

Women: ending disadvantage



Whether in Westminster, in boardrooms or at home, women continue to face major disadvantages across all sections of UK society. The Green Party would introduce a number of strong measures to promote gender equality and safeguard women's rights including equal pay audits, shared maternity and paternity leave and better support for women in need.

Women in Britain suffer disadvantages in all areas of life. Women working fulltime on average earn almost 10% less than men; for part-time workers the gap is almost 20% an hour. Fifteen per cent of female pensioners were in poverty in retirement in 2010/11.

Just over 20% of Westminster MPs are female and only 15% of board members on major British companies are female. Women still carry out the majority of unpaid work in the home and on average work considerably more hours than men in total.

One in four women are subjected to domestic violence in her lifetime, while there is significant under-reporting of rape and sexual assault cases, coupled with a low conviction rate.


The Green Party would:

- Recognise that 'work' consists of many tasks other than paid jobs.

- Introduce a citizens' income and a citizens' pension for all. These measures would significantly reduce poverty and particularly women's poverty, ending the traps that can make returning to paid work, or doing part-time work, currently unsustainable or financially impossible.
- Introduce a law to ensure that boards of major companies have at least 40% female membership.
- Insist that all large and medium-size companies carry out equal pay audits and redress any inequalities and change the law so that joint suits for unequal pay cases are easier to bring.
- Introduce shared maternity and paternity leave for the first month after birth or adoption, then provide for 22 months of leave - shared so that the parent taking less time takes a minimum of six months - except for single parents. This would be paid at 90% of salary up to a reasonable level.
- Recognises that the needs and desires of the victims of domestic abuse (including domestic violence) must be paramount and that all service providers who come into contact with potentially vulnerable women need to be trained to provide appropriate assistance.
- Ensure that a full range of birth options is available to all women and that all women are entitled to the care of a single midwife throughout their pregnancy and post-natally; insist on excellent support for all mothers who choose to breastfeed; introduce significant

penalties for harassment to ensure mothers are protected when breast-feeding their children in public.

- Remove the law requiring the consent of two doctors for an abortion and allow midwives and nurses who are appropriately qualified to perform abortions, with the aim of improving access to NHS abortions.
- Ensure that rape crisis centres and domestic violence centres receive guaranteed funding from core budgets.
- Institute an asylum policy that in particular recognises the potential risks to, and needs of, women seeking asylum, including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, rape and other sexual assault.



But surely women choose to spend time out of the paid workforce, and to work in less stressful and time-consuming jobs?

Women (and men) who take time out of paid work for family or caring responsibilities are making an essential contribution to our society and are gaining skills and experience that deserve to be recognised. They should not be penalised for this. Also, all jobs should be arranged so that every worker can maintain a decent work-life balance, giving time for engagement in family, social and community life.

Where would you find enough qualified women for all of those board positions if membership must be 40% female?

In Norway, a study of women on company boards found that the women that companies had been forced to accept were actually better qualified than even the remaining men. And if companies knew this

provision was on the way, or even likely, they would be forced to develop, train and encourage appropriate individuals along the career ladder, which would have positive impacts even below board level.

But won't providing proper funding for rape crisis centres and domestic abuse shelters will be enormously expensive?

Certainly there would be a cost, but the emotional, psychological and financial cost of victims not receiving help is far higher. Even more importantly, as a civilised society, we must ensure that victims of crime are supported and assisted, not left to struggle in crisis.

Women can get an abortion if they live in the UK can't they?

Women are still required to get the approval of two doctors to have an abortion: the only medical procedure for which this restriction applies. Furthermore, abortions are only available to women in Northern Ireland under specific medical conditions: if their lives are in danger or if their health would be permanently and severely damaged by giving birth. Abortions are not legally permitted in cases of foetal abnormality, rape or incest. Women who wish to receive abortions for these or other reasons may feel forced to pay for a private abortion elsewhere, with associated travel costs.



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