Budget 2022

# A Care Economy for a Fair Economy – Investing and Delivering for Women in Budget 2022

National Women's Council

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## 10 Principles for a Feminist Economic Recovery

1. Champion a new economic model that takes account of equality, human rights and environmental sustainability and guarantees a decent quality of life for all
2. Gender and equality proof all decisions on expenditure and revenue raising, recognising the reality of intersecting forms of discrimination on women's lives
3. Reject austerity and fund investment through progressive, gender sensitive taxation
4. Deliver Universal Basic Services on the basis of need, not ability to pay. Begin with investing in the care economy, health and in housing
5. Reform the welfare state so that it counts women in by recognising and rewarding all forms of participation and work and providing individual access to income and supports
6. Challenge low paid and precarious work. Transition to a flexible work model, including options such as a four-day week to bring a proper balance to our lives and protect our fragile environment.
7. Address the economic equalities experienced by working class women, lone parents, women of colour, Traveller women, Roma, women seeking asylum, disabled women and carers.
8. Care jobs are green jobs. Recognise the role that care plays in a just transition and reorient our economy away from environmentally damaging and unsustainable practices
9. Recognise the economic and social impact of domestic and sexual violence and end the scourge of violence against women
10. Improve decision making by ensuring women in all our diversity are at the table in decisions regarding social and economic policy

## Table of key priorities and departments

| Invest in an equal and sustainable future | Department |
|---|---|
| • Fund investment in public services and social infrastructure through borrowing | • DOF |
| • Commission on taxation to make recommendations on wealth tax and increasing employers PRSI | • DOF/DETE/DSP |
| • Introduce financial transaction tax and minimum effective corporate tax | |
| • Standard rate tax relief on pensions | |
| • Remove fossil fuel subsidies | |
| • Ensure supports to businesses are conditional on improvements for workers | |
| **Embed gender and equality budgeting** | |
| • Gender and equality proof Budget 2022 and publish an intersectional gender equality impact statement with the Budget | • DPER/DOF |
| • All depts to allocate staff & resources to support work of Interdepartmental Group | • DPER/DCDEI/All |
| **Deliver Universal Basic Services (Care, Health, Housing)** | |
| • Increase investment in ECEC to 1% of national income on phased basis, inc. €75m to improve pay for early years workers | • DCEDIY |
| • Invest in universal social care inc, homecare and Personal Assistance Services | • DOH |
| • Resource the implementation of Sláintecare to deliver universal health | |
| • Fund the work of the Women's Health Taskforce | |
| • Fund mental health services, including perinatal services | |
| • Introduce universal contraception and progress abortion care services | |
| • Increase public & affordable housing by delivering 100,000 homes on public land | • DHPLG |
| • Develop affordable cost rental housing and increase security of tenure | |
| • Gender proof policy & establish supports for women living in homelessness | |
| • Establish & resource a statutory Traveller Agency and end Direct Provision | |
| **Create a new model of work and welfare** | |
| • Deliver individualisation of social welfare payments | • DSP |
| • Ensure women benefit equally from active labour market investment | |
| • Introduce a Living Wage to promote decent work | • DETE |
| • Resource implementation of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill | • DCEDIY |
| • Increase family leave payments to €295pw and increase duration of paid leave | • DCEDIY/DSP |
| • Increase core social welfare rates by €10pw, and invest in targeted supports for those most at risk of poverty and exclusion | • DSP |
| • Introduce a universal State Pension system | |
| **Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women** | |
| • Establish & resource national structures to lead the ending of VAW | |
| • Provide funding to combat VAW and support women and frontline services | • DOJ |
| • Fund the implementation of the O'Malley report | |
| **Ensure access to Justice** | |
| • Reform family law structures and establish a statutory maintenance agency | • DSP |
| • Address historical abuse of women in care of the State | • DCEDIY |
| **Enable women's participation and Decision Making** | |
| • Increase funding to NWC, NCCWN and the women's community sector | • DCDEI/DRCD |
| • Fund the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, local caucuses & young women's leadership | • DHPLG/DCDEI |
| **Deliver a Green New Deal** | |
| • Gender, poverty and rural proof Just Transition, policy & investment | • DECC |
| • Reduce emissions by a minimum of 8% annually | |
| • Invest in care and other public services as a key pillar of a green new deal | |
| • Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures | |

# Introduction

Women entered the pandemic with fewer resources – less wealth, lower incomes, greater unpaid care responsibilities and a reliance on low paid and precarious work. Our Budget 2021 submission highlighted that the pandemic had reinforced many prevailing inequalities. A year on, it is clear that the immediate gendered effects of the pandemic have been followed by a deepening of persistent gender inequalities including an increase in women's care roles, a disproportionate effect on women's employment and health, an increase in violence against women and increased pressure on community services.

Despite record investment over the past year, there are key gaps in the provision of basic services that have not been addressed through Budget 2021, the National Economic Recovery Plan or the Recovery and Resilience Plan, including the absence of a commitment to a public model of childcare.

NWC calls for investment in the care economy to be a hallmark of Budget 2022. This includes investing the required resources into a public model of early years education and care, adult social care and universal health. It means investing in social protection and in a welfare state that facilitates women and men to play an equal role in caring and paid work. Investment in the care economy will provide the foundation for our social and economic recovery and can help support our transition to a low carbon economy. The report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality with its strong emphasis on care, provides a framework to guide Budget 2022 investment.

NWC rejects any prioritisation of "balancing the budget". Attempts at reducing the deficit by cutting funding to public services or income supports represents austerity by another name and will have a negative impact on the economy, reducing economic demand and negatively affecting employment. We cannot have a repeat of the last financial crash, where policy choices were made at the expense of women, young people, lone parents, Travellers, disabled people, migrants and those on low incomes – many of whom have still not recovered from the effects of austerity imposed, post 2009.

Instead, the state should use all of the fiscal and monetary levers at its disposal, including borrowing at low interest rates and generating tax revenue through fair taxation, to build our social infrastructure and public services and fight the climate crisis. This will create healthier and more equal societies which will support employment, sustainable productivity and additional tax revenue. Childcare in particular, is an essential component of a functioning labour market. Investment in a public model of childcare will help to generate the economic and social returns that will allow us to service and repay our debt.

The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequality and will continue to do so if action is not taken to mitigate the social and economic consequences. Our Budget 2022 proposals will help to fuel a gender equal recovery and to build a society that is better for both women and men, based on public services, fair taxation, valuing the care economy, decent work, equality and sustainability.

# The resources for an equal and sustainable society

The historical agreement by the EU to borrow collectively to fund the pandemic recovery is a clear recognition of the need to invest to recover from the social and economic effects of the pandemic. Ireland should continue to take advantage of the flexibility offered by the European Commission on the fiscal rules on budget deficits and the lowest interest rates in a decade[1] to invest in a public care infrastructure, universal health, housing and a just transition.

Investment must take priority over reducing the deficit and there are important lessons to be learned from the last financial crisis. Austerity measures taken in Budget 2009 and subsequent budgets have had

[1] PBO (2021). Summary and analysis of the Stability Programme Update 2021

a lasting impact, resulting in long term social harm from which many communities have still not recovered. Women bore the brunt of decisions to cut welfare payments during the austerity years due to the fact that women are more likely than men to be lone parents, to be "economically inactive" and to benefit more from child-related supports.[2] The years 2008-2013 saw Traveller education and accommodation budgets slashed by over 80%[3] as well as swingeing cuts to disability budgets.

Austerity measures have been cited as a factor in widespread discontent and the surge of right wing and anti-EU parties across the Europe[4] and research now shows that austerity policies influenced the Brexit vote.[5] The IMF has advised that austerity can do more harm than good, and concluded that "simply living with high debt and allowing debt ratios to decline organically through growth is underappreciated".[6]

NWC also warns against austerity by stealth. Economic forecasts in the Stability Programme Update, predict that growth could help balance the budget by 2023 or 2024, on the basis of no policy changes. However, prioritising balancing the budget at the expense of implementing the commitments in the programme for government on social welfare, the living wage and climate action would be a disastrous choice and damaging to society and our economic recovery. It would disproportionately impact on younger generations by hampering key investments which are necessary to protect against worsening climate and biodiversity crises and successfully manage a just transition to a carbon-free economy, the number one concern of young people across Europe.[7]

NWC proposes that government sets out a plan for the next 3 years to provider greater clarity to departments on funding and allow scope to plan and raise revenue for key reforms such as a public childcare system. Acknowledging that the Commission on Taxation and Welfare is not due to report until next summer, NWC proposes the following revenue raising measures to be implemented over the next three budget cycles with a focus in Budget 2022 on taxes that will not affect the labour market.

## Revenue raising choices

While borrowing should be a key component of Ireland's economic policy over the next 3 years, we also need to increase our tax take. Tax plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding our public services and social infrastructure and progressively redistributing resources. The Citizens' Assembly recognised that taxation is a necessary and important contribution to society and proposed that improvements to public services and social protection should be funded through greater efficiency and accountability for public funding and reprioritisation between current spending and revenue raising. They also indicated a willingness to support higher taxes, if necessary, based on the principle of ability to pay, to make a reality of their recommendations.

The gendered impacts of taxation are often overlooked and taxation is often presented as gender neutral. However, as women and men's socio-economic status differs, our tax system affects men and women differently and should be assessed for its gendered impacts accordingly.

Ireland's tax take as a percentage of national income varies depending on the measure used. While our tax to GDP ratio is the lowest in the EU[8], our tax to GNI* ratio is approximately 35%[9], still below the Euro area average of 42% of GDP and lower again in comparison to Northern and Western EU countries.[10] Through the EU Semester process, the EU Commission has noted limited progress made on broadening the tax base and addressing aggressive tax planning and it reiterates the need for Ireland to address

[2] Doorley, K. at al (2018). The Gender impact of Irish budgetary policy 2008-2018. Dublin: ESRI.
[3] Murphy, M. & Cullen, P. (2018). Austerity, gender inequality and feminism after the crisis. Rosa Luxembourg Stiffung.
[4] Kaczmarczyk, P. (2020). Coronavirus crisis: There is no way back to business as usual in the EU. London School of Economics
[5] Aidan Regan (2021). All that matters now is growth.
[6] IMF (2016. Neo- Liberalism. Oversold?
[7] Mühlbach, C & Kösterke, F. (2021). Austerity is risking our future.
[8] Eurostat (2020). Taxation in 2019.
[9] Malone, P (2021). Impact distribution and the impact of social transfers.
[10] Eurostat (2020). Taxation in 2019.

these issues. If we are to have the resources required to create the society we want and the public services that are the norm in other EU countries, Ireland needs to increase its tax take by broadening the tax base in a fair, progressive, sustainable and gender sensitive way.

## Corporate tax

NWC welcomes global efforts to make corporation tax fairer through the development of a global minimum corporate tax rate. Despite a headline corporate tax rate of 12.5%, a small number of highly profitable companies engage in aggressive tax planning which enables them to pay much lower effective rates of corporation tax. The recent revelation that an Irish Microsoft subsidiary paid zero corporate tax on €260bn profit last year[11] illustrates the dangers of systems that allow tax avoidance and evasion. When corporations fail to pay their fair share of tax, this burden is shifted onto citizens through a combination of increased taxes on labour or cuts to essential services. It is estimated that a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6% on profit would yield in excess of €1bn.[12] As well as addressing the low effective rate paid by some large corporations, Government must reduce reliance on windfall corporation tax receipts that has built up in recent years.

## Green taxes

There is currently a misalignment between our climate goals and our tax policy. Supports to fossil fuel activities increased from €2.3bn in 2012 to €2.5bn in 2016.[13] The majority of this is revenue foregone through exemptions to environmentally harmful fossil fuel, agriculture and transport activities. The lower rate of excise duty alone on Auto-diesel, Marked Gas Oil, Kerosene, Aviation fuel and fuel oil cost nearly €2bn in lost income in 2016.[14] Households bear the burden of environmental taxes, paying 61% of the taxes while being responsible for 22.1% of emissions.[15] Achieving our climate goals will involve shifting the burden of taxation towards environmentally damaging activities. Increased revenue from green taxes should be ringfenced to ensure a just transition and that rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or lower socio-economic groups do not experience further inequality and poverty.

## Tax expenditures and cuts

Tax expenditures should be monitored for their gender and equality impact. Tax expenditures in the area of pensions have a particularly regressive effect. The State spends approximately €2.39bn per annum in private pension tax relief. In 2014, 72% of pension tax relief went to the top 20% of earners and 5% of the population are getting 50% of the tax relief.[16] Men benefit from two thirds of the fiscal support offered by this system[17], which means that State funding actively drives the gender pensions gap. These tax reliefs should be ended and the expenditure invested in a universal pension.

In 2011, VAT cuts were granted to some of the worst pandemic affected sectors, including the hospitality and tourism industry. During 2012-2018, profits rose from 4% to 24.6%, however, wages stagnated and rose only 3.7% during the same period.[18]. As well as the obvious lack of fairness, such failure to share the benefits with workers also has impacts on the public purse through lower tax revenue and increased social welfare costs. It is essential that we learn from previous mistakes and ensure that public benefit is gained from public spending.

## Employers PRSI

On a measure of tax collected per person, Ireland scores second lowest among an 11 country EU peer

[11] Neate, R. (2021). Microsoft's Irish subsidiary posted £220bn profit in single year. The Guardian.
[12] Social Justice Ireland (2019). Time to reform Corporation Taxation and Subsidies. SJI.
[13] CSO. Fossil Fuel and Similar Subsidies 2012-2016
[14] NERI (2019). Harmful fossil fuel subsidies: a mistaken policy. NERI.
[15] Hilliard, M. (2019). Households pay most green taxes but emit one fifth of emissions – CSO. Irish Times.
[16] Collins, M.L. & Hughes, G. Supporting Pensions Contributions through the tax system. IEA Conference 2017
[17] Collins, M. (2020). Private Pensions and the Gender Distribution of Fiscal Welfare. Social Policy & Society: (2020) 19:3, 500–516
[18] Taft, M (2020). https://notesonthefront.typepad.com/politicaleconomy/

group. One of the key drivers of this difference is the much lower PRSI paid by employers in Ireland which is currently around half of the EU average.[19] Increasing employers' PRSI to the European average would generate almost €9bn a year.[20] Even a 1% increase in PRSI would increase revenue by €850m a year.[21]

### Financial transaction tax

Trillions of euro worth of financial transactions take place globally every day. Large numbers of these are speculative, meaning they make no real or worthwhile contribution to economies and societies beyond increasing risk and instability.[22] In 2011 the European Commission outlined proposals for a Europe wide financial transaction tax (FTT). Research has indicated that the value of this to Ireland would be around €320-€350m per year.[23] An FTT discourages speculative finance whilst simultaneously generating revenue for investment in social infrastructure. Ireland should support calls for a progressive European FTT.

### Wealth tax

Ireland has one of the highest levels of wealth inequality in the EU. We have a disproportionately high number of billionaires for the size of our population and rank fifth in the world after Hong Kong, Cyprus, Switzerland and Singapore in terms of relative number of billionaires.[24] A wealth tax with a household threshold of €1m would affect just 1% to 2% of the wealthiest households and would provide an estimated €250m annually.[25] Excluding principal private residences, farms, businesses and pensions, would raise €53m.[26] As an important and progressive tax reform, the Commission on Pensions should consider how best to structure such a tax, taking into account gender and equality considerations.

#### Recommendations

- Fund investment in much needed public services and social infrastructure through borrowing while interest rates are low
- The Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare must:
  - Review all individual & sectoral tax expenditures, assessing their cost, gender & equality impacts
  - Examine how employers' PRSI can be increased to fund social infrastructure
  - Consider how best to structure and implement a wealth tax
- Ensure Financial supports to businesses are conditional on social clause conditions including addressing the Gender Pay Gap, commitment to the living wage and support for collective bargaining
- Ensure the sunset clause on reduced VAT rate for the hospitality sector is activated in Dec 2021
- Implement a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6% - +€1bn in additional revenue[27]
- Introduce an FTT - +€320m of additional revenue[28]
- Standard rate pension tax relief - +€423m[29]
- End lower rate of excise duty for aviation, autodiesel, marked gas oil, fuel oil & kerosene - +€1.96bn[30]
- Increase carbon tax by €7.50 per tonne as committed to in the Finance Act 2020 and ringfence for just transition and mitigation measures - +€159m

## Embed Gender and Equality Budgeting in decisions about resources

NWC is deeply concerned at the lack of attention to gender equality in economic decision making. The UNDP Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker shows that Ireland adopted few gender sensitive

[19] NERI (2021). Submission to the Commission on Pensions.
[20] Department of Finance (2020). Political party costings. Labour party costings.
[21] Department of Finance (2020). Political party costings. Labour party costings.
[22] SJI (2019). Time for Government to support a Financial Transactions Tax
[23] NERI (2016). Estimating the Revenue Yield from a FTT. Working paper. NERI.
[24] Oxfam (2020). Time to care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis.
[25] NERI (2018). A Household Net Wealth Tax in the Republic of Ireland: Some Considerations
[26] Kakoulidou, T. & Rowntree, B. (2021). Options for raising tax revenue in Ireland (ESRI)
[27] SJI (2021). Budget 2022 choices.
[28] NERI (2016). Estimating the Revenue Yield from a FTT. Working paper. NERI.
[29] Revenue (2020). Post budget ready reckoner. https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf
[30] CSO. Fossil Fuel and Similar Subsidies 2012-2016

measures to account for women's specific needs.[31] Investments have tended to focus on boosting jobs within male-dominated industries such as construction and energy, despite the stronger impact of the pandemic on female dominated sectors and there has been an absence of funds directed to the care sector.

The disproportionate impact of previous austerity measures on women and discrimination in access to income supports during the pandemic[32], underscores the need for gender and equality proofing. Inequality is also bad for the economy. Improving equality between men and women in the EU, would increase EU GDP per capita from 6.1 to 9.6% by 2050 which amounts to €1.95 to €3.15 trillion.[33] Comprehensive gender budgeting must encompass equality for diverse groups of women and men and take into account how intersecting oppression and discrimination impacts on women's experiences of a policy or budgetary decision.

The Citizens' Assembly made a recommendation to legislate for equality budgeting across all Government bodies including local authorities as well as a requirement for gender impact assessment of all proposed legislation. If this is to become a reality, resources are needed to support the embedding of equality budgeting across government departments.

**Recommendations**

- Publish a gender equality impact statement with Budget 2022 with disaggregated data on Travellers, ethnicity, disability and other equality grounds
  - Publish gender and equality disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of projects and investments
  - Ensure that all major capital infrastructure investment has been gender impact assessed
- All government departments to allocate adequate staff and related resources to support the work of the Interdepartmental Group on Equality Budgeting
- Provide funding to support NWC & other civil society organisations as recommended by the OECD[34] and UN
- Ensure that gender equality is a core element of wellbeing budget and green budget proposals

# Deliver Universal Basic Services

The pandemic has reinforced that we cannot continue to depend on the market for essential services like care, health and housing. The provision of Universal Basic Services (UBS) is the most effective way to meet society's collective needs. Investment in UBS is investment in a properly functioning and equal society and economy. Lack of investment will inevitably keep, or transfer back, personal, health and community care needs to the unpaid, undervalued and often invisible labour of women. With one of the highest rates of low pay in the OECD, provision of UBS would lessen the impact of exorbitant rent and childcare costs in particular, for low paid workers and lone parents.

In the context of a society with profound income and gender inequality, UBS would provide better value than a Universal Basic Income and more effectively tackle the underlying causes of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Budget 2022 must invest in UBS, starting with early years education and care, adult social care, universal health and housing.

## Universal Care Services

The pandemic has reinforced the centrality of care to a functioning society and economy. However, women continue to bear primary responsibility for paid and unpaid care. During the pandemic, more

[31] UNDP (2021). COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/
[32] Women returning from maternity leave were excluded from the TWSS income support, necessitating a referral to IHREC by NWC
[33] Eige. Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU.
[34] OECD (2019). OECD Scan: Equality Budgeting in Ireland

women than men cared for a family member or friend and women were more likely to report childcare issues or difficulty working from home because of family being around.[35] Older women are five times more likely than men to leave work to care for a family member.[36]

The care sector is characterised by precarious, low paid work. Domestic and personal care workers are often migrant women, and women of colour, subject to the most extreme instances of precarious work and exploitation. NWC is concerned that we must not become dependent on the exploitation of marginalised women to meet our care needs. Because the sector is comprised predominantly of low paid women workers, investing in care could reduce the gender pay gap significantly (by 5% in a UK context[37]).

NWC's feminist analysis of care includes not only the perspectives of the women who provide care but also the women who need such supports. The absence of a sufficient state response to supporting disabled people to live independent lives, forces them into a position of dependence, locks them out of the labour market and leaves family carers to provide often very high levels of care.

The pandemic has offered us an opportunity to rethink the value of care in our society. Care is a fundamental component of our social infrastructure, no less vital than physical infrastructure such as transport and utilities. NWC rejects utterly, the notion that universal care is too expensive to provide. As comprehensively recognised by the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality recommendations, care is the foundation on which our society and economy is built. There can be no functioning economy without a functioning care economy. The National Economic Recovery Plan notes that workers will be needed to manage future care needs but signals no investment to achieve this. Budget 2022 must address this gap.

## Public early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Childcare remains the single most significant barrier to women's equal participation in all aspects of society, but particularly employment, education and training. While the National Childcare Scheme is aimed at addressing the issue of affordability, it does little to address sustainability or workforce pay. Half the workforce earns less than the living wage[38], Ireland has the most expensive childcare in the EU and investment in childcare, at 0.3% of national income, is well below both the EU average of 0.8% and the UNICEF recommended 1% of GDP.

Providers face a choice between affordable services for parents and decent pay for their workers. With an inability to reconcile the two, staff turnover in the sector is high (40% for full day services). These factors signify that there is an urgent need to develop a public, affordable and accessible early years and school age childcare infrastructure.

Investment in a public, non-profit, model is crucial. Countries with comprehensive public provision have childcare services that are more affordable, accessible, and of higher quality than countries with private service provision.[39] Market based provision leaves government with less control over fees and where services are provided, resulting in children in less profitable areas losing out.[40] Across European countries, the single most important factor in lowering the pay and conditions of care workers is the extent to which it is marketised.[41] Delivering a public, universal model of childcare would also help Ireland to meet our requirements under the European Child Guarantee, which is expected to be included in the next EU budget (2021-2027). Investment in childcare makes good economic sense as much of the upfront investment is recouped though higher tax revenue.

[35] CSO (2020). The Employment and Life effects of COVID-19.
[36] ESRI & HAS (2019). The ageing workforce in Ireland: Working conditions, health and extending working lives
[37] WBG (2020). A care led recovery from Coronavirus.
[38] POBAL (2021) Early Years Sector Profile 2019 / 2020
[39] Heery, E. (2020). Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence. Oireachtas L&RS
[40] OECD (2016). Who uses childcare? Background brief on inequalities in the use of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) among very young children.
[41] TASC (2020). Cherishing All Equally – the Care Economy.

**Recommendations**

- Increase investment in early years to 1% of national income by no later than 2030, in line with UNICEF target and Citizens' Assembly recommendations
  - In Budget 2022, support Joint Labour Committee negotiated pay scales to improve pay for Early Years Professionals - €75m
  - Additional funding of €50 million in Budget 2023 so all staff reach the Mercer entry-level salary scale.
  - Invest €75 million in affordability measures to reduce full-time childcare fees by between €30 and €35 per week.
- Establish an appropriately resourced National Childminding Office to ensure the delivery of the National Childminding Strategy
- Establish a funding and financial support expert group to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the funding and financial supports to childminding services
- Deliver resources to implement phase 1 of the National Action Plan for Childminding - €2.8m

### Adult social care

Homecare has been progressively privatised in Ireland. Workers in private providers have lower pay, weaker rights and are required to be more flexible than those working for non-profit or public sector providers.[42] Personal Assistant services are chronically underfunded and inadequate to support disabled people to live independent lives. The Citizens' Assembly recommended that disabled people be actively supported and resourced to live independently with person centred financial supports to enable this.

The pandemic has reinforced the inadequacy of our adult social care provision and the need for an overhaul of the design and delivery of services. NWC are particularly concerned by any recourse to institutionalisation as a method for resolving resource issues for disabled and older people. The impact of the pandemic in residential settings has clearly revealed our need to move beyond such institutional settings. Huge public investment is made into institutions through the provision of tax breaks, capital grants and subsidies, and in the case of disability services, this model of service provision represents poor value and delivers poor outcomes for those living there. [43]

Investment in universal, non-profit, social care services are vital to ensure older people and disabled people have the necessary supports to reduce dependence on family and friends and to maintain a private life with dignity.

**Recommendations**

- Develop and invest in universal social care services for disabled and older people across the lifespan
  - Invest in a pay structure and benefits (including sick pay and pensions) for all care workers, as recommended by the Citizens Assembly
  - Provide a statutory right to home care and a budget for a person-centred home care scheme with equality of access and availability across the country-€123m
  - Increases funding for Personal Assistance Services as a move towards providing a statutory right to a Personal Assistance Service for disabled people
- Resource a Commission on Care as outlined in the Programme for Government (DOH)
- Resource the implementation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017

## Universal Health

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus existing inequalities which have a significant impact on women's health and their access to health services. Isolation and anxiety may have made existing conditions worse and created new vulnerabilities, particularly as women take on the bulk of caring

[42] Mulkeen, M. (2016). Going to market! An exploration of markets in social care. Administration, 64(2), 33–59.
[43] DOH (2012). VFMPR of disability services.

responsibilities.[44] Health problems will have gone undetected and unsupported due to reduced contact with outside services during lockdowns, with a particular impact on women. For example, Covid-19 has restricted access to family planning and intimate partner violence resources and placed strain on the health service overall, resulting in a backlog of appointments, procedures and screening services. We must also prepare for the reality of long-COVID and the needs this will arise from this. One study in the UK[45] found that women under the age of 50 were more likely to not feel fully recovered, were more breathless, more fatigued and had higher rates of new or worsened disability compared to men of the same age.

The challenges the pandemic has posed to our health infrastructure underline the importance of creating a universal healthcare system. While we welcome the publication of the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan this May, no additional funds beyond Budget 2021's investment have been allocated to support this. Sustained and ring-fenced funding is needed if the full ambition of this plan is to be realised. As we emerge from the pandemic it is critical that we recognise the need for a restructuring of our health system towards a free at the point of access model, providing the appropriate resourcing to enhance service capacity and meet diverse needs.

**Recommendations**

- Establish the National Health Fund to ensure a dedicated and independent source of funding for the health and social care system
- Resource the recommendations in the de Buitléir report to ensure that public hospitals are reserved for public patients
- Resource and legislate for entitlements to high-quality, affordable services based on need rather than ability to pay
- Invest in cancer screening services to address the backlog and to provide national HPV screening

## Focused investment and support for women's health and mental health

The establishment of the Women's Health Taskforce in 2019 provided a strong foundation for a long-term strategy for women's health. It is critical that the work of the Taskforce is not squandered and funding allocated to embed a focus on women's health within DOH through designated posts, as well as an expansion of the Women's Health Fund to resource the implementation of the strategy.

During the pandemic, Europe-wide research highlighted that women aged 18–24 and women aged 35–44 reported the poorest mental wellbeing.[46] It is of particular concern that mental health services have not received sufficient attention within Sláintecare, receiving just 1.9% of the overall implementation budget.[47]

One woman in five will experience mental ill-health during the perinatal period[48] and the global pandemic is likely to have compounded this. Despite this, Ireland still does not have a mother and baby unit which means that mothers requiring specialist mental health support are separated from their babies and support for mother-infant bonding at this formative stage cannot take place. A failure to support to support mothers' mental health is deleterious to the welfare of mothers and babies but also carries long-term social and economic costs primarily due to the adverse impact insecure attachment can have on the emotional, cognitive and physical development of children.[49]

All mothers should be able to access tailored support for breastfeeding, in line with their wishes. UK

[44] National Women's Council (2020) Women's Experiences of Caring During COVID19.
[45] Sigfrid, L., et al (2021) Long Covid in adults discharged from UK hospitals after Covid-19
[46] Eurofound (2021) Living, working and COVID-19. Mental health and trust decline across EU as pandemic enters another year.
[47] Mental Health Reform (2021). Slaintecare Does Not go far Enough for Mental Health
[48] Baur, A. et al. 2014 The costs of perinatal mental health problems. LSE and Centre for Mental Health:
[48] Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2017) Maternal Mental Health – Women' s Voices:
[49] Bauer, A. et al. (2014) The costs of perinatal mental health problems LSE and Centre for Mental Health.

research of the savings associated with increases in breastfeeding found an estimated saving of £17m in treatment cost annually.[50] The recent creation of 24 new lactation consultant posts at a cost of €1.58m is very welcome but will still leave a shortfall of 46 to bring us to the optimum number of 110.[51]

**Recommendations**

- Resource women's health policy officer posts to sit within each of the policy units within DOH
- Establish a funding line for implementation of Women's Health Taskforce priority actions
- Provide maternity leave cover so multidisciplinary teams can provide consistent care to patients
- Ensure mental health receives 10% of the overall health budget
- Publish and resource implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan, including specific budget lines to address the health inequalities experienced by Traveller women
- Invest in inpatient mental health support and outpatient community support for acute mental health conditions that have higher mortality rates and which disproportionately impact women, e.g, eating disorders– €10m
- Establish a Mother & Baby Unit at St. Vincent's University Hospital - €12m capital & €1.5m staffing
- Further resource specialist multi-disciplinary perinatal hub and spoke teams, including ongoing training and supervision – €767m
    - Ensure facilities for perinatal mental health are installed in all three hub sites - €930,00
- Progress the Breastfeeding action plan (HSE) by funding 46 additional WTE lactation consultant posts- €3,04m
- Review the criteria for accessing the Primary Medical Certificate to ensure its sufficiently inclusive of the needs of disabled women

## Improving reproductive health services

It is unacceptable that almost two years into the implementation of abortion services in Ireland, only one in ten GPs is an abortion care provider, with just half of maternity hospitals providing surgical care. Uncomplicated procedures in the first and second trimester can be more safely provided in ambulatory outpatient settings. Budget 2021 can build on the recent establishment of two ambulatory gynaecological clinics so that all women can access abortion care via these one-stop "see and treat" community clinics.

Universal access to free contraception is fundamental to reproductive health and rights and critical for achieving gender equality, reducing poverty, protecting against adverse health conditions and prevention of unplanned pregnancies. Enabling women to control when they have children is vital for mother and infant health. Higher rates of maternal mortality and infant prematurity are observed when there are short interpregnancy intervals[52] underlining the need for greater access to contraception across the whole of the reproductive age range.

Unlike other countries, infertility services in Ireland are not publicly available and are extortionately expensive, with a single round of IVF costing between €4,500 and €5,000. In addition to the physical impacts, infertility has been associated with a range of psycho-social impacts. Currently, women in higher socioeconomic groups are more likely to use assisted human reproductive services in Ireland. A public model of fertility care is essential to achieve equitable access for all women requiring treatment.

**Recommendations**

- Establish four additional ambulatory gynaecological clinics to achieve regional parity and ensure all women can access optimal reproductive healthcare in their home communities – €3m
- Introduce a universal State-funded contraception scheme – €80-100m per year
- Develop regional infertility hubs, including three public IVF centres at €2.5m per year per centre

[50] UNICEF UK. 2012. Preventing disease and saving resources: the potential contribution of increasing breastfeeding rates in the UK
[51] HSE National Breastfeeding Implementation Group (2017) Mapping Project: Report of the review of breastfeeding resources in Maternity Hospitals/Units and Community Health Organisations
[52] Laurel W. Rice et al (2020) Universal access to contraception: women, families, and communities benefit, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Volume 222, Issue 2,

## Housing and accommodation

The housing and homelessness emergency continues to have a devastating impact on women and families throughout Ireland. While Ireland now has the highest rate of female homelessness in the EU, Rebuilding Ireland has no formal gendered analysis of policy or practice.[53] Women who are lone parents are one of the groups most at risk of house repossessions and yet despite legal obligations on equality, no State agency, including the Central Bank of Ireland, addresses gender in its reports.[54] Traveller women are also overrepresented among the homeless population.

Lone parent families, the majority of whom are headed by women, are the highest proportion of families living in emergency accommodation, the vast majority having been made homeless from the private rental sector. The use of family hubs has normalised family homelessness, which will lead to families being institutionalised and Ireland once again punishing women and children for poverty and inequality. A reliance on HAP is not a sustainable solution for lone parents.

The current statistics do not provide an accurate picture of female homelessness as many women are excluded from official statistics, including those living in refuge accommodation, direct provision, disabled people living in institutionalised settings or Traveller families forced to live on roadsides. In addition, women with children are more likely to move around, staying with family and friends rather than going to homeless accommodation in the early stages of homelessness.

The ESRI has said that government can afford to borrow €4bn to €7bn a year to build homes, without creating undue economic risks and that failure to meet the need for housing could result in social and economic damage.[55]

### Recommendations

- Increase public and affordable housing by delivering up to 100,000 new homes on public land over five years.
    - Increase public housing capital budgets
    - Review tax measures to dis-incentivise land hoarding
    - Immediately halt any sale or disposal of public land to private housing developers
    - Develop an Irish model of affordable cost rental housing
    - Reinstate 80% Windfall Tax on sale of rezoned land & invest the proceeds in housing provision.
- Establish gender sensitive support services for women living in homelessness
- Develop a Secure Tenancy Model in the rental sector by introducing tenancies of indefinite duration, banning 'no fault evictions' and establishing a national Rent Regulation system, based on clearly-defined affordable rents and the CPI
- Resource implementation of the recommendations by the Independent Expert Group on Traveller accommodation (2019) to ensure adequate supply and standard of culturally appropriate accommodation for Traveller women
- Establish & fully resource a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority accommodation
- Resource implementation of the action plan to end direct provision and ensure accommodation of people seeking protection and refugees is included in national and local housing development plans

# Create a new model of work and welfare

Our work and welfare systems were built for a different era and based on a largely male breadwinner understanding of both the labour market and social welfare systems. A return to 'normal' will not

[53] Murphy M (2017) Advancing human rights and equality proofing in Ireland
[54] NUIG (2020). A Lost Decade – Study on Mortgage Possession Court Lists in Ireland
[55] McQuinn, K. (2021). With 'g' greater than 'r', should we be borrowing to increase Irish housing supply? ESRI.

support women. A new approach must focus on creating decent, sustainable well-paid jobs, not jobs at any cost and should use public funding to drive improvements for workers.

## Gender and equality proof Active Labour Market Policy

While absolute unemployment increased more for men during the pandemic due to their greater labour market participation, the relative increase was higher for women. Overall figures hide differences in labour market participation for marginalised women. Ireland has the lowest rate of employment among disabled people in the EU.[56] 7 out of 10 young women are unemployed as a result of the pandemic[57] and Travellers are all but excluded from the workplace, with 80% of Traveller women unemployed.[58]

One of the key failings in the current system is that it does not accommodate care, reducing women's choices with regard to decent work and representing a significant structural barrier to women accessing active labour market programmes (ALMP's). Women are much less likely to benefit from ALMP investment than men.[59] Apprenticeships are an important bridge into the labour market but only 5% of beneficiaries of investment in apprenticeships were women in 2020.[60]

The National Economic Recovery Plan notes that additional demands for skills related to the care economy will be needed for a resilient, job led recovery and our ALMP needs to be responsive to this. Equally, ALMP must address gender inequalities in access to emerging, higher paid and green jobs in STEM areas. As women are less likely to be trained and employed in STEM areas, they may not benefit from investment in green jobs if this investment is focused on industrial areas. Contrary to our policy aims, the proportion of women working in higher paid sectors like information and communications technology (ICT) in Ireland actually decreased from 30% in 2004 to 21% in 2017.[61]

Active labour market policy must be capable of supporting all women, including those not currently on Jobseekers' payments. Qualified Adults do not receive an income in their own right and are excluded from accessing many ALMP's that require a Jobseekers payment as a condition of eligibility.

### Recommendations

- Invest in care as a key element of ALMP including development of training and national salary scales
- Support women to access training and reskilling programmes in STEM areas
- Ensure 'Pathways to Work includes targeted supports to qualified adults, lone parents, Traveller women, carer's and disabled women
- Establish individualised access to the social welfare system so women are paid in their own right and can access the supports that accompany an unemployment payment
- Acknowledge care by allowing those working part time to be eligible for Jobseekers payments
- Fund commitments in the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2024
    - Extend the bursary for craft apprenticeships to all apprenticeship programmes with greater than 80% representation of a single gender
    - Deliver a bursary programme to fund 100 apprentices per annum from marginalised groups, including lone parents, disabled people, Travellers and Roma

## Promote decent work

Ireland has one of the highest rates of low paid workers in the OECD; 23% of the workforce are low paid[62]

[56] Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2021) Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy
[57] CSO (2021). Monthly unemployment stats.
[58] Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Economic and Social Research Institute. Who experiences discrimination in Ireland?
[59] around 65% of those benefitting from a CE Scheme or TÚS place are men, less than 1 in 5 beneficiaries of the Rural Social Scheme are women. DSP (2020). Annual Statistics 2019. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/02f594-annual-sws-statistical-information-report/
[60] Dept Higher Education (2021). Action plan for apprenticeships.
[61] https://witsireland.com/stem-resources/women-in-stem-in-ireland-by-numbers/
[62] Low pay refers to the share of workers earning less than two-thirds of median earnings

compared to an OECD average of 15%.[63] Almost 70% of women are 'essential' workers and they are among the lowest paid in the economy. More than half of wholesale and retail workers[64] and 5 out of 10 childcare workers earn less than the living wage.[65] Among undocumented workers, many of whom work in care and other essential sectors, 26% report earning less than the minimum wage.[66]

While there has been increases in the minimum wage (NMW) in recent years, it stagnated during austerity years with no increase between 2007-2015. If government is serious about closing the gap between the NMW and the living wage, we need to see greater increases in the NMW than the 10c per hour agreed in 2020. Ireland's GPG could decline by almost 10% if the NMW were to reach 60% of median wages.[67] The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill will require pay audits for companies and technical assistance should be provided to ensure cost is not a barrier to improving pay transparency in Ireland.

Collective bargaining is one of the most effective ways to create more equal redistribution of wealth, reduce inequality and address low pay. Countries with a high coverage of collective bargaining tend to have shorter working hours for women and men, more flexible work options under secure employment conditions, better protection for non-standard workers, as well as a reduced gender pay gap.[68] However, the proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements in Ireland is low.

Public procurement can be a key lever in driving better terms and conditions for workers, given its significance in terms of government spending. Public procurement within the Public Service represents an estimated €15 billion a year.[69] Public procurement policies can promote decent work by making public contracts only available to those companies that pay decent wages, are addressing their GPG and respect workers' right to collective bargaining.

NWC has called for investment in public services. The public sector is an important employer for women, however, Ireland's public sector accounts for a much smaller proportion of employment (15%) than other small open economies in Northern Europe (25-30%). Countries with larger public sectors employ more women and also tend to have the largest (unionised) female participation rates in the labour force.[70] Therefore, investment in public services delivers on multiple fronts for women.

### Recommendations

- Deliver on the PFG commitment to a Living Wage in the lifetime of the government
- Attach social criteria, clauses and conditionality, including living wage clauses to Employer incentive schemes and government procurement processes
- Resource the Programme for Government commitment to regularising the situation of migrant workers
- Provide resources for the implementation of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill
    - Provide technical and financial assistance for SME's
    - Establish public pay audit website
- Legislate for collective bargaining rights, as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly
- Fund school infrastructure in physics and maths so women and girls can access higher paid work in areas like IT, engineering and green technology

## Improve Work life Balance

Investment in the care economy includes investment in paid parental leave schemes, flexible work and a

[63] OECD (2019). Wage levels statistics. https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/wage-levels.htm
[64] CSO (2020). LFS Minimum Wage Statistics. Q4 2019.
[65] Pobal (2021). Annual early years sector profile report 2019/2020.
[66] MRCI (2020). Live here, work here, belong here. A survey of over 1,000 undocumented people in Ireland
[67] EU Commission. Commisison staff working document impact assessment. Accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union SWD/2020/245 final.
[68] European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Collective bargaining and gender equality.
[69] DPER (2020). DPER Briefing Note Public Procurement 21/05/20
[70] Regan, A. (2020). Time for a serious political debate on fiscal reform.

work life balance that allows men and women to combine with work care and other interests. Paid parental leave schemes can help parents balance work and family life and to maintain their connection to the labour market. However, provision of statutory leave supports for parents in Ireland is much lower than EU norms and there is a larger gap between the end of paid leave and the start of ECEC services.

The income replacement rate of paid leave is a key factor in whether it is possible to take the leave, particularly for fathers in low incomes families[71] and for lone parents who are solely responsible for their household income. The Citizens' Assembly have made recommendations on improving paid parental leave, including increasing payment levels to encourage take up, ensuring paid leave for parents covers the first year of a child's life and providing lone parents with the same total leave period as a couple.

The last year has seen advances in flexible and remote working, however, greater flexibility is no substitute for reduced working hours. We need to reduce working time for all. A four-day week would help to facilitate a more equal distribution of care between women and men and help to address the situation whereby limited possibilities to combine paid work with care mean women predominate in low paid, precarious and short-term employment. As well as the benefits to workers, the four-day week has benefits for business and the environment.

**Recommendations**

- Increase the rate of maternity, paternity and parental benefit to €295 per week to bring more in line with EU norms - €65.3m[72]
- Increase the duration of paid parents leave to 26 weeks per parent (52 weeks for lone parents) to give parents choices in their child's first year – phase in up to 2028
- Convert existing unpaid parental leave to paid leave
- Increase paid paternity leave to 4 weeks - €13.5m
- Introduce five paid days of carers' leave, as per the EU Directive on Work Life Balance
- Provide a €5m financial aid fund to support businesses to pilot the Four Day Week in Ireland
- Resource a time use survey to gather updated data on time spent on unpaid work - €240k

## End Poverty

Lone parents, 86% of whom are women, continue to be among those most at risk of poverty and deprivation with 30% of families headed by a lone parent at risk of poverty in 2019. Disabled people also experience unacceptably high levels of poverty, even before the additional costs of disability are taken into account.[73] Women over 65, [74] non-EU migrants,[75] and women living in rural areas experience additional challenges to having an adequate income.[76] Addressing poverty requires a whole of government approach which includes provision of universal basic services and decent work, as described previously. But it must also include providing adequate income supports to keep people out of poverty.

At the beginning of the pandemic, government acted quickly to introduce enhanced income supports for those who jobs were affected by the pandemic. However, Budget 2021 did not follow through with much needed measures to increase core social welfare rates and address longstanding gender inequalities in our welfare system and as a result, a two-tier system has prevailed whereby those on existing welfare payments, predominantly women, were treated in a less favorable manner and continued to receive a lesser level of income support. While the commitment in the National Economic Recovery Plan to introduce pay related jobseekers' benefits is a welcome one, social assistance payments are a crucial support for women and must provide a decent standard of living rather than merely subsistence levels.

[71] Oireachtas Library & Research Service (2021). L&RS Bill Digest: Family Law Bill 2021
[72] DSP (2021). Written question CV Pillar and DSP bilateral.
[73] CSO (2020). SILC 2019
[74] CSO (2020). Women and men in Ireland.
[75] Eurostat (2020). People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by citizenship.
[76] VPSJ (2017). Minimum Essential Standard of Living: Update report 2017.

The Citizens' Assembly has recommended that social protection payments be set at a level that lifts people above the poverty line, prevents deprivation and supports an adequate standard of living.

**Recommendations**

- Establish the MESL as the benchmark for social welfare payments by 2026
  - Increase social welfare rates by €10 as an interim measure in Budget 2022
  - Increase Qualified Child payments by €2.10 for children under 12 and €10 for children aged 12 and above in Budget 2022[77]
- Extend Jobseekers Transitional Payment to lone parents in education, training or employment until the youngest child reaches the end of second level education
- Restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance for 18-24 year olds -€67.5m
- Grant Child Benefit to children whose parents are seeking asylum, as per White Paper - €2.68m
- Extend Free Travel Scheme to people in the international protection process
- Ensure Roma children have access to income by making Child Benefit a truly universal payment that is not contingent on the fulfilment of the Habitual Residence Condition - €3.68m
- Deliver a non-means tested, cost of disability payment, minimum €20 per week pending the publication of DEASP's research on cost of disability
- Increase the earnings disregard for Carer's Allowance from €332.50 to €450 (single) and €665 to €900 (couple) so that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify[78] [79]

## End the Gender Pensions Gap

As women have greater unpaid care responsibilities and are more likely to be in low paid, part time or precarious work, it is more difficult to qualify for the full pension. Women account for only 33% of those in receipt of a full State Contributory Pension[80] even though women outnumber men among the over 65's. Only 28% of women of pension age have an occupational or private pension compared to 55% of men. Older rural women are even less likely to have an occupational or contributory pension.[81]

On average, women have 29% less pension income than men.[82] Approaches that tie the pensions system more closely to employment and earnings, exacerbate rather than mitigate gender inequalities as well as intersecting inequalities and discriminations experienced by disabled women, carers, lone parents, Traveller women and other women who encounter barriers to the labour market.

Piecemeal reforms like the TCA and Homemaker's/HomeCaring Periods Schemes, while formally recognising the value of unpaid care work, are only available to those born after 1st Sept 1946. Qualifying conditions for a full contributory pension under the TCA still require women to have 20 years paid contributions, which may not be possible given all of the barriers to work that women experience. NWC believes that the State has a particular responsibility to remedy the inequality experienced by women affected by the marriage bar and by a system built on a patriarchal single "breadwinner" model.

While the narrative of a pensions timebomb prevails, spending on social protection in Ireland is well below average, driven by much lower spending on 'old-age' than the European average.[83] The state pension system requires reform to tackle embedded structural inequalities. The best way to do this and to achieve equality for women is through a universal pension.[84]

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[77] These are interim increases for Budget 2022 in order to attain a MESL by 2026, in line with VPSJ evidence on MESL

[78] https://familycarers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Family-Carers-Ireland-A-Decade-Lost-Pre-Budget-Submission.pdf

[79] Budget 2020 increased the hours carers could work and still quality for a payment from 15 to 18.5 but didn't increase the earnings disregard so while carers can keep their payment, it will be reduced.

[80] Data from DSP, November 2020. 83,847 women out of 255,001 recipients of full state contributory pension as at 31 October 2020

[81] Ní Léime, A. et al. Gender and Rural Ageing in Ireland: Profile and Key Issues. Irish Centre for Social Gerontology National University of Ireland, Galway

[82] Eurostat (2021). Gender pension gap data 2019.

[83] https://assets.gov.ie/7322/262f606010344ca3adeba2c88087add6.pdf

[84] NWCI (2008). Pensions: What women want - a model of pensions that guarantees independence.

**Recommendations**

- Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system paid for by ending tax relief on private pensions and investing the savings in a first-tier state pension
  - In Budget 2022, end the qualified adult system and provide fully individualised access to pensions for all men and women
- Deliver a full Homecarers credit that actively recognises the contribution of care and also serves as a re-entry credit
  - Remove the cap of 20 years caring contributions under the HomeCaring Periods Scheme
  - Ensure the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) is limited to 30 years for the maximum pension
  - Ensure women born before 1st Sept 1946 can benefit under all schemes
- Acknowledge the previous injustice of the 'marriage bar' with a once-off, ring-fenced retrospective scheme
- Resource & publish a gender and equality impact assessment of TCA & Auto-enrolment
- In advance of the publication of the report of the Commission on Pensions, ensure that the Commission conducts and publishes gender, equality and poverty analysis of projected increases in state pension age & subsequent pension reforms

# Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women

Violence against women goes to the heart of women's equality in our society. 1 in 4 women will experience domestic and/or sexual violence in Ireland. Disabled women and girls face greater risk of violence, with disability being the second most common risk factor for rape, after gender.[85]

The economic cost to society of violence against women has been conservatively estimated at €2.2bn[86]. The full implementation of the Istanbul Convention with regard to measures and actions focused on prevention, prosecution and legislation must be a priority in Budget 2022. To meet these international obligations, significant reform of existing structures and systems is urgent.

NWC has welcomed the increased funding and policy focus on Violence Against Women that was seen during the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the increased funding only went some way to meeting the increased demands that were experienced by frontline services. Despite the increase in funding, frontline services have experienced an unprecedented increase in demand for supports. Women's Aid have reported a 43% increase in contacts to their service, compared to 2019.[87] Between March – June 2020, RCNI reported a 98% increase in the number of contacts made by survivors seeking counselling and support. This correlates with a striking increase of 83% in the length of time spent on calls made to RCC helplines.[88] The number of criminal charges brought for alleged crimes related to domestic abuse also rose by about 24% in 2020. Gardaí received approximately 43,000 calls to respond to domestic abuse incidents – a 16% increase on 2019.[89] However, the recent shocking news that hundreds of emergency calls in 2019 and 2020 relating to domestic violence were cancelled by An Garda Síochána before there was an appropriate policing response is a reminder of how inadequate Irelands response to this issue remains**.**

Ireland has still not met the minimum requirement of having 1 refuge space per every 10,000 people. It

[85] Rape & Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape 2009
[86] The €2.2bn figure puts the cost of domestic violence at €555 per citizen. These figures have not been adjusted for inflation and is thus far from capturing the true economic cost.
[87] https://www.womensaid.ie/about/newsevents/news/2021/06/22/media-release-29717-domestic-abuse-contacts-made-w/
[88] https://www.rcni.ie/rcni-release-first-statistics-showing-how-covid-19-impacted-survivors-of-sexual-violence-and-rape-crisis-centres-during-lockdown/
[89] https://www.thejournal.ie/domestic-violence-faoiseamh-5335444-Jan2021/

was estimated that Ireland needed an additional 331 bed spaces throughout the country pre-pandemic. This figure needs to be adjusted as refuge capacity has been reduced to an estimated 75% capacity due to social distancing requirements.

To meet these international obligations, significant reform of existing structures and systems is urgent.

**Structural Reform –** Invest fully in oversight, accountability and action of DSGBV across all government departments and agencies

**DSGBV Supports –** Ring-fence increased, multi-annual funding to frontline support and advocacy services working to support victim-survivors of DSGBV

**Substantive Reforms–** fund the full implementation of the O'Malley Review; reform of the family justice system; the establishment of a Court Welfare System; Exit routes out of sexual exploitation; Establishment of a Statutory Maintenance Agency; Redress for all survivors of institutional abuse; access to free, timely legal advice for all victim-survivors of all forms of DSGBV.

**Recommendations**

- Establish & resource national structures to lead the ending of Sexual Domestic and Gender Based Violence
    - Assign and resource a Cabinet level Minister with overall responsibility for DSGBV
    - Establish & resource a Victims/Survivors Commissioner
    - Resource the implementation of the 3rd National Action Plan on DSGBV
    - Establish & resource a national fund for education and training on all forms of DSBGV in primary, secondary, higher and further education
    - Fund the implementation of the O'Malley report in full
    - Formal recognition of & multi-annual funding for the Observatory on Violence Against Women and Girls as the only collective structure that addresses all forms of VAWG
    - Fund the full implementation of the Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive -Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions Framework

- To combat and support women who experience gender-based violence, ring-fenced funding should be provided for:

    - Multi-annual funding to frontline support and advocacy services working to support victim-survivors of DSGBV
    - Appropriate refuge, housing and accommodation to meet the needs of women and families seeking safety in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, including services that can support disabled, Traveller, Roma and migrant women. Also, provide services that can support women with active addiction
    - A minimum of 1 refuge space per 10,000 population – adjusted to comply with all public health measures
    - 10 days paid leave for victim-survivors of abuse and violence
    - Exit services and supports for those who are in, or who wish to leave, prostitution or the sex trade
    - Violence against women services to take additional measures to be inclusive of the needs of all women, including: disabled women and girls and Traveller, Roma and other minority ethnic women
    - Programmes and reforms to address systemic sexism, ableism and racism across the public, NGO, and private sector
    - The development and implementation of Domestic Homicide Reviews
    - Expansion of the Divisional Protective Service Units

- Reform of the Habitual Residence Condition test to ensure that victim-survivors of DSGBV can access housing supports and social protections promptly
- Establishment of a DSGBV Data Gathering Strategy for all state Bodies and institutions
- The introduction of an identifier so that cases/experiences of DSGBV can be tracked throughout state agencies and the justice system

# Enable Women's Participation and Decision Making

## Women's Leadership

Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in often invisible, unpaid and undervalued ways in responding to the pandemic. However, women leaders and representatives have been largely absent from the official, political and media debates about COVID-19. Recovery plans must acknowledge the impact of the pandemic on women, and the essential role that women have to play in decision-making at local and national level. We must grasp the opportunity to take transformative decisions to support all those in decision and policy making structures at local level to name women's inequality, enhance their ability to address it and to firmly embed the principles of gender equality into the programmes, policies and practices of decision and policy making institutions at local level. This is why feminist analysis continues to be vital. At the national level there should be increased funding for NWC, recognised by Government as a key body advocating on women's concerns and perspectives, to continue to advance women's equality.

Gender balance in leadership roles in business, politics and public life is crucial to ensure accountability and responsiveness to women in all their diversity. More investment in needed to support women to run for election and Budget 2022 is an opportunity to invest in women's leadership. Legislation and resources to support implementation is needed to ensure that maternity/adoptive leave is available for all women TDs and councillors and that gender quotas are extended for the next local elections in 2024.

### Women's Parliamentary Caucus

NWC provides the secretariat to the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and it is vital that the Caucus is financially supported to continue providing a space for women to further women's issues in a cross-party manner. This include specific funding for staff resources at parliamentary secretary grade to support its functions and development. The current scheme operated by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to support Local Authorities in establishing local caucus should be expanded to allow civil society groups to apply and needs to be mainstreamed into the operations of Local Authorities to ensure continuity and longevity.

Specific action is required to advance young women's leadership in Ireland and the next iteration of the National Strategy for Women and Girls should include a funding allocation to support young women's leadership, including initiatives such as NWC's FemFest

**Recommendations**

- Increase funding to NWC to support the achievement of full equality for women
- Provide funding for the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and for the development of local caucuses
- Make funding available for young women's leadership programmes as part of the new NSWG
- Fund a comprehensive gender audit of all local, rural and community decision making structures.

### Women's voices in peacebuilding and North-South Links

The benefit of women's voices, particularly in peacebuilding and reconciliation, is well documented. Evidence demonstrates that women in peace processes are more likely to focus on reconciliation, economic development and transitional justice – all critical elements of a sustained peace. Such alliances

are already evident across civil society on this island but remain an underutilised resource in advancing the peace process. Women continue to be marginalised and underrepresented in decision making spaces and peacebuilding structures. In line with Security Council Resolution 1325, NWC is launching an all-island Women's Forum to develop the role of women in peacebuilding and to ensure women take their rightful place as leaders in society. However, this is but one initiative to greater include women's voices in peacebuilding, more needs done.

**Recommendations**

- Increase funding to NWC to further develop our peacebuilding work
- Provide funding for a North-South 'young women in leadership' staff member at officer level
- Increase funding to existing cross border structures.

## Women's Community Sector

NWC are concerned about the serious underinvestment in the sector and the ongoing legacy issues due to cutbacks to the sector and no full cost recovery. This has implications for women's representation and participation and for developmental work that can enable mobilisation, politicisation and gender analysis around the country. A long-term strategy is required to reinstate resources that fund advocacy, community development and anti-poverty work with women. The role of community & rural women's groups is crucial in supporting the participation of women from different backgrounds, and in particular women most distant from decision making processes, into political and public life including Traveller, Roma, migrant and refugee women, disabled women and young women. The role of advocacy and participation must be central if we are to ensure that women do not bear the brunt of cutbacks and that their voice is heard in charting the recovery. Investment into organisations working to advance women's equality must be protected from economic and budgetary cutbacks.[90] In order to address the serious power and resources imbalance that exists among women and women's groups, there must be a redistribution of resources through, for example, the establishment of a specific multi-annual budget line to enable the participation of marginalised women in civil and political life.

Prior to COVID-19, the women's community sector was already underfunded and had not recovered from the most recent period of austerity. The National Collective of Community based Women's Networks (NCCWN) experienced a reduction of 38% in their funding since 2008 with only 9% being reinstated. A full reinstatement of their funding alongside increased investment is required.

Overall, women's community organisations have been cut by 14.5% since 2008. The budget of Family Resource Centres, vital services for women and families across Ireland, is now 12% less than in 2008 but since the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, 83% of FRCs experienced an increase in demand for their services. The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, the national social inclusion programme, had a budget of €81million in 2008 and now has a budget of €38 million and this is projected to remain the same until 2022.

**Recommendations**

- Allocate adequate resources for organisations that are supporting marginalised women to participate in public and political life including building inclusivity and diversity in social dialogue processes
- Increase funding to the women's community and equality sector and NCCWN and provide for their sustainability, including ensuring staff have adequate pay and conditions.
- Government & State Agencies should ensure that adequate funding for services is provided so that staff remuneration is commensurate with experience, qualifications and the market rate for their field of work.
- Ensure that the next round of SSNO is on a five-year cycle and continues to support women's equality organisations and autonomous community development

[90] https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/08/IHREC-Submission-to-CEDAW-follow-up-to-Irelands-6th-and-7th-periodic-report.pdf

- Provide multi-annual government funding for independent, non-profit community education and community development organisations working with communities experiencing poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion.

## Women in Rural Communities

Women in rural communities experience additional barriers to participation, due to an underinvestment in social and public infrastructure. There is an urgent need for increased investment in rural transport solutions with a focus on disabled people, dispersed populations and women. Multi annual funding for independent community development in rural communities is vital for the sustainability of these services and supports. Investment into rural communities should be monitored and reported on with gender and equality disaggregated data.

Agriculture is an important part of rural life and women on Irish farms make a substantial contribution. Positive action and specific targeted measures are required to address the persistent gender gap in land ownership and ensure that young women can benefit from the investment and strategies developed to tackle generational renewal and deliver on our climate justice obligations. The farm owner who receives the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) payment is the public face, just 8% of the €1.2bn of Ireland's EU CAP Single Farm Payments went to women farmers in 2012.[91] Only 10% of the land in women's ownership is eligible for basic payments. There are very few areas of public expenditure, where 90% of public investment is going to one gender. The Post 2020 CAP offers an opportunity to review the role of women in agriculture and their contribution to farm viability.

### Recommendations

- Gender and equality proof the current Our Rural Future; Rural development policy and set gender indicators to measure progress and outcomes
- Provide multi annual funding for independent community development in rural communities
- Require all investment into rural communities to be monitored and reported on with gender and equality disaggregated data
    - New women entrants over 40 to get a 25% top up on their single farm payment
    - The top-up payment provided to Knowledge Transfer groups under the next CAP who have at least three women participants should be in the region of 15% per participant.
    - All joint farm partnerships where a woman is a named partner should receive a 60% Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) grant, in the next evolution of TAMS in CAP.
    - A 35% top-up in the annual farm payment for young women farmers under 40 years of age in the next CAP

# Deliver a Feminist Green New Deal

International research has established that as climate impacts increase, existing inequalities, deprivation and exclusion will be worsened, with the worst impacts on women.[92] Our transition to a greener economy must be a just transition and all measures must incorporate mitigation and climate justice investments to ensure rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or those on low incomes do not experience further inequality and poverty. While there was some attempt to offset the effect of an increase in carbon tax on low income households in Budget 2021, eligibility criteria for fuel allowance means that many of those on low incomes will not be able to benefit and will be disproportionately affected by the increase.

Investment in high-quality social, physical and digital infrastructures, including public services, are a

[91] Anne Byrne, Nata Duvvury, Áine Macken-Walsh, Tanya Watson (2013) Gender, Power and Property: In my own right. The Rural Economy Development Programme (REDP)Working Paper Series.
[92] European parliament-The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice 2015

prerequisite for a shift to a greener economy that is capable of promoting decent and sustainable work.[93] However, investment has tended to be focused on areas such as energy, industry, transport and manufacturing. Investment in a public model of care should be at the centre of discussions on a green new deal. Investment in care has been shown to act as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in traditional economic recovery approaches, such as construction. Producing significantly less emissions than construction, care jobs are also green jobs.[94]

NWC and partners in 56 coalitions, networks and organisations have put forward proposals for a just recovery, based on six key principles: protect and invest in public services, prioritising public health and wellbeing; invest in people; deliver faster and fairer climate action and restore and protect nature; build solidarity and community across borders; ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making; and redefine progress through a focus on wellbeing and sustainable development.[95] These principles would form a useful basis to guide commitments in Budget 2022 which must reflect the urgency of the climate crisis and the rapidly shrinking window of opportunity in which to act.

**Recommendations**

- Just Transition legislation policies & investment must be gender & poverty proofed
- National planning must ensure Irelands climate polluting emissions reduce by a min of 8% annually
- Invest in care and other public services as a key pillar of a green new deal
- Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures - Remove fossil fuel subsidies, divest from fossil fuel investment and establish no new fossil fuel exploration licenses
- Prioritise rural and urban public transport infrastructure, including cycling, over roads building
- Invest in our natural heritage & biodiversity
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production
- Fund regional Social Environmental enterprises to enable communities find solutions, address waste materials, upskill in the area and create sustainable jobs

# Ensure Access to Justice

Access to justice is a critical pathway for the achievement of gender equality. Women living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by barriers to accessing justice as they do not have alternative means of resolving disputes or resources to fall back on, and the impact of unresolved or unfairly resolved disputes on their livelihoods can be devastating for them and often their children.

## Statutory Maintenance Agency

Child maintenance plays an important role in protecting against poverty. International experience indicates that where child maintenance is a reliable source of income, there was a 30% reduction in the poverty gap.[96] Unlike other jurisdictions, child maintenance in Ireland is seen largely as a personal, parental obligation and therefore, a matter of private family law. There is no state agency with responsibility for child maintenance payments and pursuit of maintenance is left up to the claiming parent. A Statutory Maintenance Agency would take the issue of child maintenance out of the adversarial court system, reduce the burden on women to litigate for child maintenance orders and act as an anti-poverty measure. It has also been called for by the Joint Committee on Social Protection in its Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland (2017) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

[93] Global Commission on the Future of Work (2019). Work for a brighter future. ILO.
[94] WBG (2020). A care led recovery from Coronavirus.
[95] https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/assets/files/pdf/a_shared_vision_for_a_just_recovery.pdf
[96] Family Policy and Shared Parenting in Nordic Countries', available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/138826271101300203

**Recommendations**

- Establish a statutory child maintenance agency
- Child Maintenance should be a non-means tested, non-taxable income for children, as with Child Benefit, to support lone parents out of poverty.

## Ensure access to justice for women who experience violence

Budget 2021 should provide the funding for a purpose-built family courts complex adjacent to the Four Courts in Dublin (Hammond Lane) as well as modernising the family court facilities nationwide. A dedicated and integrated family court within the existing court structures would allow for matters of personal trauma and sensitivity to be handled by specialised courts, with specialist judges specifically trained to adjudicate. A high-quality Court Welfare Service should also be established. This would include a range of legal and social services, in order to reduce the number of steps that a woman has to take to access justice.

**Recommendations**

- Develop a purpose-built family courts complex
- Establish a comprehensive Court Welfare Service
- Establish a national programme for supervised contact centres
- Fully fund the Judicial Council to ensure there are sufficient resources for extensive training on DSGBV
- End the requirement for victim-survivors of DSGBV to make financial contributions for civil legal aid services where safety, protection and barring orders are being sought

## Historical Abuses of Women in the Care of the State

In 2013, the Magdalen Commission Report recommended that the State acquire, maintain and administer a garden, museum or other form of memorial. The Government accepted this proposal but it has failed to materialise. Action must be taken in a matter consistent with the principles of restorative justice.

**Recommendations**

- Provide full redress to all Magdalene survivors
- Resource a National Archive of Historical Institutional and Care-Related Records
- Review Adoption Act

## Funding Access to Legal Services

As recommended by the O'Malley report all victim/survivors have access to free legal advice and representation when needed. A gender sensitive review of the civil legal aid scheme, to include, amongst other things, the gender division of the provision of legal aid, the current waiting times, the delays, the means test, the accommodation and child care allowances, the legal aid fees, and the areas of law covered, should be undertaken.

Access to free legal advice (as distinct from legal representation) needs to be made available to all victim-survivors of all forms of DSGBV, this includes, but is not limited to: victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment; sexual exploitation and prostitution, FGM and honour-based violence.