



Northern Ireland
Assembly

25 YEARS

A New Beginning

Gender Equality post the Belfast/Good
Friday Agreement: the journey so far and
ways forward

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Gender equality and the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement – potential for transformation

- Included within a list of rights in the Agreement was a clause affirming '*the right of women to full and equal political participation*'.
- Machinery of Equality - provisions for *a more regulatory approach* to equality through the introduction of a new statutory obligation on public authorities to carry out all their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity (in relation to religion and political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants, and sexual orientation).
- The Section 75 statutory equality duty described as '*the single most extensive positive duty imposed in the UK*'

Attitudes to family and gender roles (1998 and 2002)

	2002		1998	
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person	66	59	59	52
A job is all right but what woman really want is a home and children	36	36	34	32
A woman should stay at home if a child is under school age	42	48	46	49
A pre-school child is likely to suffer his/her mother works	34	35	34	42

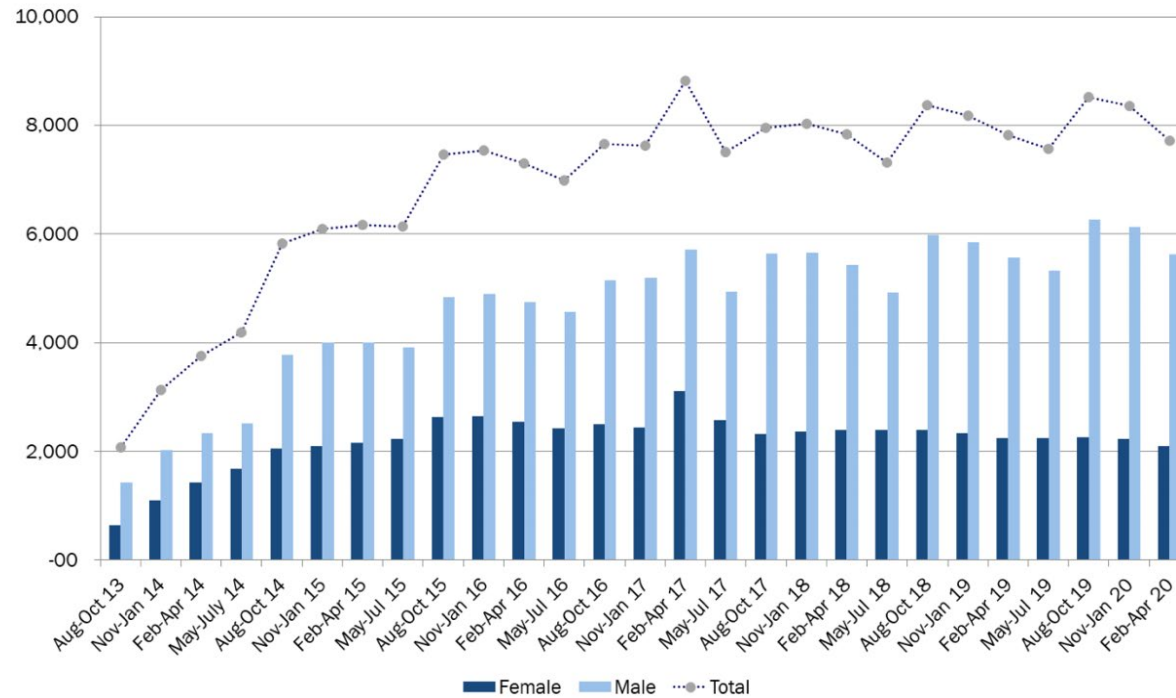
Where did women figure in 1998?

- *Employment* - employment rate of women of working age was 61.4; heavily concentrated in part-time jobs with 50% of all female jobs part-time.
- *Political Representation*- of 18 MPS elected to Westminster, none were women; of 3 representatives returned to the European Parliament, none were women and 14% of local government representatives were women. First elections to the NI Assembly, 13% of those elected were women – compared to 37% of those elected to the Scottish Parliament and 40% to the first Welsh Assembly.

2023

- Women have lower *employment rates* - 75.6% for men and 68.5 for women (March 2023)
- Proportion of women *working full time* increased in the ten years up to 2021 - but only by 2.1 percentage points to 64.3% - male rate of 89.3%
- *Economic inactivity rates* - of those aged 16-64 who are categorised as economically inactive, 30.4% are women and 21.8% are men.
- *Pay* - NI is the only area of the UK where women working *full time* earn more per hour on average than men working full time - if all employees are considered, regardless of working pattern, women earn 8.4% less than men (NISRA, 2023).

Participation in Apprenticeships NI Programmes by Gender



Progress

Women's participation in formal politics has increased:

2022 elections to the NI Assembly – 35% of those elected are women - higher than in the UK Parliament (34.6%) but lags behind the Welsh Assembly (43% women) and the Scottish Parliament (45% women)

In the 2023 local council elections 30% of those returned were women, up from 26% in 2019

Women account for 42% of public appointments in NI although only 28% of chairs are women.



Progress

- Legislative developments re domestic abuse and violence against women and girls
- Gaining of reproductive rights (Westminster legislation)
- Work on social inclusion strategies commences including new gender equality strategy

What accounts for the limited progress overall with regard to addressing gender equality?

- Failure of S.75 to be transformative – conceptual issues – not substantive equality, gender neutral policy making, process driven
- Lack of visibility of gender in high level policy documents
- Consociational democracies face challenge in attempting to accommodate other forms of difference
- Challenges with Social Policy making more generally – impacting on social economic conditions of women's lives

Gender Budgeting: the potential

- If, as McCrudden (2004) argues, redistribution is essentially the end product of an effective mainstreaming process - then what is needed is the full integration of gender perspectives at all stages of budget and planning processes
- Perceptions of the budgets as a technical exercise of public finance management and 'gender neutral' has been changing globally and on these islands
- Evidence from research in NI suggests that policy makers want to know '*how to do*' gender budgeting but the '*how*' by necessity includes a conceptual understanding of inequality and equality – *how it arises and what to do about it.*