



[Helen Crickard](#)

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Women's activism - peace and courage

Ahead of Saturday's march (9) in Belfast for International Women's Day, Helen Crickard (Reclaim the Agenda) talks about the regional and international aspects of women's activism.

I've been involved in Reclaim the Agenda since 2010. I wanted to fight poverty, for the right to things like flexible childcare and to get women into decision-making roles. There are brutal economic reasons why Northern Ireland won special exemptions to the welfare reform bill. We fought hard for those because poverty here is huge.

Northern Ireland has the second highest femicide rate in Europe. But unlike the rest of the UK, we're still without a strategy for violence against women or for women's health. Strategies get budgets so things on the ground start to move. Better women's health is about improving access and services. This might mean actually creating a service, like mental health maternity, or post-mastectomy support. People here who need these are shipped to England.

Women involved in trade unions are so important. But often, they're really good on pay and conditions and don't realise the impact we can have on wider issues like period poverty. Things like domestic violence and abortion are workplace issues. Women trade union activists need to get involved in women's committees and educate reps. People can't deal with a problem unless they're aware of it and how to spot it.

None of us are just one thing. Intersectionality is fundamental to feminism but feminism in Northern Ireland is still very 'white'. The population has changed

dramatically in the last 10 years and we need to make better opportunities for newer communities to get involved. Toxic racial discourse is rising at the same time that many people are coming from war-torn countries. We here know about pain and loss of life. You've got take people on a journey, meet them halfway and have discussions built on respect.

We chose 'Peace and courage' for this year's theme. The global aspect means we're especially thinking of women in our refugee and asylum systems and of those in war zones like Gaza, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan... Regionally, this is our own challenge: calling for peace is often unpopular. Nobel Prize winners Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan were demonised by the press. People want to win their fight first and look for equality later. Well, we're still waiting for equality.

Why would you not turn up to the rally? It's one of the biggest going - it's a fun day with drummers, choirs, speakers and a chance to get out on our streets. While it's a celebration of women's strength it's also a protest. It's one thing for people to know about the issues. It's another to get out there, all together, and get that fire in the belly. We have demands, and if we want to change anything we've got to fight for it.

[Join the march](#) at 11am Saturday 9 March, 2024, 11am, Writers Square, Belfast.