

To the Women's Budget Group on reform of social security

Women say: reorient benefits to support us and recognise care work

*Joint submission from WinVisible (women with visible & invisible disabilities)
and Global Women's Strike*

- Disability benefits (which are largely claimed by women, who are also the majority of disabled people): scrap the Work Capability Assessment and Personal Independence Payments assessment, and restore benefit rights and support. Elaine Morrall and [Jodey Whiting](#) are among many thousands who died, including under murderous [work conditions](#) for benefit and the brutal cut-off regime.



- Scrap Universal Credit (UC) and replace it with improved versions of the benefits it replaces. For new claimants, UC massively cuts benefits compared to previous provision, including by making it hard to complete your claim. It especially targets disabled people, mothers and children, and [disproportionately](#) affects women and children of colour, with a huge impact on our income and our health. Disabled people living alone, including disabled single mothers, lose severe disability premiums worth approx. £180 a month. Some mothers and children face a huge benefit cut from the two-child limit and the benefit cap incorporated into UC.
- At a Sheffield rally against UC, disabled single mother Jennifer Jones [said](#): “I’m a disabled parent with a disabled child, and one of the things you don’t hear a lot about is that currently I’m a carer for my son and I get £30 a week Carers Allowance, but when I go onto Universal Credit I’ll no longer be able to claim Carers Allowance because you can’t claim that and disability benefit at the same time.” Payments for disabled children will be cut by £175m, with thousands of families losing £1,750 per year (Frances Ryan, *Crippled*, p.170).
- Private profiteers – Atos, Capita, Maximus, which carry out the disability benefit assessments, and G4S [security guards in Jobcentres](#) who deal with claimants in distress or objecting to bad treatment — must be taken out of the benefits system.
- Increase Carers Allowance to a [living wage](#) – instead of a wage replacement which also is very partial (currently under £1.88 an hour for the required minimum 35 hours per week, even lower if over 35 hours), and mainstream it beyond disability to mothers and other family carers. Under the devolved powers of Social Security

Scotland, Carers Allowance is raised to the level of Jobseekers Allowance, an unemployment benefit – still insultingly low for someone who is required to be doing caring work for at least 35 hours a week to qualify. The global centrality of caring work can only be established with a living wage, otherwise caring remains low status and those who do it, mainly women, continue to be impoverished and overworked. Financial recognition raises the status of disabled people's right to support. It gives both disabled people and family carers a choice of who does the work and how.

- The [Green New Deal for Europe](#) (IPPR, New Economics Foundation and others) recommends: "Implement a Care Income to compensate activities like care for people, the urban environment, and the natural world." This recognises caring as a desperately needed 'green' job, and addresses the enormous economic injustice of impoverishing those doing the most vital jobs needed by society and the planet.
- Current benefits policy demonises and deprives claimants: in particular sick and disabled people over entitlement to disability benefits; and single mothers and children (such as via the total benefit cap and Universal Credit cuts). Change the system to one which is *supportive, and recognises* all carers including mothers. The back-to-work agenda demonises single mothers as "workless". Our joint lobbying in 2008-9, featuring testimony from a breastfeeding mother, won exemption from work conditions for mothers of babies under one, but that is nowhere near enough.
- The Care Act entitles disabled mothers to additional support for our caring responsibilities for children but this is not being implemented. Instead we are at high risk of punitive investigations for 'child neglect', and the unwarranted removal of our children into local authority care – deprived of their mother's protection, and left isolated and traumatised. This must stop. Legal Action for Women, which co-ordinates the Support Not Separation coalition, found that [nearly 50%](#) of those seeking help were mothers with disabilities or moderate mental distress.
- Abolish the benefit cap which penalises sick and disabled women/mothers, those fleeing domestic violence, their children (especially in larger families), and those who don't qualify for the narrow exemptions. Many are living in private sub-standard housing with extortionate rents that are not covered by benefits because of the cap.
- We strongly disagree with proposals for a Basic Income to facilitate caring on the cheap as a supposed answer to the social care crisis which would save the Treasury money (see Guy Standing [report](#)). As it is, a BI would replace low benefits, maintaining our poverty and exploitation, and extending it to men. Mothers and all carers, in the family and outside, need a living wage in recognition of our current work and contributions, not an extension of our exploitation and invisibility.
- Reinstate benefits and the right to work for asylum seekers and other immigrant people. The hostile environment denies benefits to immigrant disabled women and children.
- Abolish care charges taken from our disability and pensioner benefits. Labour [Hammersmith & Fulham](#) is the only Council in England not to charge for homecare. Follow their example.

- Most who can take waged work, generally have, but need pay equity, good conditions, support and adaptations, including fewer work hours. Disabled women workers suffer a 22% pay gap compared with non-disabled male workers ([TUC](#)). The [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) wrongly stated that the pay gap is larger for disabled men because they compared disabled women with non-disabled women (who are already discriminated against) not with men!
- Raise wages. Working Tax Credits subsidise employers, and incentivise and perpetuate low pay.
- Lower the retirement age and provide decent pensions that take full account of women's lifetime of caring. Sick and disabled women in their 60s worn out after a lifetime of work, waged and unwaged, are distressingly being found fit for work. Debating the cumulative impact of benefit cuts, Helen Goodman MP [raised](#) how people in Durham, especially women, needed sickness and disability benefits 10 years earlier than in non-industrial areas.

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- See our blog for lots more on benefit rights and issues
<https://winvisibleblog.wordpress.com/>

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- See also: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/blog/cost-of-caring>