** and women's empowerment, including in the areas of health, education, justice, and international development. This is articulated through department-specific Gender Equality Schemes in the UK (and Equality Schemes in Northern Ireland), which may complement specific Departmental programmes and action plans. For example, the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Gender Equality Action Plan (2007-2010) sets out in detail how it will meet its policy commitments to give greater priority to gender equality and women's rights in UK development assistance, as outlined in its third White Paper on International Development (2006).

The UK Government and devolved administrations also promote women's empowerment through cross-sectoral thematic work. For example, work on Violence Against Women is carried out through specific cross-governmental action plans (i.e. on domestic violence and trafficking, among others) but is coordinated under a

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<sup>27</sup> The UK Government's performance framework enables the monitoring of progress towards the achievement of national goals. These goals are reviewed alongside public spending every three years and are articulated through Public Service Agreements (PSAs). There are currently thirty PSAs covering the whole of the Government's work including the promotion of equality. The PSAs rely on Departments working together effectively to deliver improvements on this front, with one Department assigned to lead coordinated government action.

<sup>28</sup> As the lead department on the Equality PSA, the GEO is responsible for the overall programme-management of the PSA, including chairing a management board to drive progress on the PSA priorities, monitoring progress on the statistical indicators, managing risks and co-ordinating action across Government.



broader strategic framework. This work in turn may be complemented by department-specific strategies. For example, in April 2008, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) published a Violence Against Women Strategy and Action Plan which aims to improve the success rate of prosecutions, increase support for and satisfaction of victims, and improve public confidence in CPS-specific work on domestic violence, rape, sexual offences, child abuse, forced marriage, trafficking, so-called honour crimes, prostitution, pornography, and crimes against older people.

### **New Efforts to Streamline Anti-Discrimination Legislation**

In mid-2009, a major new reform in equality legislation - **the Equality Bill** ('the Bill') - will be introduced in England, Scotland and Wales. The new Bill will streamline and significantly strengthen existing anti-discrimination legislation in order to increase transparency about inequalities, strengthen enforcement and extend the scope for action to assist under-represented groups, including women. In addition, it will give greater clarity to individuals and organisations about their rights and responsibilities. The Bill will directly contribute to promoting gender equality including by: extending the scope for positive action (i.e. the ability to use women-only shortlists in selecting parliamentary candidates); increasing transparency in pay (i.e. to tackle the gender pay gap); promoting the scope for employers to increase workforce diversity; ensuring that public bodies report on equality issues, and; strengthening enforcement.

The Bill will introduce a new public sector **Equality Duty** which sits alongside comprehensive anti-discrimination and equal pay legislation and which will integrate and build on the success of the three existing duties on race, gender and disability, and which will extend to fully cover the remaining equality stands: age, sexual orientation, religion and belief and gender reassignment. The Equality Duty will strengthen the existing Gender Duty by adding a new requirement to foster good relations (including between women and men) and tackle (including gender) prejudice. This is in addition to the existing requirements of the current Duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity. This year the UK Government and Devolved Administrations will consult on options for creating a single set of specific duties for the betterment of the single general Equality Duty. This may, for example, include looking at how the requirement on some public authorities to publish Equality Schemes might work in the context of a single equality duty. As with the existing duties, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) will be responsible for ensuring that public authorities comply with their obligations under the Duty and will be mandated to take enforcement action (either via compliance notices or, ultimately, through judicial review in the courts) where necessary.

The Welsh Assembly Government officially launched its **Single Equality Scheme**, covering all six equality stands, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. The Scheme was inspired by the Welsh Assembly Government's aspiration to go beyond the fulfilment of its legal commitment to eradicate unlawful discrimination with regard to gender, race and disability. The scheme will be reviewed at regular intervals and progressed over the next three years.

## **Part Four: Remaining Challenges and Actions to Address Them**

While important advances for gender equality and women's rights have been realised in the UK, as noted throughout this questionnaire, some persistent challenges remain. These include sector-specific challenges such as: the continuing pay gap between women and men; the under-representation of women in public and political life, in particular among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women; the continuing prevalence of violence against women and girls and the low prosecution and conviction rates of rape cases; the persistently high rates of teenage pregnancies; and the challenges of work and pension-related poverty, particularly for lone-parents.

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations are committed to addressing these challenges and a range of measures have been put in place, as highlighted throughout the response to the questionnaire. These include: addressing gender pay inequalities, including through the introduction of cross-governmental targets to address the gender pay gap, the introduction of Carer Strategies and the inclusion in educational curricula, frameworks to address the gender stereotyping of girls in employment; introducing measures to increase the number and diversity of women in decision making, including through targeted outreach work to raise awareness of local decision making roles and through the introduction of legislation allowing positive measures towards women's increased participation; investing tens of millions of pounds in support services for women and girls affected by violence (including multi-agency response) and strengthening both prosecution and prevention response; investing in improving young people's access to effective contraception, related information and support services; introducing measures to tackle barriers faced by lone-parents as well as minority ethnic communities to enter work, and introducing Pension-related legislation, among others.

In addition, in 2007 the UK Minister for Women published the three Priorities of the Ministers for Women. These are: supporting families, particularly as they bring up children and care for older and disabled relatives; tackling violence against women and improving the way we deal with women who commit crimes and; increasing the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women. A progress report against each of these three priorities was published in 2008.

The UK Government continues to advance women's equality. A number of recent **headline commitments** include the introduction of the Equality Bill on April 24 2009 (in England, Scotland and Wales) which will streamline and significantly strengthen existing anti-discrimination legislation and directly contribute to promoting gender equality, as outlined in Part 3; and the announcement of England-wide consultation on violence against women which will inform a national violence against women strategy that includes a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

New challenges are beginning to be felt as a result of the global financial and economic downturn, which has had a severe impact on all sectors of society and which may pose new challenges to achieving gender equality over the short and medium term. The UK Government is committed to gathering an evidence base on the differential impact of the downturn on women and to ensuring that this informs relevant policies. It is working to build a fair, flexible and family friendly labour market which will use the skills and talents of both women and men fully in the future.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, alongside the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), constitute the most comprehensive set of international commitments to gender equality and women's rights and will continue play an important role in guiding the UK's work to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.