



# NI WOMEN'S BUDGET GROUP

## **NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S BUDGET GROUP (NIWBG) RESPONSE TO THE 2021 CENSUS OUTPUTS: DISSEMINATION APPROACH, RELEASE PHASES, AND CONTENT DESIGN CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

**Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)  
Prepared by Alexandra Brennan (Coordinator) of NIWBG**

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The Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (NIWBG) is made up of organisations and individuals from the women's sector, trade union movement, academia and wider civil society in Northern Ireland, with the aim of implementing a gender equal economy. The members of the NIWBG scrutinise policy and budgetary matters with a gendered lens to bring attention to the different ways in which women and men are affected by government-level decision-making. It aims to provide policy- and budget-makers with policy analysis to secure substantive equality for women and men through the assessment of gender impact.

The NIWBG works with a range of organisations in Northern Ireland on devolved issues and with sister organisations in Wales, Scotland, England and Ireland on East-West and North-South issues.

We hope that our response to the consultation will be considered by NISRA when organising the formatting and release of the 2021 Census outputs.

If there are any questions or comments regarding the NIWBG's consultation response, please direct them to the Coordinator for the NIWBG, Alexandra Brennan ([info@niwbg.org](mailto:info@niwbg.org)).

## Introduction

The NIWBG believes that the 2021 Census outputs have the potential to advance gender equality in Northern Ireland. The women's sector frequently highlights the difficulties that a lack of disaggregated data presents to advocacy work. As decision-makers implement a pathway to recovery, the data collected through the 2021 Census, if disaggregated by protected characteristics like gender, can provide decision-makers with a more detailed and accurate understanding of how inequalities exacerbated by the current crisis and previous austerity policies affect factions of society differently. As well, it would allow civil society organisations like the NIWBG to advocate more effectively on mitigating these inequalities.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to this consultation and to have our feedback considered by NISRA before the ultimate release of the outputs. Additionally, we would like to direct NISRA to the response from the Women's Policy Group, which highlights many of the points we will elaborate upon below, particularly the need for gender-disaggregation of the findings and our concern around the lack of a 'gender' indicator.

## Gender-Disaggregation of Data

As mentioned in the introduction, the main recommendation of the NIWBG is the need to disaggregate the data collected through the 2021 Census by gender. This is a significant gap in Northern Ireland-related data, which impacts policymaking and impedes on the NIWBG's and many other organisations' ability to advocate.

The 2021 Census is an extensive look at society in Northern Ireland and we welcome the introduction of new variables like unpaid care, COVID-19 health risk, and key/critical worker, that provide a necessary degree of detail. This is precisely why gender-disaggregation of data is needed. The NIWBG acknowledges previous analyses from NISRA that specifically looked at gender, such as Women in Northern Ireland 2020 and the recent Gender Pay Gap section of the Employee Earnings in NI 2021 report. They have been referenced throughout the NIWBG's responses to consultations and in conversation with decision-makers.

However, having access to a gender-disaggregated report of the 2021 Census findings would be significant as it would be looking at a wide array of aspects regarding life in Northern Ireland, not a specific subject.

The NIWBG advocates that gender budgeting tools, which makes policy makers consider the gendered impacts of spending and revenue raising decisions, would help secure gender equality in Northern Ireland. However, a main barrier to proper gender analyses of policies is the lack of gender-disaggregated data. It is important to note that the disaggregation of the 2021 Census results will not fix the issues surrounding the lack of gender-disaggregated

data - targeted policies to mitigate this gap need to be put in place. Nonetheless, it is an important step in the right direction that will help with the current absence of available data.

The new variables that deal with adjustments made to living patterns due to the pandemic and impacts of the crisis, such as the '*Economic risk created by the coronavirus pandemic indicator*,' are important to the work of the NIWBG and the wider women's sector. We advocate for a feminist recovery through our work in the Women's Policy Group, which produced a thorough [report](#) on the disproportionate impacts of the culminating crises on women and gender minorities. Therefore, it is crucial that the gender-disaggregation of this data is made available to policymakers as decisions are made around the pathway to recovery.

The NIWBG recommends that all the findings from the 2021 Census be disaggregated by gender. The gender-disaggregated data should be further disaggregated to take account of intersectionality. Additionally, the findings should be disaggregated by every other protected characteristic under Section 75 and include identities that are not, such as residency in a rural area and income status, to assist public authorities in accessing data in order to meet their Section 75 requirements.

## Gender Indicator

The NIWBG believes that the 2021 Census could have been a thorough depiction of the identities and situations found in society in Northern Ireland, yet there was one critical indicator that was noticeably missing that left a significant gap in the data - gender. While there was a question asking about the 'sex' of the respondent, that is not the same as asking their 'gender' and by leaving 'gender' out, gender minorities are erased from such analyses.

The difference between 'gender' and 'sex' from TransgenderNI's 'Terminology & Language' page<sup>1</sup>:

*Gender - A person's inner perceptions of being male, female or otherwise. Gender is a spectrum, with most people falling on either male or female. It is different than someone's sex characteristics. A transgender person's gender is different than the gender assignment that was made at birth.*

*Sex/Sex Characteristics - A set of multiple characteristics of a person's body that defines someone as male, female or otherwise. This includes genitalia, chromosomes,*

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<sup>1</sup> TransgenderNI. 2021. 'Terminology & Language,' <https://transgenderni.org.uk/glossary/>

*hormone levels and other physiological factors. Sex is a spectrum, with most people falling on either male or female. Commonly, children are born intersex.*

The exclusion of 'gender' is of serious concern to the NIWBG as data on anyone who is not cisgender in Northern Ireland is incredibly limited. As mentioned above, limited data restricts representative organisations' abilities to advocate sufficiently.

The NIWBG recommends that NISRA include the indicator 'gender' in any collection of data where basic descriptive indicators are asked of the respondents.

## **Conclusion**

As highlighted throughout this response, the lack of disaggregated data is an obstacle for advocates and is a barrier to comprehensive and effect policymaking. The NIWBG believes that if the provided recommendations are met, the 2021 Census outputs have the potential to make a real impact – both at the advocacy level and the decision-making level. We would be pleased to meet with NISRA to further discuss our recommendations and see how we can work together on these issues.