



**NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
2023**

PRELIMINARY AGENDA

16-18 FEBRUARY 2023

BOURNEMOUTH INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

2023 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Bournemouth International Centre

16 Feb 2023 18 Feb 2023

Organising and Recruitment

1. Women in UNISON are our strength!

Conference notes that UNISON is the UK's largest union representing 1.3 million members who provide public services. Currently 78% of the membership identify as women, a total of over 1 million women members.

There is no doubt that the strength and stability of our union UNISON lies with our ability to recruit, support, and develop our women activists. UNISON Women members are at the forefront of many of our most important campaigns. UNISON's women members have successfully negotiated on issues such as domestic abuse, equal pay, and maternity rights. But we can do much more.

TUC research in 2014 revealed that women were under-represented relative to the proportion in membership among shop stewards, health and safety reps, branch officers, union conference delegates and union executives. Part time workers are also under-represented in Trade Unions, the majority of whom are women.

It is recognised that Women face unprecedented challenges and still face inequality in the current climate and erosion of hard fought for rights. Gender pay gap, sexual harassment, flexible working, access to maternity rights and progression are just a few workplace issues affecting our women members.

The introduction of women's officer as a formal role within the UNISON's branch rules was made in 2016. However, discussion at Women's Conference in 2020 described the difficulties created due to the removal of Regional Women's Officer posts.

Despite this our Union continues to provide additional support to our women members via our self-organised groups led by members or Women officers in a voluntary capacity. These groups are doing amazing work to continue to engage with our women members, representing them and supporting their development to be active voices in our union. However, understandably capacity and facility time issues can make this demanding and conflicting.

To meet our aims to continue growth and remain the largest union we need to maintain and improve our recruitment levels but also to target our 'hard to reach' and lower paid women members. Only by a targeted approach can we ensure that we offer the protection and opportunities of UNISON and encourage more women to join us and take on active roles within our union.

Newcastle City Branch SOG group discussed these challenges and developed a stand-alone proposal for a dedicated part time Women's Officer role for a year as a pilot in September 2021. Women members in the branch were consulted and asked their views. The pilot project is designed, shaped, and delivered based on grass root priorities of women members. This was discussed and agreed at Branch Committee with full support. The voices of women members in our branch were heard loud and

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clear. The evidence-based project aims to ensure women members reach their potential to lead change in the workplace.

The project has been successful in achieving its target outcomes, increasing the number of women recruited to UNISON in target areas, recruiting new activists and increasing overall engagement with women members to encourage personal development via UNISON Training and Education and our regional mentoring programme.

The project has also supported the further development of the branch women's self-organised group by feeding in women's priorities and issues and as a result increased member led activity and involvement.

Evidence of the success of the first year of the project has resulted in a branch decision to increase release time by 100% which will continue the project work for a further year and also will extend the reach and support provided.

Quote: Each time a woman stands up for herself she stands up for all women!

We ask National Women's Committee to:

1) Work with regional women's networks to encourage and support branches to:

i) develop a focused and structured approach to encourage recruitment of women members, particularly lower paid women workers

ii) develop structured support to women members to enable their personal development and progression to become active and take up leadership roles within UNISON

Newcastle City

2. Increasing participation by women in our union by lower paid women

Women's conference notes proudly that UNISON is a union with over a million women members and that we reach every corner of the UK and every corner of the public sector.

Conference also notes that our collective labour as women contributes billions of pounds to the economy, and our human contribution keeps our society running, exceeding even that vast sum by adding our wealth of knowledge and experience to our workplaces and communities.

Whether it be in health, education, local government or utilities it is women who hold our communities together. Despite this, years of low-pay, the experience of the pandemic and women's substantial underpaid labour has shown us and continues to show us how we are taken for granted.

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We know that much of what we do is under-regarded by our employers: the gender pay-gap ; zero-hours contracts ; misogyny ; multiple part-time jobs just to make ends meet ; discrimination and harassment are just a few of the problems we face at work. Every year at conference women share their stories of challenging their employers and we hear how our union has a long history of fighting for our hard-won rights. Yet Conference also needs to recognise that many of us in union activist roles have stable work, have access to facilities (albeit sometimes under attack from employers) and enough time to execute our roles to the best of our abilities while at the same time, many of the women we work hard to support find it difficult to undertake union activities even though their authentic voices are essential to understanding the issues they face. The barriers include lack of time, difficulty in negotiating facility time with employers, caring responsibilities and the cost of childcare. Also, some branches and some women can be unwelcoming and may fail to provide support. Black women may face prejudice and racism and there can also be an element of snobbery if the woman has a low-paid job.

Conference believes that there is a need to be honest and recognise that we need to do more as a trade union but also as women activists to support low-paid women's involvement and reduce the barriers to participation. UNISON must do better than the employers.

Therefore, this conference calls on the National Women's Committee to provide leadership in supporting low paid women members to become active in all areas of the union by:

- 1) Ensuring easily accessible explanations of the roles that are open to members are available
- 2) Providing information about the advantages of union participation
- 3) Working with regional women's committees and regional staff to provide written assurance of support from of the branch and the region for individual women who show interest in becoming an activist
- 4) Explore with relevant committees and staff how to make it as easy as possible to participate by providing the information on participation in as many languages as possible and facilitating easy-to-claim expenses that are available without delay
- 5) Look with LAOS at the possibility of providing online training programmes and pathways to activism that can be used on a mobile phone
- 6) Consider with relevant staff the possibility of a conference that is focused on issues of concern to low-paid women members
- 7) Explore with relevant committees and staff the possibility of providing a dedicated legal help-line for low-pay issues through There for you, and specialist support for difficulties with Universal Credit (so expenses do not disrupt UA payments)

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- 8) Discuss with National Black Members Committee ways to encourage more Black women to take an active role in their union and what support can be offered.

National Women's Committee

Campaigning

3. The Cost Of Living Crisis And The Impact On Women And Families

Women are the 'shock absorbers of poverty'. They tend to have the main responsibility for the purchase and preparation of food for their children and families, and for the management of budgets in poor households.

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, people in Northern Ireland are facing a devastating cost-of-living crisis.

Over a decade of austerity policies, cuts to social security benefits and low wage rises (which are effectively real term pay cuts) have left many people in poverty and continue to cause increased hardship for the working poor. While the richest households saved money during the pandemic, the poorest have fallen further into debt, with no cushion to cope with rising prices.

Working people are having to choose to eat or to heat and, with fuel and energy costs set to raise again, this will have a devastating impact on women and families. This has been exasperated by the current Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Single parents, most of whom are women, have been hit particularly badly by the cost of living crisis with a third in financial difficulty, and 11% in problem debt. To add to the ongoing crisis, working mothers in Northern Ireland also struggle to access affordable childcare.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the NEC and with relevant organisations to campaign for:

1. an increase in all benefits to keep pace with inflation;
2. the abolition of the benefits cap and the two-child limit;
3. increases in earnings replacement benefits including ESA, Jobseekers' Allowance, Income Support, Carers Allowance, Maternity Allowance, Statutory Maternity Pay and Statutory Sick Pay;
4. an increase in Child Benefit;
5. public sector pay rises that reflect inflation rates;
6. a fully funded childcare strategy for Northern Ireland including affordable, accessible, high quality childcare including 30 hours of free childcare for parents and a workforce with decent pay and terms and conditions.

UNISON Northern Ireland

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4. Women and the cost of living crisis

Conference notes that women are disproportionately affected by spiralling living costs. Women are more likely to be in low paid jobs and have been hit hardest by the sharp rise in inflation.

Women are usually the ones who manage household budgets especially in lower income households. Women tend to have the main responsibility for buying food and preparing it for children and families. Women also tend to have lower paid jobs and fewer hours than men. There are three times as many women in part-time work as men. A fifth of women are paid below the real Living Wage. A significant number of UNISON members work in social care, where women outnumber men four to one. Conference is very concerned that 71 percent of care workers who work in the independent sector are paid less than the real Living Wage.

Conference also notes that women tend to spend a greater proportion of their income on bills and household goods whether it's cleaning products or kids' school uniforms. The cost of living crisis is affecting everyone but it's more often than not women who can't make their household budgets add up and women who have to make the choice between skipping meals or buying their children's school uniforms. It's women who end up leaving their jobs because childcare is so expensive.

Conference is also concerned that for some women, an already disproportionate impact, is likely to be even more serious. Conference notes that research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that poverty rates are significantly higher among Black people than white people. TUC research highlights that even prior to Covid-19, over a third of disabled workers were having to cut back on food and heating. Victims/survivors of domestic violence and abuse, including economic abuse, largely women are likely to find it harder to leave an abusive relationship if they are unsure how they will support themselves and their children as living costs rise.

Conference calls on the national women's committee to work with UNISON's National Executive Committee to action the following:

- 1) Work with the Labour Link to press the UK government to a) tackle and resolve the issue of living cost crisis, highlighting the particularly harsh impact on low paid women workers and b) provide long term policies that will include addressing food poverty and wastage.
- 2) Provide information and case studies about the impact of cost of living increases on women workers to help negotiate & bargain for a better pay deal that benefits everyone but workers on low wages who tend to be women.
- 3) Campaign for minimum pay rates of £15 an hour across the UK and to restore the £20 cut to universal credit.
- 4) Campaign for good quality, affordable childcare for all children, properly paid parental leave for all parents and all jobs to be flexible by default.
- 5) Support the 'right to a food justice campaign' which seeks to ensure the right to food in UK.

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- 6) Work with the relevant NEC committees to try to improve the fundraising capacity of UNISON's There for you charity and continue to publicize to women the vital help available from There for you.

National Women's Committee

5. Disabled women and the cost of living crisis

Conferences notes the cost of living crisis which will disproportionately impact disabled women.

Even before the pandemic, disability related expenses or the 'disability price tag' was on average £583 extra per month compared to non-disabled people, according to the 2019 Scope Disability Price Tag report. One in five faced extra costs of more than a £1000. Over a half of disabled adults worried about how they would afford to pay their bills. These figures are likely to be much higher now given the rate of inflation.

More than a decade of Conservative cuts to Local Government funding have also led to increased social care charges for disabled women.

This alongside the current cost of living crisis, with food and petrol prices trebled, frozen tax allowances and massive fuel bill rises, means that most people will suffer, but disabled women even more so.

Disabled women's income has fallen in real terms and benefits payments, including in work benefits many low paid disabled women rely on to make ends meet, have failed to keep up with rocketing inflation. Universal credit can increase disabled women's financial dependency and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) do not adequately cover the cost of disability, while very few people qualify for the higher rate.

Disabled women and girls experience double discrimination on account of their gender and impairments. Disabled women are less likely to be in employment compared to disabled men and or non-disabled people. For those women in employment and for those with certain impairments, the disability pay gap can be as large as 18.95%.

Disabled women can also be targeted for particular kinds of abuse where their finances are controlled by others or where they cannot leave an abusive relationship due to economic dependency, and the cost of living crisis leaves these women in a particularly difficult situation.

Although government has bowed to pressure and given disabled people £150 to help address energy costs, at the same time they have ended the warm homes discount for disabled people, leaving disabled women in a worse situation overall.

Many disabled women rely on energy not just for heating but for powering specialist lifesaving equipment such as oxygen machines, or equipment vital to achieving independence such as electric wheelchairs. These are unavoidable costs that can't be cut back so disabled people's bills will inevitably increase more than others, along with their social isolation. This will not just mean a choice of heating and eating but, for some, breathing.

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Some disabled women have impairments that are impacted by cold and need to spend more on heating their homes to avoid pain – they are therefore doubly susceptible to increases in energy prices. Additionally, there has been a big increase in disabled women working from home or hybrid working since the pandemic. Many of these women will have reasonable adjustments at home, such as assistive technology or additional devices which require frequent charging and add a “cost of disability” to their already increasing utility bills.

A report from Leonard Cheshire released in April 2022 found that:

- 1) 55% of disabled people feel anxious, depressed, or hopeless due to the financial difficulties they are experiencing
- 2) Around a quarter had missed meals (25%) or not heated their homes (28%), while around a third (30%) had to ask for financial help from friends or family.
- 3) A third of those surveyed said they have £50 or less to live on a week.

Conference further notes this research found that over half million disabled people (7%) are already living off just £10 a week after bills. It is just not acceptable for the sixth richest economy in the world to subject people to such poverty living.

Conference notes that women face additional costs due to their experience of menstruation and this is exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. Experiences of menstruation are not homogeneous, with evidence showing that discrimination experienced by disabled women is compounded during menstruation. Research has found that period poverty and lack of access to period products can also negatively affect mental health.

Conference believes that disabled women are being pushed even deeper into poverty. The impact will have a resounding effect on women and their children for years to come

Conference therefore instructs the National Women's Committee to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to:

Raise awareness of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on disabled women across the union and seek ways to ensure that these issues are highlighted as part of UNISON's national campaigning on the issue

- i) Lobby the Labour Party, via the Labour Link, to commit to the reform of Universal Credit so that it does not undermine women's financial independence, and to the reform of PIP to accurately capture the extra costs of being disabled and to help disabled women to live independently

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- ii) Continue to campaign to end the Gender Pay Gap and join calls for mandatory publication of the disability pay gap
- iii) Promote the Disability Employment Charter as a way of improving disabled women workers' income through better access to reasonable adjustments, Access to Work support and supporting disabled women into good quality employment

National Disabled Members Committee

6. Women bearing the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis

Conference notes with extreme concern the continuing pressures women are facing as the cost-of-living spirals out of control, with the inflation rate hitting 10.1% in July 2022, this was the highest reading since 1982.

Conference, Women are more vulnerable to the impact of the cost of living rises as 69% of low paid or insecure jobs are held by women. Women make up the majority of people living in poverty and female headed households are poor – these constitute 90% of lone parent households, 45% of which are living in poverty.

Conference, in addition the statistics in the North East are alarming:

- 1) 2 in 5 children are living below the poverty line
- 2) The average salary for full time workers in the North East is the lowest in the UK, in addition the average salary for a man is higher than for a woman.
- 3) Disposable income for workers in the North East is the lowest in the UK
- 4) The North East has the highest rate of domestic abuse related crimes in England and Wales

Conference, it is women who disproportionately feel the emotional and financial brunt of inflationary rises, as the 'shock absorbers' for austerity and now too for the cost-of-living crisis; women are going without food, heating, and clothes to provide for their families and loved ones.

Conference, women with caring responsibilities, in the absence of affordable childcare, are less able to increase their hours of paid work than men further adding to the strain women are feeling. Women will also suffer from the long-term implications of the cost of living as they are prioritising their immediate financial commitments such as mortgage payments and utilities over long-term goals like pension savings, meaning the effects of this cost-of-living crisis will be felt for years to come.

Conference, the cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately affecting women as it exacerbates the existing outcomes of entrenched gender inequality.

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

- i) Work with Regional Women's Groups and service groups to build a body of evidence showing the effects that the cost-of-living crisis is having on women members and use the results to create a campaign to highlight the impacts.

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- i) Work with the NEC and all appropriate sections of the union and our partners, including Labour Link to lobby for changes to ease the financial burden of the cost-of-living crisis on women.
- ii) Report back on the findings to the 2024 Women's Conference.

Northern Region

7. Surviving the Cost of Living Crisis

Conference notes that the exponential rise in energy costs, the highest interest rates in decades and the staggering increases in the cost of food are having a massive impact on our members' standard of living. Following a decade of austerity, below inflation pay awards and pay freezes, in work poverty is soaring.

Poverty in the UK is gendered with women being more likely to be living in poverty than men. The gender pay gap, is a key factor in women's higher levels of poverty, both while working and during retirement. Bottom loaded pay rises can reduce the pay gap as seen by the impact of the increase in the national living wage rate.

Conference condemns the approach of some public sector employers throughout the UK including the Scottish Government and COSLA to not "bottom load" the pay awards offered to staff. This means that the lowest paid staff, who are most severely affected by rising costs, receive the lowest pay increases in cash terms.

Conference recognises that within the public services in Scotland, these roles are predominantly filled by women. During the pandemic these roles were classed as essential and kept our country and communities going. However, women workers are exhausted and are now being insulted by the below inflation pay awards.

Conference supports the activities of all affiliates in trying to secure pay awards for members across both the public and the private sectors.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) use its influence and profile to highlight the pay campaigns which affect our women trade union members.
- 2) lobby the UK Governments to take substantial action on tackling the gender pay gap

Scotland Region

8. The Cost of Living Crisis and its impact on Women who experience domestic abuse

Conference notes that Domestic Abuse is a workplace issue, with 1 in 3 women reporting domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime.

Conference further notes a sharp increase in reported cases of domestic abuse throughout the pandemic. The cost of living crisis now means that the situation has deteriorated even further. It had previously been estimated that more than 90% of

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women facing domestic abuse reported that they were subject to economic abuse with spending controlled by their abuser.

Women's Aid conducted research with 66% of survivors telling them that abusers were using the cost of living crisis and concerns about financial hardship as a tool for coercive control, including to justify further restricting their access to money. For almost three quarters of these women, this meant that they were either prevented from leaving or faced increased barriers to leaving. The cost of living crisis has made it even harder for women to go on to build new lives.

Conference is concerned that at a time when women are facing escalating abuse, barriers to accessing support are increasing. Service providers are not immune to the sharp increase in costs with some services relying on reserves to survive. This isn't sustainable in the long term and more must be done to ensure that they are funded on a sustainable basis. Conference is further concerned that the planned help for energy bill payers will not apply to women living in a refuge where the refuge uses a bulk energy contract.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to campaign for the introduction of:

- 1) an Emergency domestic Abuse fund to support survivors of domestic abuse to pay for essential items and energy bills
- 2) a statutory right to paid leave for those experiencing domestic abuse

Scotland Region

9. Cost of Living Crisis-Maternity Leave

The cost of living crisis is affecting everyone, with the inflation rate, hitting 10% last month, the highest levels in 40 years. The energy prices have rocketed and daily household expenses have also increased but wages are just rising by a maximum of just 5.2% (according to the Office for Budget Responsibility), with benefits increasing by just 3.1%. The dramatic drop in income experienced by households means that many are struggling to pay for the basic necessities.

Whilst the cost of living crisis will affect everyone, it is apparent it will disproportionately be felt by those women on maternity leave or new mothers. The failure to increase of maternity pay to keep up with the drastic increase in the cost of living will not only cause financial hardship but also drive more and more pregnant women and new mothers into poverty.

The current basic rate statutory maternity and parental pay from April 2022 is only £156.66 per week. It equates to just 47% of the National Living Wage (for a 35-hour week at the adult rate of £9.50 per hour).

At time when they need their income to keep up with the costs of a new baby, women are getting penalised and finding themselves in financial difficulties.

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According to the survey carried out by Maternity Action, nearly two-thirds of respondents said that they worried a lot about money while they were pregnant or on maternity leave. Not only women are worried about the immediate financial problems that the sharp drop in income causes, they are also worried about their future finances ranging from the inordinately high costs of childcare in the UK when they did return to work, to the long term impact on their future income and pension describing it as the “motherhood penalty”. This is then having a negative effect on their mental health and well-being not to mention the detrimental effect on relationships.

Conference calls upon the Women's National Committee:

- 1) To work with National Labour Link to press the government to resolve the Cost of living.
- 2) To campaign with Maternity Action to protect and improve maternity rights & extend financial support to pregnant workers/new mothers in hardship.
- 3) To ensure women are not penalised for going on maternity leave/being new mothers by lobbying government (affiliated campaigning groups such as TUC and Maternity Action) to put incentives in place for affordable pre-school child care
- 4) To report back to National women's Conference 2024

Tees Esk and Wear Valleys Health

10. Young women and the cost of living crisis

Conference believes the cost of living crisis has had a gendered impact, with the persistent effect of the gender pay gap and the higher likelihood that women are in part time or low-paid work.

Conference notes the March 2022 research by the Living Wage Foundation which found that in addition to these inequalities, women are more vulnerable to high inflation, as they spend a higher proportion of their income on household goods which are “more susceptible to inflation-induced volatility.”

Conference further notes the June 2022 report from the Young Women's Trust which found that the cost of living crisis was impacting disproportionately on young women compared to their male peers. The Young Women's Trust found that 52% of young women said they were ‘filled with dread’ when they think about their household finances, and 24% have been unable to afford food or essential supplies in the last year. These impacts are even worse for young women with children.

The Young Women's Trust report highlights the way that employers' practices disadvantage young women at work, leading to lower pay and fewer progression opportunities for women. 1 in 5 Human Resources professionals interviewed by the YWT said that their organisation did not have any measures in place to support the advancement of women's equality in the workplace; and 31% agreed that “it is harder for women to progress in their organisations than men”.

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Conference recognises the strong work done by UNISON and the National Women's Committee to address the gender pay gap and believes that UNISON has an essential role to play in combatting the cost of living crisis. Conference believes that young women's voices must be heard as part of UNISON's campaign on the cost of living and against the gender pay gap and that this is a crucial opportunity to build engagement and involvement from UNISON's young women members.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Continue to highlight the gender pay gap and to campaign for more robust legislation addressing the gender pay gap;
- 2) Continue to promote UNISON's materials on the gender pay gap to women members and branch and regional women's groups;
- 3) Support and promote the national UNISON campaign on the cost of living crisis, and seek to highlight the gendered impact of the cost of living crisis on women workers and young women;
- 4) Work with the National Young Members Forum to engage young women members with UNISON campaigns on the cost of living crisis, and to use this as an 'organising issue' to encourage more young women members to become activists;
- 5) Promote the National Women's Committee work on the gender pay gap to young women in UNISON.

National Young Members' Forum

11. The cost living crisis on Ethnic Minority

The cost of living crisis on Ethnic Minority

The cost of living crisis in the UK is disproportionality impacting on ethnic minority women workers, many of whom are part time workers.

Black employees could see the hardest hit to their wage as inflation rates in the UK continue to surge.

A report by the Women's Budget Group in March 2022 found that poverty rates are significantly higher among women from Black, Asian and ethnic minorities. Black women are more likely to earn less, which means they are disproportionately impacted by the increase in the cost of living.

Research during the pandemic showed high levels of concerns about debt among Black women with 42.9% said they believed they would be in more debt than before the pandemic, compared to 37.1% of White women.

The same polling reported that nearly a quarter of black mothers (23.7%) reported that they were struggling to feed their children compared to 19% of White women.

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Many Black women workers are in low paid jobs at £9.70 hr yet cost of living has risen to 9.9%, this means that they are less likely to be able to cope with the rising cost of living.

According to the research over a third of people from ethnic backgrounds can no longer afford to pay their bills, rent, or mortgages each month compared to a quarter of the people from white backgrounds leaving households in deep poverty if their income falls more than 50% below the relative poverty line, in itself defined as 60% of the median UK income. Leaving Black women more exposed to the cost of living crisis than their white counterpart.

We call on the national women's committee to:

- 1) Work closely with the NEC to raise awareness of the disproportional impacts of the cost of living crisis on black women.
- 2) Work with National Labour Link Committee to continue to work with Labour MPs to lobby/challenge government, highlighting the inequality of the cost of living crisis on black women

Gateshead Health

12. Women and the Impacts of the Energy Crisis

Conference, on energy strategy, the government is leaving women in the cold. Women will shoulder some of the worst effects of soaring energy bills. Why doesn't the government's energy security statement do more for us?

How much do low-income people spend on electricity and gas? According to an analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, low-income individuals who live alone will spend the most on gas and electricity bills (33% of their income after housing costs) Women, will feel the consequences.

Women are more likely to be the member of the household opening the bills and counting the pennies at the checkout. Pervasive gender discrimination means women continue to be paid less than men, including for equivalent work. Single women are more likely to struggle to cover the cost of living on one salary. Single parents face historic levels of inflation and soaring day-to-day costs, they simply do not have the buffer in their budgets to mitigate the consequences for their families. Many are looking at increasing debt, missing meals and being unable to afford rent or mortgage payments

Women who are trapped in abusive relationships cannot afford to leave through the impact of soaring fuel costs and refuges are also feeling the brunt of rising energy costs. Research by Women's Aid found that almost all survivors (96%) responding had seen a negative impact on the amount of money available to them as a result of cost of living increases.

Two thirds (66%) of survivors told us that abusers are now using the cost of living increase and concerns about financial hardship as a tool for coercive control, including to justify further restricting their access to money. Almost three quarters (73%) of women living with and having financial links with the abuser said that the

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cost of living crisis had either prevented them from leaving or made it harder for them to leave.

Rising utility costs mean refuge services are seeing a devastating impact on their outgoings as they look to cover increases from reserves rather than pass on to residents. This is not sustainable long-term and noted that refuge residents will not benefit from government measures to help with energy costs where the refuge uses a bulk energy contract, rather than individual meters.

The cost of living crisis is causing hunger, hardship and mental anguish for too many single parent families, primarily women. This government urgently needs to put in place targeted support for those on low incomes or the stark reality is that more single parents and their children will be forced to live in poverty and experience the disadvantage this brings.

Conference calls upon the Women's National Committee:

to work with National and Regional labour link committees to continue the work alongside Labour MPs to lobby Government to

- 1) To continue pushing for a windfall tax on fuel companies.
- 2) remove other tax subsidies i.e. VAT exemption on Energy Bills.
- 3) Reduced energy costs for all refuges during the cost of living crisis, for example by extending the remit of Warm Home Discount Scheme to include refuges to help women fleeing domestic abuse

UNISON Northern Energy

13. Cost of Living and Tory Myths

Conference we are living in dangerous and difficult times for workers, for our members and specifically our women members. The basic necessities of life – food and heating are increasing at alarming rates. As a majority women members union, we are fighting to prevent pay awards becoming pay cuts.

Whilst its true that this will impact on most, if not all, members it is the lowest paid who will be hardest hit. That is our women members, home carers, hospital cleaners, teaching assistants as examples. Because of rising prices and the soaring cost of living they are all facing a massive pay cut.

In this climate we expect our government to bring forward plans that support our low paid women members, but what is being done - nothing to help us conference. Only actions that will help the already rich, we've already seen the scrapping of the higher tax band – only to see successful opposition reverse that greedy Tory plan.

The same that happened with PPE is happening now - while our low paid women members face ever mounting bills, forcing decisions on eating or heating, CEO and energy shareholders are raking it in.

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Tory minister after Tory minister is blaming the rising cost of living on

- 1) the war in Ukraine
- 2) or covid aftermath
- 3) or workers striking for better pay

But we know that this is not the case. Other countries in Europe that have been affected have put in policies to help cushion the rising costs, yet the Tory government is using every excuse but the truth which is GREED.

We instruct the national women's committee to

- i) 1) liaise with appropriate bodies to continue to launch a campaign setting out the real reasons for the cost of living crisis our women members are experiencing.
- ii) 2) To work with labour link and other appropriate organisations to campaign for in work benefits to increase in line with inflation

Eastern Region

14. The gendered impact of the cost-of-living crisis and what this means for UNISON women

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) have in 2022 produced a series of reports clearly highlighting the impact this post pandemic cost of living crisis will have on women. We are in the midst of combined high inflation rates, across the board price increases and significant income deficit for many through historic and ongoing low wage rises, austerity policies and harsh benefit cuts.

The Inflation rate for July 2022 was 10.1%, reaching a 40-year record. The Resolution Foundation forecast prices in 2022/23 will be up 7.6% from 2021/22. Workers are facing a pay cut in real terms of 1.9% and public sector workers are seeing an even bigger drop in salaries with workers in key sectors such as education (who are mainly women) seeing the biggest falls in pay. In April, benefits were increased by 3.1%, equating to a third of price rises in the same month. The UC covid payment was cut and the benefit cap is still in place. Women are far more likely to be reliant on state benefits, and foodbanks, and more likely to be in significant debt due to lower wages and savings.

According to the WBG reports this will inevitably bring more people into the realms of poverty but the impact of these combined crises will hit women particularly hard for several reasons:

- 1) An increase in the cost-of-living will hit the poorest hardest. Women are more likely to be poor and have been hit harder by cuts to social security and provision of public services over the past decade.
- 2) Women have lower levels of savings and wealth than men.

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- 3) Even before Covid-19, women were more likely to be in debt and this has worsened because of the pandemic.
- 4) Women's caring responsibilities mean that they are often less able than men to increase their hours of paid work, as childcare costs were increasing above the rate of inflation for several years before this crisis.
- 5) Women are the 'shock absorbers of poverty'. They tend to have the main responsibility for the purchase and preparation of food for their children and families, and for the management of budgets of poor households.
- 6) Groups of women will be disproportionately impacted:
- 7) Poverty rates are significantly higher among people from Bangladeshi (53%), Pakistani (48%) and Black (40%) ethnic groups than among White people (19%), making it harder to meet rising living costs.
- 8) Disabled people were already facing on average an extra £583 in costs per month due to their impairment or condition. Even prior to Covid-19, over a third of disabled workers were having to cut back on food and heating.
- 9) Single parents, most of whom are women, have been hit particularly badly by Covid-19 with a third in financial difficulty, and 11% in problem debt. Prior to the pandemic 84% of single parents, reported savings of less than £1,500.
- 10) Victims/survivors of domestic violence and abuse, including economic abuse, are likely to find it harder to leave an abusive relationship if they are unsure how they will support themselves and their children as living costs rise.
- 11) Women with 'no recourse to public funds', who are excluded from claiming social security benefits are at high risk of poverty, and often destitution, if they lose work, or separate from a partner.

The SE Regional Women's Committee believes this is a Unison issue since nationally our membership stands at approximately 70% female. Unison should take a lead in ensuring our members are not experiencing poverty and debt which will inevitably lead to poor mental and physical health, whilst being expected to carry out some of the most vital roles in the workplace.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work to:

- i) Work with the appropriate bodies within UNISON to conduct research about the gendered aspect of the cost-of-living crises on women in UNISON to generate resources and toolkits for branches that are reflective of the different service groups we represent
- ii) Work with other SOGs across the union to better understand the intersectionality of the gendered cost of living crisis and its impact on workers
- iii) Raise the profile of the gendered impact of the cost-of-living crises and use as a strategic tool when recruiting and organising women
- iv) Work with Labour Link to promote the issue of the gendered impact of the cost-of-living crises on women
- v) Work with 'There for You' to combat the impact of the cost-of-living crises on women members

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- vi) Work with Learning and Organising Services to provide specific training for activists on the cost-of-living crises and in particular the affect it has on Women.

South East Region

15. Work-life balance, mental health and the Right to Disconnect

Conference notes the significant changes to working patterns and practices that have happened since the pandemic, including a large rise in remote and hybrid working.

Conference believes greater flexibility should be welcomed where this works for staff – for example, some disabled workers may find more home working is a useful adjustment, and workers with children or other caring responsibilities, often women, may find that greater flexibility may help them balance caring with their working lives.

However, working from home and flexibility can also present problems for staff, by blurring the line between work time and personal time. Being expected to be permanently available can have a particular impact on younger workers, and workers with caring responsibilities, who are more likely to be women; it can negatively impact mental health and stress levels; and it can mean that staff are not being paid for all the hours they are actually working. Badly considered and implemented moves to home working can also put victims of domestic violence at greater risk, if they are moved without their consent to working arrangements which force them to spend more time within an unsafe home environment.

Conference notes the 2022 survey of UNISON's young members which found that 80% of young members had experienced a mental health problem in the last year. When asked about their working lives, 59.7% of young members agreed with the statement "No matter how hard I work, it's difficult to get everything done" and 57.5% said that they "find it difficult to switch off from work at the end of the day".

Conference believes that flexible, hybrid and remote working policies need to be actively negotiated and agreed by trade unions, who can meaningfully consult staff, and can negotiate fair and positive arrangements that work best for the workforce as a whole.

Conference notes the 2017 research produced by the TUC which found that unionised workplaces have stronger policies around work/life balance, and that trade unions have expertise in negotiating such policies. Conference believes that the voices of women must be heard when trade unions talk about work/life balance, as they are more likely to have caring responsibilities which can be affected both negatively and positively by new working arrangements.

Conference notes that the Right to Disconnect is the right not to engage in email, telephone and other work-related contact outside of paid working hours. The Right to Disconnect has been established through legislation in some countries, eg. France, but can also be negotiated with individual employers through bargaining for robust workplace policies. Right to Disconnect policies can have a specifically positive impact on women workers and those with caring responsibilities, who benefit from a clearly defined separation between working and personal time.

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Conference believes all workers should have the Right to Disconnect and that UNISON has a key role to play in improving work/life balance for workers in the public sector.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Highlight the gendered impact of flexible, hybrid and remote working policies;
- 2) Promote UNISON's bargaining guidance on work/life balance and hybrid, remote and flexible working to women members and branch and regional women's groups;
- 3) Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) and the National Executive Council (NEC) to support a campaign for legislation on the Right to Disconnect;
- 4) Support and promote the NYMF campaign for more mentally healthy workplaces and better mental health at work;
- 5) Seek to promote the voices of women members in UNISON campaigning and bargaining on work/life balance.

National Young Members' Forum

16. Fair and Fast Compensation for WASPI Women

"This conference notes that:

The Women Against State Pension Injustice (WASPI) campaign is about the injustice suffered by 1950's born women because of the 1995 and 2011 pensions acts. These delayed the State Pension Age by up to 6 years with little or no notice. The way in which the changes were implemented has left women financially unprepared for their later years and caused severe hardship for many of them.

WASPI women made a series of maladministration complaints to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), followed by complaints to the Independent Case Examiner (ICE), culminating in complaints to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). This resulted in an investigation into the way that the DWP communicated the changes to women's State Pension age.

Stage 1 of the investigation found that there had been maladministration by the DWP. The provisional findings of stage 2 of the investigation looks at whether any of the failings identified in stage 1 led to injustice and the Ombudsman is working on stage 3 which will consider what action the DWP should take to remedy the "apparent injustice".

The Ombudsman said that these women had suffered maladministration because the DWP should have informed affected women of changes in December 2006 but delayed until April 2009.

The PHSO has no power to refund lost pensions or pay damages but can recommend that the Government gives the women compensation.

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WASPI Campaign data suggests that 82,000 women died between 2010 and 2020 before reaching the new State Pension Age and before receiving compensation for the lost years.

WASPI women are now fighting for fair and fast compensation.

In 2017 UNISON pledged support for WASPI women, and in 2019 declared that it would continue to stand with WASPI and other 1950's pension campaign groups.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Reaffirm UNISON's support of WASPI and the injustice suffered by 1950's born women;
- 2) Raise awareness about the maladministration of the DWP and how it has affected 1950's born women;
- 3) Support WASPI's campaign for Fair and Fast Compensation.

West Midlands Region

17. Gender Pension Gap

Just as UNISON's women members were getting to grips to working longer due to the increase in pension age (brought in to provide gender equality) we find that a woman's working career is beset with hidden pitfalls that seem designed to wide gender inequalities and deny us our hard worked for pensions.

A recent report from Legal and General has highlighted that an inevitably fall out of the Gender Pay Gap, alongside other contributory factors, means that women are being disadvantaged by massive gaps in Gender Pension Payments. Contributory factors include women not making contributions during maternity leave; women taking a career break or reducing hours in order to fulfil caring responsibilities for children or elderly relatives; and women statistically struggle more following a divorce (leading to them withdrawing from pension schemes) or waiving their rights to a partner's pension. The report details that within the Senior Care Sector 85% of pension scheme members are women, yet on average their pension pot size is 47% smaller than the average man's in the same sector.

Due to errors made in by the DWP in National Insurance Credits certain married women, widows and the over 80s) are owed in the region of £1.5 million pounds. This came to light from a July 2022 audit and the extent of the error will not be fully understood until autumn 2022.

Conference therefore calls on the Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with UNISON's Pension Department to understand the current situation
- 2) Oversee the development of easy to understand information sheets setting out the issues to be sent to all women members

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- 3) Work with LAOS to develop training sessions for women on how to improve their current pension outcome
- 4) Work with Labour Link to lobby the Government to lower the auto enrolment threshold to support our lowest paid women and those with multiple low paid employment

North Cumbria Northumberland & Tyne & Wear Health

18. Gender Pay Justice for Women Workers

Conference is concerned that UN Women's data report in 2020 estimated women's equality to be at risk of being set back 25 years due to the pandemic, and therefore reaffirms its commitment to improving women's working conditions in order that we combat this rollback on progress.

Conference notes that Close the Gap has reported that women are more than twice as likely as men to experience increased financial insecurity resulting from the pandemic, including being worried about how to pay rent.

Already before 2020, women's participation in work was disgracefully undervalued, underpaid and precarious, and this trend is rising.

Conference further notes the urgency of achieving pay justice, in particular for sectors of employment where women make up the majority in order to tackle the gender pay gap.

Conference is appalled at the ease with which policymakers have turned their backs on women workers, who made up the majority of frontline workers during the pandemic, who shouldered the burden of intensified care and domestic work during lockdown, and who are now facing the hardest impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) raise the issue of gender pay justice with UNISON's Service Group Executives and asking that calls for meaningful action to tackle gender pay gaps are included in future pay claims
- 2) lobby UK Governments and call on them to bring forward meaningful legislation to close the gaps with penalties for those employers who fail to reduce the gap
- 3) reinvigorate and re-launch UNISON's bridge the gap campaign

Scotland Region

19. We must defend attacks on Women's human rights

Conference notes that commitments to abortion and sexual health rights have been quietly removed by the Government from an international pack on freedom of belief and gender equality.

Conference, over the last few years we have seen repeated attacks on women's abortion and sexual health rights across the globe. In amending the language to

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removed reference to women's sexual and reproductive health, the UK government puts all these rights at risk.

If a woman is not free in the most intimate, conscientious choice that could face her, then how is she free?

Conference believes that as a union of 80% women, we need to continue to fight to protect women's rights and ensure that women's human rights will not be traded in by this government.

We call on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with Labour Link and Labour MPs to lobby the government and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to reinstate the initial statement to include reference to women's abortion and sexual health rights.
- 2) Work with the relevant structures in our union to keep members informed about the ongoing fight to defend women's human rights

South Tyneside Local Government

20. Dual discrimination and disabled women

Conference is concerned about the level of discrimination that disabled women are subjected to every day. Conference is further concerned at the government's continuing failure to implement Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010 which offers protection against dual and multiple discrimination.

At 14%, the Disability Pay Gap is the UK's biggest pay gap and while the gap between disabled men and non-disabled men may be bigger than the gap between disabled women and non-disabled women this is in the main due to men being paid more than women. Disabled women are paid less than both non-disabled women and disabled men. Yet there is no requirement for employers to monitor either the disability pay gap or to consider disabled women when monitoring and reporting on the gender pay gap.

And nothing much changes when we consider the Disability Employment Gap. While 81.1% of non-disabled people are in employment, the rate for disabled people is almost 30% less at just 52.3%. Again, the gap appears to be higher between disabled men and non-disabled men, at least until you dig further into the data and look at the economic inactivity rate.

The economic inactivity rate is people who are not in employment but who the government claims are not actively looking for work, usually because they aren't claiming any employment related benefits. While the difference in the economic activity rate between disabled and non-disabled men is around 20%, the gap between disabled and non-disabled women is a staggering 32%. And as benefits are more often than not paid to the man in a mixed-gender household this means many disabled women are not able to independently support themselves financially.

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And it isn't just in the workplace where disabled women are at a disadvantage compared to both disabled men and non-disabled women. It's in almost every area of society.

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) there are serious barriers for people with learning disabilities in accessing information about sex and contraception and that disabled pregnant women do not receive appropriate support.

The EHRC also found that disabled women are disproportionately at risk from all forms of violence and abuse including from carers, partners and people in the community. Women with learning disabilities and mental health conditions are also more likely to experience sexual violence. And to make the situation even worse, less than 2% of women's refuge spaces in England are wheelchair accessible.

Disabled people were also more impacted by COVID-19 than any other group. Almost 60% of people who lost their lives to COVID were disabled. But once again it was disabled women who were at the greatest risk as they were 1.6 times more likely to die from COVID compared to 1.4 times more for disabled men.

These statistics are shocking but not surprising. Other examples of where disabled women are hit the hardest include cuts to public spending, welfare reform and lone parent households (most of whom are women) where the parent is disabled. Disabled women also face significant discrimination in education, in health care and even in accessing goods and services.

A recent report by the London School of Economics (LSE) found that in the UK gender policies tend to ignore the needs of disabled women and disability policies have a gender-blind approach.

Disabled people are often seen as sexless with their life only affected by their disability but this isn't true. Disabled women are more economically marginalised compared to both disabled men and non-disabled women, more likely to receive poorer health care, less likely to secure well paid jobs despite often having better qualifications than their male counterparts and can expect to face abuse and violence more often than any other group in society.

Conference believes it is right that the fight for disabled people's rights includes all disabled people. We don't want to see disabled men become worse off because they are levelled down to match disabled women. We want to see equality for all disabled people but to achieve that we have to recognise that gender is a factor that we need to consider in the fight for disability equality.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the National Disabled Members Committee and the National Executive Council to:

- 1) Campaign for Section 14 of the Equality Act to be implemented
- 2) Work with Labour Link to seek to secure a commitment that the next Labour government will implement Section 14 of the Equality Act in their first year in office

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- 3) Include the impact on disabled women when responding to consultations on gender equality
- 4) Work with the health service group executive to seek to ensure disabled women's voices are included in all phases of the development and implementation of the Women's Health Strategy
- 5) Join the campaign to make disability pay and employment gap reporting mandatory for employers with over 250 people

National Disabled Members Committee

21. Equality Act and Menopause

Conference knows that menopause is a recognised medical condition and one of the challenges women face daily with gynaecological issues and concerns.

Menopause is a biological stage in a woman's life which can cause mental and physical changes.

Menopause is not a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, and conference believes this needs to change.

Quite rightly, pregnancy and maternity are protected, as are sexual identity and sexual orientation but still not menopause, despite the impact it has on women's daily lives.

There must be changes to the law to ensure that women have the necessary protection during menopause to ensure there is no detriment or unfair treatment because of going through this inevitable chapter of a woman's life.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the National Executive Committee to:

- 1) seek to lobby the main political parties and women's organisations to call for menopause to be a protected characteristic; and,
- 2) carry out a survey of all UNISON women to assess the impact of the inadequacy of existing legal protection on their working lives.

Norfolk and Suffolk Police UNISON

22. Menstrual Health

Women's reproductive health is a workplace issue. Women are roughly half of the UK workforce and 65% of public sector employees. As a union, we need to ensure that working women have all the information they need to be healthy and safe at work.

For some women, reproductive health issues can cause particular difficulties at work and may even lead to discriminatory action by employers, yet it's not something we usually talk about.

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Employers can be ignorant of or unsympathetic about conditions that affect women. Workplace sickness absence policies often use inflexible trigger levels that don't take account of these issues, setting off formal procedures that could ultimately lead to an unfair dismissal.

Women should have access to menstrual-friendly policies in their workplace. Access to flexible work arrangements including paid time off, improved training, action to address deep-seated stigma, practical improvements in toilet facilities, and temperature control for those who experience hot flushes or other menstrual and menopausal symptoms.

Better access to measures to alleviate issues with menstruation and menopause is cited as the main reasons that women avoid commuting when experiencing cramps, nausea and hot flushes.

In May 2022, Spain became the first European country to introduce legislation to allow workers who suffer from severe period pain to take 3 days of optional medical leave per month, with two additional days permitted in exceptional cases.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the NEC and with relevant organisations to do more to ensure that employers address issues around menstrual health, to campaign for the introduction of legislation to allow menstrual leave to those who need it and that flexible working arrangements should form part of period and menopause-friendly policies.

UNISON Northern Ireland

23. Black women and 'There for you' (UNISON Welfare)

Conference recognises that again and again Black females suffer economic disadvantage worldwide. Whether working as a domestic, a carers support staff, or in a senior management role. Black women fall into both gender and ethnicity pay gap lower earnings figures.

Conference, Black women across the UK already know that experiencing racism at work is the norm, however the campaigns of UNISON need to engage and advance the experiences of Black women members across all structures of the union.

In the current climate we know that many more of our members are having to go to food banks than ever before. We also know that this need will be higher for larger families and women who have caring responsibilities, two categories that Black women are disproportionately represented in. We also know that as donations to food banks drop while demand rises, people who need the service are going without.

It is in this climate that the work of UNISON and 'There for you' needs to be promoted to all members.

Anecdotal information received at conference from branches regions and devolved nations tell us that while some females will receive excellent support, development and advancement in branches developing a strong enhanced voice, others are not even given expenses to attend conference or other meetings in a timely way.

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They do not see themselves represented and feel unable to approach branch secretaries for the many helpful UNISON initiatives that are in place, in particular seeking support for school uniform costs, payment of bills and clearing of debt, opening them up to increased levels of stress and mental health problems.

Conference, the National Black Members Committee believes that working with the National Women's Committee we can create a programme of work that acknowledges and deals proactively with this disparity of experience and cultural stigma that may exist for many Black women

This conference therefore asks the National Women's Committee to work with the National Black Members Committee in the 'Year of Black workers 2023' to

1) Contact 'There for you' in association with the NEC Services to members to create a programme of work that acknowledges and deals proactively with this disparity of experience and any cultural stigma that may exist for Black women and promote the work of 'There for you'

2) Develop and create a Comms action plan to ensure Black members, especially Black women are reflected equally through 'There for you' materials in the 'Year of Black Workers' 2023

3) Write an article in Black Action to further impress on Black women members that they are considered equally important to the union in all the areas of work that they do and the importance of their role on the National Women's Committee to encourage further participation in all structures of UNISON

4) Create and distribute a UNISON survey as to the experience of Black women member during this cost of a living crisis and signpost activities of UNISON to support our women members through this crisis.

National Black Members' Committee

24. Promoting young women members participation in the union NLGBT+ Committee

Conference, UNISON has more than 1.3 million members and activists of which more than 70% are women. This means that there are over 9 hundred thousand women members scattered across the twelve regions and over 1000 branches. We know we have around 85 thousand young members, so if we use the same percentage of 70% for women this means that we have around 60 thousand young women in UNISON.

At the National Young Members' Forum (NYMF)'s first conference in 2021, there were multiple motions calling on UNISON to do more to support and encourage young members into other avenues of activism within UNISON when they "age out" of the NYMF after the age of 27.

The NYMF submitted a motion to the 2021 National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) Conference calling on the National LGBT+ Committee to

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work with the Forum to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young LGBT+ members participating in the LGBT+ group.

In 2022, the national LGBT+ committee launched a specific campaign aimed at creating an inclusive space for young LGBT+ members on a national level and increasing their participation within the LGBT+ group. It has established a national young LGBT+ network, set up a 'buddying' scheme and is developing a mentoring programme. The national network, launched in July, already had over 60 members by October, of whom around 70% are women.

Conference notes that a survey of UNISON young members in November 2020 found that 61.6% of young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) members said they “don't often take part in UNISON activities, or never do”. Young disabled members, LGBT+ members, women members and Black members were also more likely to be anxious about taking part in UNISON activities for the first time. The national LGBT+ committee's campaign will assist in addressing these issues.

Conference we know that a percentage of young members will have multiple identities that span our self-organising spaces. In order to include young members and encourage greater participation in our union we need to be working together across the self-organised groups (SOGs).

If we can bring more young members into the women's and other SOGs, we can encourage and support them to continue their activism journey in UNISON. This can only be good for membership and activist development.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Consider setting up a network for young women members
- 2) Encourage young LGBT+ women members to participate in the national young LGBT+ members' network
- 3) Encourage regional women's groups to circulate information about the young LGBT+ young members network widely within their region
- 4) Work with the NYMF to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young women members participating in the women's SOG
- 5) Engage with branch and regional women SOGs to identify barriers for young women members in getting more active in UNISON, and to highlight positive measures and success stories in addressing these barriers
- 6) Work with the other SOGs, young members' forum and other appropriate parts of the union to explore alternative ways of meeting, to increase the participation of young women members in our union.
- 7) Encourage regional and branch groups to hold joint events with regional young members' forums wherever possible.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee

25. Young Women's Mental Health

Conference notes that in recent statistics published by the Office for National Statistics, in England and Wales rates of suicide amongst women aged 24 and under has seen the largest increase since records began in 1981.

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Although the reasons for this increase are not clear, conference notes that in an article by Mind, published in September 2022, it was recognized that young people were amongst those most affected by isolation and loneliness during the pandemic, and that women are more likely to have experienced traumatic events such as abuse, and are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems.

As two thirds of UNISON members are women, Conference believes that UNISON young women members are being disproportionately affected by mental health problems and notes that a recent survey of young members found over 81% has experienced a mental health problem in the last year. The main problems reported by young members were depression (88.2%) and anxiety (87.1%). Young members reported that over half of these problems were related to their work, with over two thirds saying they often felt stressed at work, with a similar proportion reporting that they “find it difficult to switch off from work at the end of the day”.

Conference calls on the National Women's' Committee to:

- 1) Work with Regional women's committees and branches to encourage employers to prioritise young women's mental health and campaign to improve mental health policies at work.
- 2) Work with UNISON national young members committee in conjunction with Unison national health service group executive on a campaign to raise awareness of the Young Workers Charter, to improve terms and conditions at work and achieve the priorities set by young women members.
- 3) Work with UNISON Learning and Organising Services to develop training for activists and members on supporting young women members with their mental health problems and improving mental health practices within the workplace.

North Cumbria Northumberland & Tyne & Wear Health

26. Towards An Inclusive Women's Health Strategy

Conference notes the December 2021 government policy paper 'Our Vision for the Women's Health Strategy for England', published after 100,000 women shared their personal experiences around the way the health and care system listens to women. The document looked at the approach to women's health by putting women's voices at the heart of this work. The policy paper was based on information and the voices of women, in addition to building on two previous reports. A 2020 report, the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, played a vital part in the recommendations in the report.

Conference we have all heard about the failure of testing of the vaginal mesh which has led to women being left with impairments for the remainder of their lives. A further 2020 independent report into the issues raised by Ian Paterson, a former surgeon, was also crucial. This report found 'it is often women whom the healthcare system fails to keep safe, and whom systems fail to listen to'.

Conference believes that there is not a woman who won't recognise the need for a Women's Health Strategy, after decades of gender health inequalities. The 'Vision' document contains evidence around health in the workplace, with the report

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highlighting that health conditions and impairments impact on women at work, leading to increased stress levels and mental health impacts. It calls on employers to look to flexible working arrangements to reflect that women make up 51% of the workforce.

Conference acknowledges the long struggle our women across UNISON (black, disabled & LGBT+) have within employment and the impact of the disabling elements that come with periods, menopause, endometriosis to name a few conditions that for women can be extremely painful and cause extra time away from work. This is in addition to dealing with the impact on other impairments and ever-increasing comments like 'It's Just a Women's Thing'. While on average women in the UK live longer than men, women spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health and disability. This is on top of growing geographical differences and disparities between different groups of women in how they access services. Doctors' routine dismissal of women's debilitating health problems as "benign" has contributed to gynaecology waiting lists soaring by 60% to more than half a million patients. Dr Edward Morris of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said institutionalised gender bias meant the term "benign" was used more widely in gynaecology. Resulting in conditions being normalised and deprioritised within the NHS.

Conference welcomes the work towards producing a women's health strategy in light of the need to improve the health of all women and girls and to build an approach to women's health that is inclusive of LGBT+, Disabled & Black communities. Changing what is an institutionalised culture will not be easy but there are no 'quick fixes' we can take that would risk the health of women.

Conference, for our part as a union, we need to ensure that we negotiate robust guidance and inclusive sickness policies. Conference notes in response to the strategy that "UNISON considers that a women's health strategy should include health and well-being in the workplace, work life balance and occupational hazards as well as biological matters. It should also include consideration of ways to promote good health and prevent ill health at work."

Conference women and their health are influenced by many things during their lifetime from the job roles, family responsibilities, different health impacts and exposures in and out of work environment even down to their own biology. Even on how the Pandemic effected women differently both physically and mentally impacting on their already inequalities pre the pandemic the long lasting effects are yet unknown by many women.

While we welcome this strategy and at present conference, that is all it is, we need to see robust action that reaches the very women who are identified within it. We welcome the response from our own union but conference it could of reached out to our grassroots women and reached our regional women's committees and networks.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to

1) Work with National Health Service Group to campaign to ensure that women's voice is not diluted furthermore within the Women's strategy of all women's health by pitting one woman's need against another.

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- 2) Work with Labour Link to seek to ensure the Labour Party holds the government to account on addressing women's health inequalities
- 3) Raise awareness of these issues across the union and consider backing appropriate campaigns for action
- 4) Continue to produce and circulate guidance on negotiating sickness absence policies and disability leave.

***North Cumbria Northumberland &
Tyne & Wear Health***

27. Workplace Policies on Sexual Harassment

Conference notes that a number of motions were passed at National Delegate Conference in 2022 on Violence Against Women.

Too many public bodies are moving towards having an all encompassing fair treatment at work policy rather than individual policies focusing on specific issues like sexual harassment, racial discrimination etc. where the voices of marginalised groups are lost through merging them under the equality banner.

Our employers cannot continue to get away with ignoring both the specific needs of women in the workplace or the intersectionality issues faced by marginalised groups.

The City of Edinburgh Council has spent in the region of £2million on an inquiry after harbouring, enabling and protecting a serial sexual abuser of women at work and at home and colluding with senior managers to protect the abuser from facing action.

The response from CEC is to change behaviours and culture but alongside this a refusal to implement a sexual harassment policy.

The City of Edinburgh Branch would like the National Women's Committee to progress:

- 1) raising the profile of what sexual harassment is and the different ways it can impact people in the workplace
- 2) b) making it a mandatory requirement for Equality and Women's Officers within branches to negotiate and roll out a sexual harassment policy for all public bodies and ensure that it includes references to the specific needs of women, both cis and trans, and the specific needs of other marginalised groups with a focus on intersectionality.

City Of Edinburgh

28. Women in work- The Motherhood penalty

Conference, the company, PwC, who are leaders in economic analysis in public and private sectors, recently highlighted in their Women in work index (<https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics/insights/women-in-work-index.html>) a fact that we already know – that Women raising children pay a 'motherhood penalty' in underemployment, slower career progression, and lower lifetime earnings. The increased burden of unpaid childcare, borne by mothers and women raising children

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during the pandemic, was a key driver of the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment outcomes overall. In addition, Women in ethnic minority groups experienced significantly worse employment outcomes than white women in the UK.

Experienced women are leaving the workplace and becoming unemployed as they are unable to juggle paid work with additional demands such as caring responsibilities for children and other family members.

Conference believes that women should not be subject to the 'motherhood penalty' and only when women and men are considered equal in undertaking childcare and domestic work, can gender equality at work become an achievable reality. To achieve this there must be inclusive policies, such as flexible working without gender bias to be used by both women and men, and equally paid parental leave to redistribute the burden on unpaid leave on women and importantly affordable childcare.

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the NEC and Labour Link to develop and build upon campaigns to improve flexible working and parental leave legislation.
- 2) Work with NEC and Labour Link to develop a campaign for the Labour Party to support affordable childcare options for women.

South Tyneside Local Government

29. The Importance of Women Health and Safety Representatives

"UNISON has approximately 5,000 Health and Safety representatives across the union working hard to defend members' health and safety at work.

Over the past few years health and safety has emerged again as critical for protecting members' rights at work. However, the gender balance of Health and Safety representatives in UNISON does not reflect the gender balance of our union.

Women's health and safety is never more important – whether it is advising on maternity rights, menopause, women's safety equipment, or areas where there is a traditional bias towards female working – we need women representing women.

Therefore, we call on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum to emphasise the key issues for women in the workplace;
- 2) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum, and any other relevant body, to encourage women to become health and safety representatives.

West Midlands Region

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30. Menopause and Perimenopause: A Workplace Issue

This conference notes that whilst there is a better awareness and knowledge of menopause and perimenopause generally, some of which has been helped by Unisons comprehensive guidance on the Menopause, we as a union still need to further focus on specifically promoting this within the workplace. Women make up over 70% of Unison membership and the implications and impact of understanding menopause and perimenopause should therefore be a crucial issue for us as a union to campaign and educate on. Furthermore, the impacts of menopause and perimenopause on women members, physical, mental, and sometimes financial may not be recognized or can be misunderstood by their colleagues and managers in the workplace.

In our region from speaking to women members we found that the menopause and perimenopause is in most workplaces still approached and managed using the sickness and absence policy and procedures and comes from a place of not understanding what the menopause and perimenopause is in the first place.

We know that menopause and perimenopause is not an illness – it is part of the cycle of life. A part that yes can be debilitating, that in some instances can be disabling but managing the menopause and perimenopause solely from an illness stance does not acknowledge what they really are and perpetuates misinformation or lack of understanding around this and have a detrimental impact of those going through it. Our activists need to feel empowered to work with employers to discourage the use of sickness policies and procedures to manage the menopause and perimenopause, but rather create and implement policies and procedures that treat menopause and perimenopause as a part of the cycle of life wherever possible.

We also need to consider that whenever the existing guidance provided by Unison is used to support and educate, that it is acknowledged that not every woman experiences menopause and perimenopause in the same way. That our representatives are trained to be aware of the need for some flexibility in the way this guidance is applied, that it is not a one size fits all situation.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with all appropriate UNISON departments, service groups and regional women's groups to;

- 1) Strengthen the existing guidance available to branches to include perimenopause in a more than the glossary.
- 2) Work towards building into our organising steward and health and safety representatives training a module on awareness raising of the effects of the menopause and perimenopause.
- 3) Report back on progress to the National Women's Conference 2024

Eastern Region

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31. Sexual Abuse and perimenopausal and/or menopausal women: A Union issue

One in 35 women are raped or sexually assaulted every year. You will know at least one woman who has been raped or sexually assaulted in the last 12 months. Whether the person shares this harrowing experience with you is another matter. Sexual violence is linked to shame and humiliation.

In support of motion 15 at National Women's Conference 2022, Newcastle Branch Women's Self Organised Group (SOG) have been investigating domestic abuse as a workplace issue. Our women members agreed to investigate and work with our own education and welfare sections to create an up-to-date training and advice package which would be available to branches and representatives. The package will demonstrate how to support those members experiencing domestic abuse (DA) and start sometimes difficult conversations with members. We plan to encourage our branch to seek a review of any existing domestic violence policies in relation to employers across our area. Women members in SOG told us they wanted to see opportunities for women survivors of DA and that their Union is a safe place to get this support.

Many of us who are involved also play a key role in our Menopause project. During discussions about violence against women we revealed the tangible link between DA and the menopause.

Is it a myth or a fact that sexual violence escalates against perimenopausal and/or menopausal women within their domestic situation?

FACT: One in two rapes against women are carried out by their partner or ex-partner.

MYTH: Many people believe it can't be rape if the act is carried out by the person the victim is married to.

FACT: Rape is rape and it is **ILLEGAL**.

One of the biggest barriers for women to reach out for help is other people's lack of understanding, hostile storytelling and placing blame onto the victim "A women with her job (employment position held by the women) and she can't leave her husband. I would just tell him where to go. He won't speak to me like that!"

We began to research sexual violence against perimenopausal and/or menopausal women within their domestic situation and found little research could be found. Rape Crisis told us, in the year ending March 2022 70,330 people reported rape. Yet only 2,223 rape charges were brought during the same time, ending March 2022. What we have revealed is that 40% of women said they didn't report the incident as they were embarrassed. 38% said they didn't think the police could help. 34% said they thought it would be **HUMILIATING** to report the crime. We need to stop this blame culture and self-shaming.

An American study by Rohitha Naraharisetty (associate editor at The Swaddle, Sept 2022) told us that the link between violence and menopause is biological as well as cultural. According to a 2019 longitudinal study, intimate partner violence, and

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sexual assault were associated with a greater risk of “potentially disruptive menopause symptoms” — pointing to the “need for greater recognition of these exposures by clinicians caring for midlife and older women.” Leaving many women with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Fact: The impact of menopause on decreased quality of life is well-documented. We know symptoms of menopause include hot flushes, changes in sleep cycles, sex drive, mood changes, and more. However, the long-term impact of violence against perimenopausal and/or menopausal women is largely unknown creating further inequalities in women’s healthcare.

Very little is known about the prevalence of traumatic exposures to sexual violence amongst midlife and older women. This needs to change. We need to talk to our women members and find out more. How can we help a situation when we don’t know enough about it? This cannot continue and we need to lift the lid on sexual violence against ALL women including those perimenopausal and/or menopausal women. We all work alongside victims of domestic abuse and those women with symptoms of perimenopause and/or menopause. We need to support our women members, engage in sensitive conversations, gather evidence, to show this is happening now across the UK and Northern Ireland.

We therefore call on National Women’s Committee to work with regions and regional women’s networks/committees as appropriate to:

- 1) Investigate and research this issue through various methods including surveying women members and share findings.
- 2) Urge branches to collate any evidence they have which supports links with Domestic abuse and perimenopausal and/or Menopausal women and share this evidence.
- 3) Encourage branches to check that they have adopted a DA policy which will enable them to support members, shop stewards and branch officers when faced with disciplinary issues fundamentally related to DA.
- 4) Campaign to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse against peri menopausal and menopausal women.

Newcastle City

32. Domestic Abuse

Conference notes that:

Domestic abuse impacts on women in their workplace as well as their home. There is no timeline to abuse or location preference, this can happen anytime of the day at any place.

Pre-pandemic the workplace was a key place and provided safety away from their perpetrator. Women have become even more vulnerable and isolated from help while having to work from home during the pandemic.

As more and more of our members work from home it is vital that we look at and find new ways and a new approach to support our members from domestic abuse. Also

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play an active part in reminding our employers that they have a duty of care and legal responsibility to protect their employees under health and safety law.

Even though our members are working in their home environment we need to remind employers of their responsibilities to ensure our members are safe and that they need to do everything to safeguard our members, their employees. It's a different location to their usual workplace but it's still the responsibility of the organisation to keep all employees safe and well.

We are the U.K.'s largest public service trade union, with around 1 million women members. During the Pandemic there was a marked increase in traffic to Unison's learning pages by reps searching specifically for resources and materials help address domestic abuse. This evidence is showing that our reps are dealing with more cases of domestic abuse and need training and support more and more.

Some visitors to our website accessing this information would also have been members looking for help for themselves on a site they can readily hide or explain rather than contacting an abuse helpline or organisation.

Conference further recognises that working women, especially the low paid, are prevented from being able to flee to a place of safety by having to fund their own place in a refuge. They just don't see this as an option due to financial problems and feel forced to stay with their perpetrator and feel trapped from safety.

Our union needs to focus on having clear ways to help all our members to safety, with real focus on the lower paid who are most vulnerable victims and re-assure our members that there is a way and we can guide and support them to keep them safe.

Our members need access to a clear way they can gain help and support and understand how we can help them with resources to get help, empower them to remove themselves to a place of safety without the worry of how it's possible to do so. Clear resource support and how they can access this is vital to protect our members.

We call on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with LAOS to provide training for all UNISON stewards on domestic violence
- 2) Carry out a survey of all UNISON members asking two simple questions: (i) how do you identify? and (ii) Have you ever experienced domestic violence?
- 3) Ask all UNISON branches to provide support for women having to flee without preparation, including photocopying essential documents such as birth certificates, passports and any rent/mortgage agreements and emergency packs including basic toiletries.
- 4) Support the TUC's campaign encouraging all employers to develop and implement workplace domestic abuse policies; provide mandatory training for all employees; and offer victims 10 days' paid leave and a Day 1 right to flexible working.

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- 5) To support the TUC's call for wider reforms of Universal Credit; funding for domestic abuse support services; extending the rail to refuge beyond the Pandemic.

North West Region

33. Domestic Abuse: A Workplace Issue

This conference notes that whilst there is often a proactive approach, policies, and systems in place for customers that organizations serve when it comes to tackling domestic abuse and violence there may not be the same levels of provision for staff. It is also recognized that whilst there may be workplace policies in existence; the education, training, and knowledge of how to both recognize and deal with domestic violence in the workplace can be inconsistent and given little priority by employers of our women members. We have learnt that the approaches taken can be for instance via sickness and absence policies and even, if domestic abuse and violence are not identified, cases where women have been subjected to action via disciplinary procedures.

Women make up over 70% of Unison membership and statistics show by far the majority the victims of domestic abuse and violence are women. We still hear of women who are subject to domestic violence end up taking their annual leave to deal with matters such as court attendance, legal case preparation as well as time off to seek or get legal advice.

In April 2020, the Home Affairs Committee said there was “evidence that cases are escalating more quickly to become complex and serious, with higher levels of physical violence and coercive control.” Karen Ingala-Smith, who runs the ‘Counting Dead Women’ project, estimated that during the first three weeks of the first lockdown, there had been sixteen domestic abuse killings of women and children in the UK, which was the highest for at least 11 years. The 2022 Unison Health Care Service Group Conference carried a motion that Domestic Violence is still a workplace issue and how the pandemic had increased levels of domestic violence and that employers need to be reminded of their duty of care for employees.

The need for safe spaces that might be useful for those subject to domestic abuse including safe and secure places to store papers; time off to seek legal advice, ad hoc short notice if situations are developing and need to be dealt with quickly are some of the quick solutions that can really make a difference to the women having to deal with the domestic abuse. Women who are experiencing domestic violence have need a level of both understanding and practical support from their employer. This could mean considerations such as a moves of job, workplace or even hours where there may be a need to meet the criteria for Universal Credit.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with all appropriate UNISON departments, service groups and regional women's groups to;

- 1) Review and update the existing guidance on Domestic Violence and Abuse, a Trade Union Issue.

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- 2) Review and update the presently available training courses and information for activists and women members who may be impacted by domestic violence either directly or indirectly
- 3) Review and update, in light of increased home working, the model workplace agreement on Domestic Violence and Abuse. This advice to consider now also including but not be limited to;
 - a) Plans for implementation & monitoring
 - b) Guidance on creating “safe spaces”
 - c) Training and information to manage domestic abuse appropriately in the workplace.
- 4) Report back on progress to the National Women’s Conference 2024

Eastern Region

34. Defend the right to choose - decriminalise abortion now

The overturning of Roe Vs Wade by the US Supreme Court is the biggest attack on abortion rights since the 1970s. There are over a dozen US states ready to bring in bans following this ruling. These bans won't stop abortions. But they will stop safe abortions, and they will make it a crime to assist someone to have an abortion.

This means thousands of working class people face an unwanted pregnancy, an unsafe procedure, a jail sentence. Rich people will be ok – they can afford to travel to states or countries without bans, or to check in to a private clinic. The growth of far right parties in government around the world will make it far more likely that abortion rights will come under increasing attack.

We cannot be complacent here – our right to choose and access to abortion has repeatedly come under attack, and the Supreme Court decision will give confidence to those wanting to attack abortion rights. Nadine Dorries used the publicity around the Tory leadership battle to call for reducing the time limit for abortion, and Liz Truss has not supported the right to choose.

This makes it more important than ever for us here to campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion. It's an outrage that in the 21st century, the only medical procedure that requires permission rather than consent is an abortion, and that there are currently women facing legal action for having abortions. Earlier this year a woman was kept in police custody for 36 hours following an unexpected stillbirth because of a 'suspicion' that she had an abortion. She was then under investigation for 18 months without charge. A Freedom of Information request has revealed that in England and Wales, at least 17 women have been investigated by the police for alleged illegal abortions. This happens because of an arcane law passed in 1861 before women even had the right to vote that puts abortion as equivalent to murder without the permission of two doctors.

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Working class people and the trade union movement have come together before to fight for our right to choose. The TUC called the biggest ever protest to defend abortion rights against the Corrie Bill in 1979, mobilising 80,000 people on to the streets. This made a huge difference to the campaign, and to women in the workplace.

This Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the NEC and other appropriate bodies within UNISON to highlight the campaign for abortion rights and decriminalisation in England, Scotland and Wales
- 2) Explore the possibility of making links with international organisations sharing UNISON's aims and objectives in the campaign to defend abortion rights.

Camden UNISON

35. Buffer Zones for Abortion Clinics

Conference notes that the decision to seek an abortion is never an easy one for a woman, and is a very stressful time of life.

Conference also notes the recent attacks on Roe Vs Wade in the USA have given encouragement to anti-choice protesters and activists internationally.

Such protests frequently take the form of picketing clinics and units which provide abortion related services, with displays of religious symbols, fetuses, and verbal abuse and harassment of vulnerable women seeking to access the services.

Conference believes that women should be able to access abortion and counselling in a safe and low stress environment, and that no woman should be subject to harassment at such a time.

Conference also notes that local authorities have the power to establish "buffer zones" where protests are banned within a certain distance of facilities providing abortion, by use of by-laws, and that this has been effective in places like Ealing and Leeds in the past. (This is the case in England and Wales).

Conference calls upon:

- 1) The NWC to produce campaign materials and briefings for branches and regions to lobby local councils to work towards establishing buffer zones around all premises that offer abortion related services.
- 2) For NWC to work with Labour Link to encourage Labour councillors/authorities to support the implementation of buffer zones around all clinics and hospitals providing abortion related services.

Yorkshire - Humberside Region

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36. Decriminalise Abortion

Conference notes that:

- 1) Abortion has been legal since the Abortion Act in 1967.
- 2) There are very strict conditions that must be met for two doctors to agree to facilitate the process whether it is via medical or surgical conditions.
- 3) Abortion legislation was devolved to Scotland in 2016 and the issue remains a responsibility for the Scottish Government, with all provisions made within the NHS, unlike elsewhere in the UK whereby most abortions are outsourcing to charitable organisations.
- 4) Legislation states that a woman commits a criminal offence if she “unlawfully procures her own miscarriage” with punishment up to life in prison.
- 5) This legislation also affects any doctor, nurse, or any other person who is deemed to have assisted in this activity.
- 6) There are currently 2 women awaiting trial in the UK for following police investigations because the police have deemed that the necessary criteria laid down in the 1967 legislation were not met.
- 7) It has been noted that the police now appear to be investigating more women who have accessed abortions.
- 8) Conference also notes that:
- 9) Women remain subject to archaic, discriminatory, and stigmatising legislation removing their rights to bodily autonomy, privacy and which puts added stress and burdens on them.
- 10) Those doctors, nurses and pharmacists who choose to be involved in this field, do so because they recognise the importance of ensuring that women have access to safe in TV abortion care, but should be able to do so without the added threat of criminal law.

Conference calls on the National Women’s Committee to:

- i) support the Abortion Rights campaign call for the full decriminalisation of abortion and for the Scottish and UK Governments to legislate to ensure women and medical staff can act within safe medical guidelines as for any other medical procedure.

Scotland Region

37. Free Sanitary & Incontinence Products

Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Women’s Committee believe free, community-based provision of sanitary and incontinence products should be available for all women and girls.

A 2022 Action Aid UK Survey, as part of the Menstrual Hygiene Day; showed that in the UK 12% of women are now struggling to purchase sanitary products. They are now using less healthy alternatives such as toilet paper, washing rags (sometimes without adequate washing facilities) or not changing products as regularly as they should, putting them at risk of toxic shock syndrome and/or UTIs. The financial

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situation of women is, as we all know being increasingly impacted upon by the cost-of-living crisis.

Incontinence Products are a much less discussed problem but can be equally as distressing and as big a health risk to women. Many women suffer the impacts of incontinence following a recent birth, as a result of health issues or as a side effect of the menopause. The personal products used can be very expensive and women can be purchasing these at the same time as sanitary products for themselves and their daughters.

Provision should be guided by the following principles:

- 1) Protecting people's dignity, avoiding anxiety, embarrassment and stigma
- 2) Making a range of products available in places people use
- 3) Obtaining free period products should neither be complex or bureaucratic – products should be reasonably easy to obtain
- 4) Respecting individual choice and cultural needs by providing a range of products that meet personal preferences
- 5) Promoting gender equality by ensuring anyone who menstruates can access products, including transgender men and non-binary individuals, and that language is gender inclusive
- 6) A response that is reflective of communities' views and needs
- 7) Promoting reusable products to encourage a shift away from single use plastic products and to reduce period plastic waste
- 8) Awareness raising and education to promote the offer and attempt to change norms

We therefore call on the National Women's Committee to work with the wider Unison structure, including the Labour Link Committee, together with external bodies as they see fit to lobby the National and Devolved Governments and Opposition Parties to fund the free local provision of these products, in line with the principles listed above, as soon as practically possible.

(We recognise that free sanitary products are currently available in Scotland but at the time of writing free incontinence products are not.)

Yorkshire - Humberside Region

International

38. Defending and improving women's rights internationally

Conference notes the words of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, "Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world."

Conference believes that identifying, celebrating and increasing visibility of women's achievements worldwide can help forge equality and combat gender bias, and that collaborating with women activists in different countries across the World, based on a foundation of shared purpose, trust and appreciation, can impact positive change for women.

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UNISON works with individual unions and global union federations to defend public services and fight against austerity around the world and works to defend human and trade union rights wherever they are under attack

Conference believes that with over a million women in our union and as the UK's biggest women's organisation, UNISON women can play an important role in helping to defend and improve women's rights in the workplace and wider society, internationally.

Conference congratulates the National Women's Committee for recent international work including understanding the potential global impact of the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade, removing a woman's constitutional right to abortion and for speaking out and defending abortion rights alongside American and Polish women activists. Also, for inviting women activists from Colombia and Turkey to speak with the National Women's Committee and wider women's membership about defending human rights, labour rights, peace and social justice.

Conference applauds the bravery of women in Iran for taking a stand and demanding an end to the mandatory headscarf and modest clothing. Conference condemns the repression of women who have been physically attacked and killed for fighting for their basic rights. We stand in solidarity with them as individuals and with the women's organisations that are supporting them.

Conference believes there is more that could be done to strengthen international links with women activists and women's structures in trade unions and social organisations in other countries and calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with UNISON's International Committee to identify new opportunities to build links with women activists and their structures in trade unions and social organisations internationally
- 2) Continue to work internationally to defend abortion rights
- 3) Continue to work with the International Committee to provide solidarity with women who are on the front-line in demanding trade union rights, peace and social justice, specifically in Colombia and Turkey
- 4) Show solidarity with women in Iran and explore ways to help them fight oppression and discrimination.

National Women's Committee

Efficient and Effective Union

39. Developing women into Lay Tutors

Conference notes that significant investment has been put in to training our lay women members to build upon confidence in their roles as women activists in branches, this will help to address proportionality within our union.

Conference notes and welcomes that the introduction of the UNISON College will provide women with further opportunities to develop their learning and skills through the high-quality training that is offered.

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Conference, we now have the chance to take this development of our women a step further by empowering our women activists to become Lay Tutors to work in partnership with UNISON staff and deliver a suite of courses to the wider membership. The benefits of this model would allow for a greater reach of training, as once trained, the Lay Tutors could deliver training independently on a range of workplace issues for the benefit of our women members.

In the Northern Region, we have had success using this model to deliver menopause training to branches and workplaces spanning across all the service groups. This has led to many employers adopting menopause policies within their workplaces and has provided both managers and members with a broader understanding and awareness of issues related to menopause, leading to improved outcomes for members within the working environment and at formal meetings.

Women's Network has also been actively involved in the region on delivering the Health and Safety course 'Delivering for Safety', linked into the campaign to get more women to be involved in becoming a Health and Safety Rep in their work environment and their branch.

Conference, we know that the greatest asset within our union are our women members, and together we rise. Adopting a network of lay women tutors in all regions, will enable us to continue to identify and mentor our women members participating in lay tutor led training to become our activists of the future.

We ask National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with LAOS to develop the Leadership Course to include a module on the delivery of training, to facilitate women to become Lay Tutors.
- 2) Work with LAOS and regions alongside Regional Women's Networks/Committees to collate a skills matrix of women within our branches to identify opportunities to develop our women activists in to Lay Tutors.
- 3) Report back findings of the skills matrix and training to National Women's Conference 2024.

Northern Region

2023 National Women's Conference

UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Motions Ruled Out of Order

Beyond the remit of the Committee

Shifting the balance of power in the union – more work to be done –

Rule change

Conference, traditionally trade unions have been dominated by men, with little flexibility and few opportunities for new activists, particularly women, to participate. Women make up around three-quarters of UNISON members and are at the forefront of many of our most important campaigns.

Conference, we know that our women members are our greatest asset in UNISON.

National Women's Committee supports and is committed to proportionality in all the policy it creates and in previous years has supported motions brought by North West and Northern Women's Network to do specific work to increase the participation of black, disabled and LGBT+ women and to work on proportionality in all areas of the union.

UNISON rules and guidance provides for the principles of proportionality and fair representation to be implemented in UNISON elections and delegations. Yet, despite the union's strong commitment to proportionality the unfortunate reality is that in many branches proportionality is not achieved and as such creates an imbalance.

Conference, we know many motions have been passed over the years to address this imbalance and work is being done to shift the balance of power across the union. However, this will take time to be embedded.

Conference, the UNISON Rule book 1.10.4 provides for self-organised groups (including National Women's Conference) to submit a total of two motions and/or amendments to rule at National Delegate Conference. Conference, as a union that is made up of 80% women, how can it be that women's motions and therefore priorities are limited in such a way?

Conference, we need to take direct action and submit a rule change to 1.10.4 to ensure that whilst work is ongoing to embed proportionality in all layers of the union, women's issues are at the forefront of union business.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to:

1) Submit an amendment to rule 1.10.4 at National Delegate Conference to provide for no limit to the number of motions and/or amendments to rule at National Delegate Conference.

Northern Region

Women Speaking up in our Union

This Women's conference is appalled at the lack of response and delay in dealing with complaints within our Union.

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This means that some members suffer turmoil not knowing how and when their complaints will be dealt with. This should never happen in Unison.

Motion 121 Speak Up and Speak Out was carried at national delegate conference.

This motion explained that when allegations or complaints are made we should have a process which is equitable clear and concise which allows for a proper investigation and decision making.

We must also have processes where serious complaints should be dealt with within a certain timescale and specialist Officers are employed to support complainants. However, our processes seem weighted towards the responder.

It is vitally important that our policies and procedures are adhered to within our Union and as the Union with the largest number of women members then we should be an example to the Union movement as a whole.

We call on the National Women's Committee to;

- 1) Ensure all actions are carried out that was agreed in Motion 121 and actions from National Delegate Conference;
- 2) Support the creation of new Policy and Procedures so that everyone involved feels support and is represented.
- 3) To help create access to a safe place to speak out, within our own ranks and networks to be made available for support at the point that a complaint is raised.

Kirklees Local Government

Could place the union in legal jeopardy

Equality for trans women is UNISON business

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

***National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgender plus Committee***

Stop the Toxic Debate

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

South East Region

Convicted paedophiles/sex offenders as members of unison

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

South East Region

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Not competent

Supporting our women members during the cost-of-living crisis

Conference notes that we are living through a cost-of-living crisis. Many of our women members will be struggling during this difficult time which has a huge impact on mental health. The cost of energy, fuel and food has gone up dramatically, but women's wages are stagnating in many areas.

Women members wages simply aren't going far enough and difficult choices are having to be made. In some households even the necessities of life are being left on the shelf. Families are not just facing the choice between heating or eating. They are also having to leave essential hygiene items such as sanitary products and toothpaste out of the shopping basket.

Conference also notes that women's use of foodbanks has been steadily increasing since the Tory Government came into power. The Trussell Trust noted that approximately 2.17 million people used a foodbank in the UK in 2021 - 2022. Year on year the number of foodbank users has increased, and this is likely to get worse as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

We are conscious that not all women UNISON members will be aware of the support that is available to them during this time. We also note that UNISON's charity There For You has seen a large increase in the number of members requesting support, with some schemes such as the winter fuel grant having to pause applications due to such a large demand.

Therefore, conference asks the NEC to support our campaign #OneExtraItem:

- 1) Write to all women members to note that UNISON is there to support them, advise members they can contact the Branch if they need help and reassure them that this will be confidential and not be shared with their employer.
- 2) Organise a donation box for food, sanitary products and toiletries with all Branches which can be taken directly to local food banks.
- 3) To join our campaign #OneExtraItem asking individuals to add an extra item to their weekly or monthly shop to go into Branch donation boxes.
- 4) To start a national initiative to raise awareness of food poverty as well as hygiene and period poverty.

Please support this very important motion as an effective way of assisting our fellow women members.

East Midlands Region

2023 National Women's Conference

UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy

Conference notes that in July 2022 the Government produced a Women's Health Strategy for England Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) that highlights that:

- 1) Half the population is female
- 2) Health & Social Care services were designed by men for men
- 3) Women live longer than men, but have longer periods of ill health or life limiting conditions in later life
- 4) Race, Disability and Sexual Orientation means women experiences of healthcare is further compromised

UNISON has more than a million women members who make up more than two thirds of our union and they can provide first-hand experience of how the many different health issues affecting women, and those who identify as women, can have a massive impact on their lives and daily functioning for years.

Without an all-encompassing policy on Whole Life women's health issues and the impact this has on all women members in the workplace, women members will continue to remain unsupported in many workplaces and face continued inequality.

Conference further notes that such a policy would also benefit trans men and other people with traditionally female reproductive systems. Even with hormone blockers and surgery, trans men can experience some biological issues that can, for example, impact severely on their mental health.

Conference acknowledges some progress has been made, for example, the introduction of Menopause Policies is a critical step forward in recognising the impact of menopause transition in the working lives of women members and is to be applauded. However, having broken through the brittle barrier of wilful ignorance on the menopause, we now need to go further.

Women members experience unique health issues and conditions, from pregnancy and menopause to gynaecological conditions, such as uterine fibroids and pelvic floor disorders.

Some of these conditions are little understood within the NHS as well as within the workplace and members can face long waits for treatments, which compound the issues they face in the workplace.

Members in the North West have provided several examples of why they believe the development of a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy is vital. These examples include up to 75 per cent of urinary tract infections being missed because of outdated urine testing, leaving women susceptible to Chronic Embedded Urinary Tract Infections and a quality of life that can be equivalent to crippling rheumatoid arthritis, terminal cancer or end-stage renal failure; women undertaking demanding roles while experiencing excruciating period pain; women being severely impacted day to day with both Endometriosis and Pre Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder while dealing with ill-informed employers and a wait of up to 8 years for a diagnosis; inconsistencies in the way women are treated by employers.

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A Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy would broaden the knowledge and understanding of both the Trade Union and employers and formally recognise:

i) Gynaecological health and disorders affecting women include menstruation and menstrual irregularities; urinary tract health, including urinary incontinence and pelvic floor disorders; and such disorders as bacterial vaginosis, vaginitis, uterine fibroids, and vulvodynia. Disorders related to infertility include uterine fibroids, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, and primary ovarian insufficiency. Pregnancy issues include pre-pregnancy care and prenatal care, pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth), preterm labour and premature birth, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), breastfeeding, and birth defects.

This list is an indication of the many and various aspects of women's health but is by no means conclusive.

Recognising the specific health issues that impact on a woman member's ability to work is a key equality measure.

Employers who ask the right questions, provide the right support and engage with women workers appropriately are more likely to retain staff across the board as attitudes change to health concerns.

Conference believes that taking a Whole Life approach to the impact of specific health conditions will be a union builder by encouraging more women to join a union and more taking on lay and elected representative roles.

Conference will:

- a) Conduct research into the unique health conditions facing all women members
- b) Use this research to develop a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy
- c) Work with LAOS to develop training for union representatives on Whole Life Women's Health issues and the impact they have on a women's life at work so they are better equipped to ensure employers engage with women workers and provide the right support

North West Region

Menopause let's get it on every agenda

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for most women. Commonly known as 'the change', it refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months and a person has reached the end of their reproductive life.

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe. On average, women continue to experience symptoms for four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years after their last period.

Physical symptoms associated with the onset of the peri-menopause can include: hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, insomnia and sleep disturbances, fatigue,

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headaches, joint aches, dry skin and skin irritation, increased perspiration during the day, dry eyes, hair loss, urinary problems, vaginal dryness/itching/discomfort, irregular and/or heavy, painful periods, clots and flooding. There may also be associated psychological symptoms including: depression, anxiety, panic attacks, poor concentration, changes to mood, problems with memory, loss of confidence.

According to the aging workforce study 47% females are aged 45 and over – there is currently little, or no support given to a woman as she makes this transition in life.

Specialist advice and support is essential to maintaining attendance at work. Positive Occupational Health intervention can offer managers a better understanding of their staff complexities, providing additional support for members who are experiencing menopause or living with a partner suffering during this time.

We would like to note that the menopause is not a sickness, it's a natural part of a women ageing, however it is one that can cause temporary and even longer-term disabling events on the individual. The word sickness sends the wrong message when applied to symptoms of the menopause.

This conference calls for:

- 1) NEC and Conference to campaign Central and regional governments to get menopause on the agenda in discussions with employers and legislation and to specifically look at how UNISON can get:
 - i) Employers to take menopause seriously and have detailed menopause policies.
 - ii) Employers to provide a specialist consultant within Occupational Health.
 - iii) An additional criteria to the recording of absenteeism to make allowances for episodes of menopause related absence without it being recorded as 'sickness'.
 - iv) Employers to makes improvements for members to access flexible working opportunities, have more appropriate uniforms and be able to access breaks during work times (circumstances allowing) if there is a sudden onset of incontrollable symptoms.
 - v) Employers to give women back their dignity. We demand to be listened to and treated fairly with recognition for natural but sometimes debilitating life transitions.

Wrexham County UNISON Branch

Domestic Abuse 'Access for all'

This Women's Conference is appalled that two women are killed each week from Domestic Abuse and many women and children are stuck in abusive situations due to the fact that they cannot access a refuge space.

The reduction in refuge provision for women and children throughout the UK is not only adding to the death of women and children each week it is also creating access problems for women and children.

It is not right that a woman should have to give up her employment to be able to access a safe space in refuge. This is due to the high supported accommodation costs which leaves it an unaffordable choice for women and children in abusive

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situations. Whilst housing benefit covers some of the cost if you are working this can still leave a large sum of rent for the refuge space to be paid.

It is also not right that due to cuts Women and their children sometimes have to move across the whole of the UK to access refuge spaces and many employers are reluctant to keep jobs open for staff unless they are a national company that can move staff. This leave the woman having to access benefits when they should be able to continue to work whilst in a place of safety. Whilst this is sometimes needed for safety reasons this is not always the case.

A woman should not have to give up her home or her employment due to abuse there should be funding available to ensure that a woman and her children can be safe and be able to remain in their employment.

This conference calls for:

- 1) The NEC and UNISON Central to challenge the Government on the Domestic abuse issue and push access for all.
- 2) UNISON to set up a campaign about 'Access for all' in refuges
- 3) Branches talk to and challenge their own Local Authority, supported housing provision within the local authority to provide funding for refuge spaces for working women to access
- 4) Branches to write to their Local MP's/MS's/MSP's to push for funding to be provided for working women in refuge

Wrexham County UNISON Branch

Employers can't use COVID as an excuse to avoid addressing the issues if uniforms for women going through menopause.

UNISON and the TUC have made great strides in breaking down the menopause stigma, however, we feel that this work has now been majorly overshadowed by COVID-19 and employers are once again disregarding the impact the menopause can have on Women, their partners and their families. We find ourselves almost back to square one - powerless in obtaining the rights to work in a healthy and dignified environment.

Whilst every NHS worker across the country is going over and above for our beloved NHS, COVID writes itself firmly into our history books and women across the UK are being left behind to suffer.

Women make up 77% of the workforce in the NHS but research suggests that women are still the minority in senior roles. Without women to influence change, behaviour and culture there is a clear lack of adequate facilities and lack of menopause awareness across the NHS.

Uniforms are just one example demonstrating this. They are made of thick heavy cotton which is uncomfortable, rough and unpleasant in the best conditions. With the removal of fans and air circulation units on wards; the extreme heat, coupled with hot flashes and an added layer of PPE is unbearable.

Conference calls for:

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UNISON and TUC to call for an:

- 1) An urgent review of women's uniforms in the NHS
- 2) An introduction of seasonal uniforms to allow for lighter cotton for periods of hot weather or at times individual women are struggling with symptoms, for uniforms which don't reveal sweat patches.
- 3) Adequate and in-depth research around PPE for women
- 4) A specific discussion about the fitting of both uniforms and PPE for women

Wrexham County UNISON Branch

Call out Coercive and Controlling Behaviour

This conference fully recognises that the increasing numbers of cases of coercive and controlling behaviour is a national shame. We as a movement need to call out this behaviour and work to engage all our members help take steps to eradicate this abuse.

It is so desperately sad that for some of our members their daily lives are blighted by a controlling partner. In Scotland, The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 has allowed for prosecutors to specifically tackle behaviour which is deemed to be controlling, domineering, and demeaning by way of criminal charges. This is a widening of criminal prosecutions to include control of what clothing or make up is worn, monitoring, and controlling access to friends or family or social media and financial control. Whilst this legislation is very welcome it is infuriating that these behaviours continue to dominate so many lives. We need to expose and re educate to eliminate these types of behaviour for good.

The changes to work patterns during the Pandemic and beyond now mean that home working can be of benefit to many members but for those where the home is not a safe place the impact is devastating. We need to do all we can to help.

Conference calls upon the Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with Branches, Regions, and Self Organised Groups to highlight the dangers of Coercive and Controlling Behaviour.
- 2) To produce guidance that can help to signpost help and support for members both at home and in the workplace. Either by way of a published hard copy document or electronic copy.

UNISON Renfrewshire

Not sufficiently clear

Cost of Living Crisis and the Impact on Black women

Conference, the cost-of-living crisis whilst affecting all will have a significant impact on Black Women members, their families, and their broader communities. The Health Equity in England study in 2018 identified that 50% of all Bangladeshi and 46% of all Pakistani people were the most deprived fifth of the population after meeting housing costs, compared with 20% of all White British people. The Metric

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Commission reported that 46% of Black African and Caribbean people and 32% of those with a Mixed Heritage were in poverty compared with 19% of white British people.

Conference we are aware that prior to the cost-of-living crisis many Black members were already employed on zero-hour contracts and living in poor housing conditions. Black members are more likely to live in larger family households with intergenerational families, working longer hours and they may have more than one job to try to make ends meet.

Conference, the increase in mortgages, rent, and the cost of fuel is impacting on us all. Salaries have not risen in line with inflation. 1 in 4 workers have no savings to fall back on. However, research from the “New Economic Foundation (NEF) thinktank published analysis warning that “Black, Asian and other ethnic minority households will experience an average increase in the cost of living 1.6 times greater than their white counterparts”

The energy cost will mean that some Black Women will be forced to choose between eating and heating which will severely impact those who have additional health conditions like Sickle Cell Anaemia, and arthritis, which disproportionately impact on Black women. Material deprivation will further increase as Black women are unable to provide some of the basics requirements for their family to survive in modern day Britain.

Conference, the impact of the general cost of living crisis combined with sexism and racism that working Black women face will no doubt lead to a greater increase in stress related conditions.

Black Women experience a pay gap every day, and this gap adds up. Closing the divide, however, requires widening the focus to include developing a deeper understanding of the different factors driving these inequalities which constantly devalue the experience of Black women in the workplace and specifically address the unique discrimination that Black women face at the intersection of race and gender.

This conference calls on the National Women’s Committee to:

- 1) Work with the National Black Members Committee to promote UNISON’s Welfare Fund, Support with School Uniforms for members to access.
- 2) Deliver a workshop on budget planning and financial management at the Women’s Conference in 2024
- 3) Share statistical information on the numbers of Black members who access these initiatives to identify and focus on the following area in 2023 ‘Year of Black workers’
- 4) Produce a money saving guide to signpost Black women and place on the Women and Black members websites and share information on organisations that can help

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- 5) Place an article in Black Action on the cost of living and its impact on Black women

National Black Members' Committee

Withdrawn by submitting body

The Importance of Women Health and Safety Representatives

“UNISON has approximately 5,000 Health and Safety representatives across the union working hard to defend members’ health and safety at work.

Over the past few years health and safety has emerged again as critical for protecting members’ rights at work. However, the gender balance of Health and Safety representatives in UNISON does not reflect the gender balance of our union.

Women’s health and safety is never more important – whether it is advising on maternity rights, menopause, women’s safety equipment, or areas where there is a traditional bias towards female working – we need women representing women.

Therefore, we call on the National Women’s Conference to:

- 1) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum to emphasise the key issues for women in the workplace;
- 2) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum, and any other relevant body, to encourage women to become health and safety representatives.

West Midlands Region