

Submission by the National Women's Council of Ireland on the Draft National Plan for Women

Introduction

The National Women's Council of Ireland welcomes the decision by the Government to draft a National Plan for Women, which can potentially provide a framework for concerted action to promote women's equality. A fundamental objective to the development of the Plan must be the incorporation of rights based approach towards the progression of equality for women. Progressing women's rights as women's human rights will be key to achieving equality for women in by 2005. Adopting a human rights framework to both the analysis of the inequalities which women experience and the appropriate actions which are required to eliminate inequality and discrimination provides the basis for achieving the objectives as set in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Since the Platform for Action was signed by the Irish Government there has been some progress in ensuring women's human rights. Progress, however has been slow and piecemeal with no visible changes at all in some areas. Severe discrimination continues to be experienced by specific groups of women, including lone mothers, minority ethnic women, women with disabilities, lesbians and homeless women. Huge inequalities have been allowed to persist and develop between women in Ireland because of the lack of an adequate focus on diversity. Traveller women have over three times the risk of dying in a given year than a settled women. As of 2002, not one Traveller woman has been able to access a job in the Civil Service.

If the structural inequalities experienced by women in Ireland are to be addressed, the draft National Plan for Women needs to be shaped by a definition of equality which recognises the heterogeneity of women and acknowledges the particular discrimination experienced by them as a consequence of their caring roles. This equality definition needs also to provide a theoretical framework in which continuing inequalities can be identified and addressed.

Equality Framework

The NWCII sees women's inequality as a structural problem, based on a feminist analysis of a patriarchal society. We need equality for women because:

- Men dominate all our public institutions, our cultural, social, economic and legal infrastructures
- Gender is a basic structuring principal of the labour market, placing women in a disadvantaged economic position

- Women are relatively absent from formal politics and local government decision-making structures, marginalizing the concerns and interests of women as citizens
- Unequal power relations across the spectrum from the public domain to the privacy of the home, place women in a subordinate position to men

The key inequalities in society are caused by inequalities of power, as well as structural economic and social / cultural inequalities. These inequalities create disadvantages for all women in some ways, and they intersect to create different dynamics for different groups of women.

The identity of women as a community is diverse. What we mean by diversity is that individual women's identities are socially constructed and vary according to differences of class, rural/urban, sexual orientation, 'race', ethno-religious identity and dis/ability. Because inequalities are intersecting, diversity also means there are inequalities between women, which the Government needs to recognise and address.

The implications of this are that achieving civil and political rights depends on realising economic, social and cultural rights (i.e. we cannot secure meaningful equality without abolishing poverty). Achieving meaningful gender equality depends on guaranteeing ethnic and racial justice, eliminating homophobia and xenophobia, and transforming society to respond fully and respectfully to those who are differently-abled.

The NWCI recommends that the Government should draw on the following multi-faceted definition of equality which has been developed for the National Economic and Social Forum (**NESF : *Equality : Frameworks for Change, 2001***) and which recognises both women's structural inequality and their heterogeneity :

RESPECT

Affective equality: the right to love, care and solidarity

The definition of women's equality needs to provide recognition of the contribution that women's caring, and other, unpaid work makes to our economic, social, political and emotional well being as a society.

RECOGNITION

Social and cultural equality: the right of everyone to autonomy and personal freedom

This concept should encompass equal respect in the treatment of all women, independent of their race, gender, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, or political or religious affiliations. This would also involve recognition and celebration of the richness of difference and respect for its manifestations in women's lives.

REDISTRIBUTION

Economic equality: the right to a fair share of our society's resources

This definition of equality would cover educational and occupational options that give all women the prospect of self-development and satisfying work

It would also encompass substantive redistribution of wealth, aimed at satisfying needs and enabling roughly equal proportions of well being between women and men, and between different groups of women.

REPRESENTATION

Political equality: the right to the protection of human and political rights

The definition should provide for the democratisation of decision-making procedures in public and private institutions, so that women can claim a place in political life and decision-making, and thereby gain an influence on the distribution of resources

It should envision the empowerment of women through self-organisation, the creation of safe spaces where women can gain the tools for personal and collective change

It should allow for the development of new and better institutions and practices, including self-representation within the women's movement

Overarching Priorities

The recommendations which are put forward in this document have been developed by the NWCI in consultation with its affiliates. Its 150 affiliates represent over 300,000 women in Ireland, reflecting a diversity of women, their experiences and needs. Its recommendations for future policy action by the Government have been grouped under the relevant Critical Areas of Concern. Issues which relate to the plan as a whole or which are key NWCI priorities are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Need for Resources, Targets and Timescales

The Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 297, states:

*“Governments, in consultation with relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations, ... preferably **by the end of 1996**, should have developed their strategies or plans of actions ... (These) **should be comprehensive, have time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and include proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation.**”*

If the Government intends the National Plan for Women to reflect its real commitment to women's equality, it needs to identify the resources which will be allocated to the implementation of individual recommendations. It also needs to include targets which are measurable so that progress can be monitored. Crucially, for this plan to be effective in bringing about real change for women, it needs to include detailed timescales indicating when commitments will be implemented.

The inclusion of commitments regarding resources, targets and timescales was a key element of the Beijing Platform for Action. These commitments must be included in the revised plan. Otherwise, the NWCI cannot regard the plan as anything other than a collection of disparate commitments rather than the mechanism through which the Beijing Platform for Action will be implemented in Ireland.

Data Strategy

Discrimination against certain groups of women has remained hidden because their particular experiences have not been recorded. Because data continues to be collected in a manner which overlooks women's experiences, their particular needs remain hidden, under-estimated, unmonitored. At its most extreme, such a limited data strategy can render some women's lives invisible - the homeless and women living in institutions, for instance, have not even been included in the Living in Ireland Survey. In general, existing data collection strategies leave major gaps in our understanding of women's needs and roles – it is only now, for instance, that data is beginning to be collected on the role of women in agriculture. Similarly, inadequate data collection means that there is no way of measuring whether or not a gender pay gap continues to operate in certain sectors. Data gaps limit our understanding of issues of critical concern to many women – they also ensure, as a consequence, that policy initiatives cannot be targeted. More comprehensive data needs to be collected so that the Government can fulfil the EU requirement, agreed at the Laeken Summit, that social indicators be devised. Furthermore, all future data collection needs to be gender disaggregated.

Individualisation

It is of fundamental importance for the NWCI that women should have financial independence regardless of their life choices. The NWCI welcomes the action which the Government has taken so far on individualisation. However, while this remains partial, unnecessary divisions are created between women in the workforce and those engaged in full-time caring work. If women are to gain the economic equality, promised under the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government needs to secure their financial independence. Individualisation of the social welfare system needs to be implemented in full. This should be accompanied by a recognition of the unpaid caring work of women through the introduction of social insurance credits for caring. The NWCI advocates the introduction of retrospective

pension credits for older women who will not benefit from the current scheme for homemakers.

Women and Poverty

Introduction

The National Plan for Women must include a recognition that women continue to be at greater risk of poverty than men. One in every four women raising children or managing households on their own will experience poverty despite our economic boom and a growth rate of 8% (**ESRI 2000**). The current commitments listed in relation to women and poverty are vague and many relate to government commitments on the family rather than women specifically.

Women are at a higher risk of poverty than men

The implications for women arising from the Living in Ireland Survey 1997 data are highlighted in the following statistics:

- Women are at greater risk of poverty than men as is evident from the 1994 and 1997 data.
- Households headed by someone 'working full-time in the home' form the largest income poverty group - 29%. The risk of poverty has increased significantly for this group from 35% in 1994 to 51% in 1997. This group is composed predominantly of women.
- The risk of falling below the 50% line for households headed by an older person (65 years) rose from 10% in 1994 to 29% in 1997. This group is composed predominantly of women.
- An increasing number of households are headed by an employee at risk of poverty. This group doubled as a proportion of those in poverty from 6% in 1994 to 13% in 1997. The incidence of low pay is central to this increase. A significant number of women hold low paid jobs.
- Lone parents were shown to be one of the groups at highest risk of poverty in 1994 and they remain in the *at-risk* category in the 1997 Survey. In 1994 32% of lone parents were at risk of poverty and 70% of lone parents fell below the 60% poverty line.

Overall female headed households faced a 24% risk of poverty compared to 17% for male headed households. This was predominantly due to the high risk of poverty for two categories of households, which are mainly headed by women

- single adult households
- households headed by someone working full time in the home.

Since the 1997 data, there has been no detailed gender analysis of the data on women's poverty; however it is reasonable to infer from the data that is

available that there has been an evolving trend throughout the 1990s and into 2000 towards the progressive feminisation of poverty in Ireland.

Key recommendation

Set clear targets to eliminate women's poverty in both the National Plan and in the National Anti Poverty Strategy.

- **by 2010 eliminate income poverty for households headed by women, namely lone parents, older people, women working in the home so that no female headed households are living below the 50% poverty line.**
- **by 2006, eliminate consistent poverty for women headed households.**

Using a rights based approach is critical to eliminating women's poverty. A strong feature of the NWCI consultation on the National Plan was the need to establish the following rights for women in order to address the structural causes and effects of women's poverty;

- **a right to an adequate and independent income,**
- **a right to accommodation,**
- **a right to accessible and women friendly healthcare,**
- **a right to childcare place for each child,**
- **a right to affordable and accessible education**

Data Strategy

Recommendation

- Adequate data collection systems on women living in poverty or at risk of poverty across all different social groupings and situations are required. A data strategy must be established within the context of NAPS which should include
 - the desegregation of data on gender and all the equality grounds
 - the collection of data on poverty including the NAPS themes for the various groups under the nine grounds.

Individual Rights

The underlying assumptions of the Irish social welfare system are based on patriarchal values concerning the role of women and men in society regarding, work, family and domestic responsibilities. This model of social welfare is referred to as the male breadwinner model as it emphasises the male role as the breadwinner and the women's role as homemakers i.e. wives, mothers and daughters. Consequently, the rights of women are derived from the rights and entitlements of men. The construct of the system is therefore based on the concept of gender inequality and this is reinforced through a range of policies to consolidate the male role as the breadwinner

and women's role as economical dependants.

The construction of the social welfare system in this gender-biased manner is a key factor in women's experience poverty and must inform the strategies to be pursued to combat and remove poverty amongst women. Reforming the system has commenced slowly. However the reforms to date have not challenged the fundamental concept of dependency and the male breadwinner model. Moving away from this model to one which considers both men and women as individuals with their own needs and resources must be central to moving women out of poverty and a prerequisite for gender equality.

Central to reforming the system must be a clear recognition of the caring work undertaken predominantly by women.

Recommendation

- The NWCI recommends the adoption of a proactive policy on the individualisation of the social welfare system. This will involve a phased approach to implementation of the following
 - the introduction of two adult rates for both spouses.
 - the introduction of full social insurance credits for those engaged in full time caring responsibilities and those participating in second chance education and training.
 - The development of a fully inclusive social insurance model of social welfare.

Income Adequacy

Social Welfare Payments

Rationale

The achievement and maintenance of an adequate income for women relying on social welfare is critical in enabling women to move out of poverty. Social welfare payments must be increased to, and maintained at, a sufficient level so that those reliant on these payments can participate fully in society. The recommendations of the PPF Benchmarking and Indexation Group have clearly set out how to achieve an adequate income standard for social welfare. These targets must be reached.

Recommendation

- Implement the recommendations of the PPF Benchmarking and Indexation Report.

Pensions

Rationale

The issue of adequate pensions is critical for older women. Pension levels are determined by the years spent in paid employment and as women have tended to work in sectors where occupational pensions are not the norm, the penalty for years spent engaged in caring work becomes very evident. Many older women remain dependent now either on non-contributory old-age pensions or on reduced rate contributory pensions because they looked after their families and were not entitled to pension credits for this work.

While recent Governments have taken welcome initiatives to enable older women to qualify for reduced pensions, these measures do not provide recognition of the invaluable contribution made to society by these women through their caring work. In the interests of equality for all, the social welfare system should be modified in a manner, which would recognise this unpaid contribution. Given the limited choices, which faced older women when they were young, and the societal assumptions that they would remain in caring work within the home, it is crucial that older women should not now be penalised by society. The introduction of retrospective pension credits would also offer a useful means of combating the higher risk of poverty faced by older women, as confirmed by the ESRI's Living in Ireland Survey.

Recommendation

- Extend pension credits to all women, including those of pension age, who have been rendered ineligible for full contributory old-age pensions by virtue of their caring responsibilities for children and older people.

Asylum Policy

Rationale

The current system of Direct Provision denies asylum seekers fundamental human rights. It is discriminatory and promotes the physical, economic and psychological marginalisation of asylum seekers. Such isolation is reinforced by a prohibition on work and training, through forced dependency and redundancy (Comhlámh, 2001). Women asylum seekers with babies and children face particular difficulties in feeding and caring for them adequately under such inappropriate circumstances. Women asylum seekers, who are alone, can feel particularly vulnerable and isolated.

Recommendation

- The NWCI calls for an immediate end to Direct Provision, so that all asylum seekers are treated in the same way as Irish citizens on social welfare.

Women with Disabilities

People with disabilities should be compensated in full on the extra costs connected with their disabilities. The impoverishment of disabled people is exacerbated by the frequent failure to recognise and address the additional cost-of-living expenses of impairment. Disabled people require higher incomes than non-disabled people to maintain the same living standards. There continues to be a significant absence of comprehensive information on the situation of women with disabilities in Ireland. Research in other countries shows that women with disabilities are more isolated from the larger socio-economic system than their male counterparts (NRB, 1994).

Recommendation

- The Department of Finance should undertake a large-scale study to estimate the prevalence of disability in relation to participation in order to estimate the future costs of disability for future budgets. In the longer term, a Cost of Disability payment should be established.

The issue of Child Poverty is addressed under the 'The Girl Child' however it is important to state that it is central to women's experience of poverty.

Education and Training of Women

Introduction

The current Government argument that the best route out of poverty is a job makes the issue of paid employment critical for women in poverty. While the draft plan includes a number of important recommendations concerning women and training, it does not yet secure women's access to training as a matter of right. Given the barriers faced by many women in accessing education and training, the NWCI calls on the Government to provide an analysis of female labour market disadvantage. This would recognise the structural inequalities, which have denied women access to the labour market, and the existing inadequacies in terms of childcare and eldercare support which continue to limit women's access even to available opportunities. Such an analysis would also offer recognition of the educational barriers which have been experienced by many women. Social class is recognised as a key contributory factor to educational disadvantage in Ireland.

Access to education is a key determinant of women's subsequent economic status. Research has shown that the more formal education a girl receives, the greater her likelihood of achieving a measure of financial independence and of participating in the labour force (**P. Conroy : *Reflecting at the Crossroads*, 2001**). However, many women in Ireland remain seriously educationally disadvantaged. Data dating from 1996 reveal that the education levels of those between 25 and 44 were lower than the OECD average, with only 54% of 35-44 year olds having completed upper secondary education (***Report of Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places, 1999***). The educational disadvantage experienced by older women has been confirmed by Ned Costello, Chairman of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, who has indicated that past under-provision in education has led to lower attainment levels, particularly among older women. In general, only one third of all Irish adults between 55 and 64 have completed upper secondary education. Furthermore, the OECD has found Ireland to have the greatest number of people at the lowest level of literacy, with the exception of Poland (***National Council on Ageing and Older People : Conference proceedings - employment and retirement among the over 55s: patterns, preferences and issues, 2001***).

The key issues which emerged from the NWCI consultation on education were those relating to increased access to community education, the need for more adequate resourcing of the community education sector and issues relating to accreditation and lifelong learning.

Community Education

Rationale

Community education plays a crucial role in supporting women's education and in targeting many of those from educationally disadvantaged groups. It is estimated that there are around 1,000 women's community education groups with participation levels ranging from 30,000 to 100,000 women annually (**ESRI : *Women returning to education, training and employment, (forthcoming)***). However, many community education groups remain under-resourced and under-valued within the education system.

There is a need for core funding for women's community-based education which would allow for continuity and security in the provision and delivery of essential educational services. Such core funding will require the establishment of an inter-departmental structure, bringing together government departments that currently have parallel responsibilities for funding education and education-related activities at community level: the Departments of Health and Children; Education and Science; Social, Community and Family Affairs; and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Education Equality Initiative is a welcome development but it needs to have its budget significantly increased and mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that successful EEI projects are mainstreamed as a matter of course.

Recommendations

Budget-line for Community Education

- Establish a publicly accountable community education budget-line with clear criteria for project and group selection to be widely disseminated. There should be a co-ordinated approach to funding women's community-based education (including their organisations' core costs). NWCI affiliates recommended the establishment of an inter-departmental structure which would cover, for example, materials, premises, childcare, mentoring systems and transport.

Ringfence funding for community education

- Ringfence 10% minimum of the budgets for community education for tackling practical barriers such as child/elder care and transport unless similar resources can be accessed via other financial supports.

Mainstream the Education Equality Initiative

- The Education Equality Initiative needs to be mainstreamed so that the key policy lessons emerging from the programme and its principal actions can be incorporated into mainstream policy from 2006 onwards.

Barriers to Women's Participation in Education

Rationale

Barriers to women's participation in education relate primarily to the economic disadvantage, and the under-resourcing of appropriate support services, particularly childcare, transport, mentoring, personal support and learning resources. However, women also face particular barriers due to the persistent of overly rigid accreditation systems which fail to offer due recognition to informal learning. NWCI affiliates were particularly anxious that progress be made by the Government on making the accreditation system more responsive to women's needs. Affiliates felt strongly that there should be a clearly defined right to lifelong education which would facilitate women's access to educational opportunities.

Recommendations

- There needs to be recognition of informal learning in gaining access to further education.
- Flexible systems of accreditation need to be developed for women's community-based education.
- There should be a fundamental right to lifelong education for all adults
- The necessary support (childcare, transport, mentoring etc.) should be provided for ALL women to facilitate access to further education.
- All asylum seekers should be given the right to participate in state-funded education and training opportunities at all levels.

Further Education Costs / Lifelong Learning

Rationale

It has been proven that a child's educational attainment is directly linked to that of his or her mother. Education represents one of the best ways of breaking the cycle of poverty for women. The Government has indicated its commitment to lifelong learning with the establishment of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning. If the Government is to be serious in its commitment to lifelong learning, which is a stated priority of the European Union, it needs to recognise and eliminate the major barriers which are still preventing many people from participating in further education. It remains prohibitively expensive for mature students to return to education. Women in a survey carried out in West Tallaght cited 'high costs' as their main reason for not returning to education.

Participation in education is particularly difficult for lone parents with caring responsibilities. However, the Waterford Student Mothers' Project provides an excellent model of how student mothers can be supported in education. The NWCI urges the Government to implement the recommendation in the National Economic and Social Forum's report on Lone Parents that this project should be mainstreamed.

Recommendations

Abolish fees

- Part-time and open distance learning fees to be abolished in line with criteria for non-payment of fees for people entering full-time on-site courses.
- A personal funding allowance should be established for young people and adults to support them to participate in further education.

Support for lone parents

- Lone parents should be assessed on their own means for a third-level grant from the age of 18.

Waterford Student Mothers' Project

- The Waterford Student Mothers' Project should be mainstreamed.

Rationale

NWCI affiliates considered that women continued to be unaware of educational opportunities in their local areas. They recommended the establishment of one-stop shops which would provide information to adults on education.

Recommendation

- The Government should develop a national framework of one-stop shops for adults wanting further information on education and training. A promotion campaign to support that with specific funding provisions to reach difficult-to-reach groups should also be provided.

Teaching Profession

Rationale

- Pauline Conroy has drawn attention to the continued failure of school management boards to appoint women to management positions despite the overwhelming dominance of women in teaching positions. (**P. Conroy: *Reflecting at the Crossroads, 2001***). NWCI affiliates called for action to be taken to increase the number of women in management positions.

Recommendation

- Develop mechanisms to increase appointments of women in management positions at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary levels).

Training

Rationale

Employment is vitally important if women are to be enabled to move out of poverty and to gain financial independence. Research by the ESRI on women returners, funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (forthcoming) estimates that there are approximately 500,000 women engaged in caring work or home duties who may decide at some stage to return to paid employment. However, the ESRI's study confirms that most enter low-paid, insecure employment such as cleaning, childcare and catering. There are complex factors influencing this trend towards downward mobility. However, what the ESRI has found is that women are often forced into low-paid, part-time jobs because of lower than average educational attainments and the need to reconcile paid work with their caring responsibilities. Women who make a successful transition back into paid employment tend to be those who are younger and have spent less time out of the workforce.

The ESRI's research findings are borne out in the experience of NWCI affiliates, many of whom were former NOW projects providing education and training programmes for women returners. They have consistently reiterated the need for comprehensive supports for women returning to paid employment. Affiliates consider that many women returners require education and training to provide them with the skills necessary to access sustainable and well-paid employment. However, certain fundamental obstacles continue to prevent women returners from moving into employment. These include the existence of barriers such as the live register blocking participation in labour market programmes and the absence of childcare and eldercare supports. NWCI affiliates called, in particular, for the Government to take action to eliminate all remaining barriers preventing women from accessing training, in line with the recommendations of the *Report on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities*.

Recommendation

- To give women equal access to all education and training, including VTOS and FAS courses. This particularly applies to women who are full-time carers.

National Support Programme for Women Returners

Rationale

NWCI affiliates considered that a national support programme should be established which would assist women returners in making the transition to education, training and employment. The existing FÁS Return to Work Programme was not considered adequate for this purpose. The establishment of a mainstream support programme of this nature was already recommended by the NESF in 2000 (**NESF : *Alleviating Labour Shortages, 2000***).

Recommendation

- The Government should introduce a national mainstream education and training support programme for women returners as recommended by the NESF (Alleviating Labour Market Shortages 2001) to provide women wishing to enter or return to work with the skills necessary to access sustainable employment. This should include childcare and eldercare supports to enable women in situations of disadvantage to avail of this programme.

Women and Health

Introduction

Health has been identified as a major priority for NWCI affiliates throughout the country. The key issues on which they want action by the Government include the extension of cancer screening programmes to all women, greater participation in decision-making in relation to their own health choices and a recognition by the Government of the importance of complementary therapies and of primary health care.

The NWCI affiliates wish the Government to move to a definition of health that includes “ women’s physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing at all stages of the lifecycle.” They feel it crucial that the medical system move to a more holistic model of care. They want greater funding into the area of primary care and, in this regard, demand that the Government resource nurse-run clinics. With regard to maternity services, they support a model which emphasises the importance of midwives as the primary caretakers of normal birth, with obstetricians in a back-up, emergency role. This model was advocated in the ***Report of the Maternity Services Review Group to the North Eastern Health Board, 2001*** which recommended that maternity services should deliver a woman and family-centred approach to care, in partnership with the woman and advocated a community-based, midwife-managed care model.

Screening Programmes

Rationale

Breast cancer is the most common non-skin cancer among women in Ireland. One in 13 Irish women will develop the disease in their lifetime (**National Cancer Registry, Ireland**). Irish women’s risk of developing breast cancer is 20 –30% above the EU average (**Women’s Health Council : *Picture of Health, 1999***). Irish women under 64 are more likely to die of breast cancer than their EU counterparts but are less likely to receive preventative screening. NWCI affiliates are particularly concerned at the age limits which have been imposed on the current screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer. Older women, in particular, feel that their risk of developing the disease has not been adequately recognised and consider the current programmes to be ageist. Similarly, NWCI affiliates have demanded that age-appropriate screening programmes be devised for younger women in recognition of the risk which they also run of developing breast and cervical cancer.

Recommendation

- Age appropriate free cancer screening programmes for all women – (e.g. mammograms, nurse-run breast and cervical examination clinics & education).

Equity of Access to Treatment / Medical Cards

Rationale

The link between poverty and ill-health is well established. Poverty is known to contribute to poor health through inadequate environments and poor housing. Being poor also makes it more difficult to access or afford health care and reduces the opportunity for adopting a healthy lifestyle. The current low cut-off point for medical cards is causing serious difficulties for many families, with women, in particular, being forced to choose between their own health and that of their children. The NWCI affiliates felt strongly that medical cards for all children would both improve children's health and indirectly contribute to women's health through increasing the amount of household income available for lower income families. However, they also considered that the Government should urgently take action to ensure equity of access to healthcare. The inequity of a two-tier health-system has been highlighted in the forthcoming National Economic and Social Forum report (**NESF : *Equity of Access to Healthcare, (forthcoming)***). It was in this context that they demanded medical cards for everyone by 2010.

Recommendations

- Medical cards for all children (i.e. under 18 years) by the year 2005.
- In the short-term, medical card limits should be set at levels which ensure the eligibility of those on the minimum wage.
- Medical cards for EVERYONE by year 2010.

Holistic Model of Health Care

Recommendations

- The Government should ensure the provision of information on, and the promotion of good physical and mental health across a woman's lifespan through a holistic model (e.g. diet, exercise, reproductive health, menopause) with practical supports through :
 - Walk-in, accessible, nurse-run, women's health clinics with transport for rural women
 - Education in schools, community and the family.
 - Supports and funding for women-run organisations providing peer and intergenerational information and experience (particularly on the menopause).
 - Free counselling and mental health services for all and the promotion of mental health
 - Increased education, information and services regarding sexual health
 - Implementation of breast-feeding support and education with family-friendly workplaces
 - Increased nutritional information, education and supports relating to dieting.
 - Increased supports / education relating to exercise and women's participation in sports

Violence against Women

Defining Violence against Women

Rationale

It is imperative that all known forms of violence against women are included when defining the problem. The definition contained in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) states:

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Only a comprehensive definition can adequately inform measures to eradicate all forms of this human rights abuse. The safety of women must be held as paramount at all times.

Recommendations

- The preamble on violence against women must use the definition contained in the *UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993).
- Prostitution and the related issue of trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation, should be a focus of attention by the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women and there should be representation of an organisation working with women involved in prostitution on the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women.

Resourcing the Community and Voluntary Sector providing services to women experiencing violence

Rationale

Community and Voluntary organizations providing crisis and support services to women experiencing male violence identify funding as the substantive barrier to carrying out their work.

Recommendations

- Increase core funding (linked to clear criteria developed in conjunction with the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women) to existing community and voluntary services (ie refuges, rape crisis centres, community-based services and transitional housing) so as to enable them to be fully operational.
- Develop initiatives in areas where service gaps are identified in the forthcoming research commissioned by the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women (Kelleher Associates).
- Implement other key needs identified in the Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women.

Reform of the Legal System

Rationale

Research commissioned by Women's Aid (1999) looked at the effectiveness of the application and enforcement of Irish domestic violence legislation. It looked at the response of the legal system in offering protection to victims of domestic violence and the accountability of perpetrators. The research highlighted that when a victim is at greatest risk, the legal system does not always afford her protection. It also highlighted the lack of accountability for this crime in sanctions to perpetrators - less than 3 per cent. A pilot domestic violence intervention project is currently being supported by the Department of Justice. The project works to offer protection and support to victims and to ensure the accountability of perpetrators of the crime of domestic violence. The National Domestic Violence Intervention Project, together with Women's Aid Dublin, Women's Aid Dundalk and Clare Haven House, have been working on the implementation of this integrated, interagency approach.

Recommendation

- The Department of Justice should provide funding for the National Domestic Violence Intervention Project to work within the legal system.

Public Awareness on Violence against Women

Rationale

Every woman needs to be aware of her right to live in safety from male violence. Every boy, girl, man and woman needs to be reminded that violence against women is a serious crime that cannot be tolerated by society.

Recommendation

- An extensive public awareness campaign on the continuum of violence in society, and informed by a power and control analysis, should be conducted. This campaign should be on a similar scale to that conducted on drink driving. Such a public awareness campaign should also challenge the misrepresentation of the proportion of male-female violence to that of

female-male violence in intimate relationships, thus providing correct information: that men are the perpetrators of violence in intimate relations over 90% of the time.

Violence against Women and Poverty

Rationale

In situations of domestic violence, most violent and abusive men will move to cut off and take control over, any possible avenue towards independence, choice and action of women with whom they are in a relationship. When the abuser chooses to use an unfair proportion of an already inadequate family income, the deprivation, the stress and the lack of choice are compounded many times over. Two main obstacles to leaving a violent and abusive partner, identified in Women's Aid research (1995), were material; women had not where to go and they were financially dependent on their abuser.

Recommendations

- Provide resources to groups working to address poverty and social exclusion experienced by women, to enable them to develop appropriate responses to male violence against women.
- Establish targeted support measures integrated into education, training and workplaces for women who have or who are experiencing violence and who wish to participate in the workforce.

Resourcing services to ensure minority ethnic women experiencing violence can access safety

Rationale

Minority ethnic women (including Traveller women) experiencing male violence have a right to culturally appropriate and accessible services.

Recommendation

- Organisations providing services to women experiencing male violence should be given additional resources to ensure their services are culturally appropriate and accessible.

Adequate response to violence against women by the Garda Síochána

To ensure the implementation of guidelines for Garda responses to cases of violence against women, the following is recommended:

Recommendations

- Training of all Gardaí on their correct use
- Specific timeframes for their implementation
- Independent monitoring and evaluation of their implementation by a consortium of community and voluntary service providers
- Allocate a trained, female Garda designated to the issue of violence against women every district.

Data Collection

Recommendation

- A dedicated budget-line should be provided for research to provide gender-disaggregated data on violence and qualitative data on the nature and extent of violence against women.

Rationale

In order to develop services that respond appropriately to the needs of Traveller and other minority ethnic women who experience violence, an understanding is required of their needs in this regard. Information needs to be gathered through all stages of involvement with services, including access, residency and outcome. The appropriate way to collect this information is to ensure that it is clearly done within an equality and human rights framework. Such a system needs to be developed and implemented so that information the ethnic background of all clients can be collected in an appropriate, sensitive and effective manner. Training of service providers who implement the monitoring system is central, as well as promoting an information strategy on the value and need for such an exercise.

Recommendation

- Organisations providing services to women experiencing male violence should be resourced to develop, implement and evaluate an ethnic data collection system of clients who come in contact with their services in order to develop appropriate responses to the needs of clients from minority ethnic communities.

Violence against Disabled Women

Rationale

Women's Aid held a consultation in 2001 on the feasibility of conducting research into violence against disabled women. The study highlights many of the additional barriers encountered by disabled women in accessing safety and protection from violence and abuse. The study recommends ways of progressing and researching the issue, as well as identifying issues that could begin to be addressed in the short term.

Recommendations

- Action research should be conducted to: explore the experience of disabled women who have been subjected to violence and abuse; examine disabled women's help-seeking strategies and the barriers to this; examine current responses of relevant services and agencies and recommend a good practice model of response to disabled women experiencing violence.
- Provide resources to facilitate work at a national and policy level that will ensure that the immediate safety and protection needs of disabled women experiencing violence and abuse.

- Service providers working on violence against women should be resourced to make their services more accessible to women with disabilities both in the short and longer term.

Violence against Immigrant Women

Rationale

Immigration policy must protect the rights to safety of immigrant women who experience male violence in intimate relationships.

Recommendation

- Explore the policy implications for women of vulnerable legal status who are experiencing violence in intimate relationships. Immigration policy must ensure that women do not find themselves in situations where they have to choose between maintaining their legal status and seeking personal safety from domestic violence. Women who decide to leave their partners may be forced underground by their undocumented status, and become even more vulnerable to exploitative labour (European Parliament Working Paper, 1995).

Education and Awareness Programmes for Young People

Rationale

Education programmes for young people which are relevant to the issue of violence against women have an important role to play in preventing violence and abuse in a new generation, and in developing a general awareness around issues of gender equality (Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women, 1997). Research conducted in by Women's Aid in 2001 (Teenage Tolerance) highlighted the confusion amongst young people about the meaning of rape, violence and consent, which raises serious concerns for these young people. A staggering 19% of young women and 34% of young men did not think being forced to have sex is rape.

Recommendation

- A line of funding should be provided for specific education and awareness programmes for boys and girls in which gender identity, gender relations and the continuum of violence in society are explored and the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to prevent violence against women in future generations are provided.

Women's Access to Legal Services

Recommendation

- Women experiencing male violence should have access to legal services to ensure their protection from this crime and that appropriate sanctions against perpetrators are put in place.

Trafficking in Women for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation

Rationale

Trafficking of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation is an inherently clandestine activity. Women who are trafficked are in extremely vulnerable situations, often in fear for their lives. Victims of trafficking find it very difficult to disclose such crime and access safety. Thus, while it is difficult to provide a precise picture of the prevalence of trafficking of women to Ireland for the purposes of sexual exploitation, certain NGOs are aware that such activity clearly does exist; they have come in contact with and have provided assistance to women who have been trafficked for such purposes. The crime of trafficking, which is inextricably linked with prostitution, must be tackled. Concrete measures must be adopted to fight the phenomenon of trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation, both by enforcing appropriate legislation and by developing preventative measures, so as to ensure adequate prosecution, protection and prevention mechanisms.

Recommendation

- Implement the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

Armed Conflict

Introduction

During its consultations on the draft National Plan, the NWCI's affiliates highlighted the trauma experienced by women fleeing from situations of armed conflict. They expressed their continuing concern at the manner in which the Government denies asylum-seekers their human rights, calling for an end to the system of direct provision, and demanding that asylum-seekers who had been in Ireland for over 6 months and awaiting a decision on their application should be given the right to work. The Government, despite its commitment to use gender-sensitive interviewers, has not introduced a comprehensive gender-sensitive asylum-policy which addresses the particular needs and experiences of women and thus ensures their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Concern was also expressed by NWCI affiliates at the low percentage of women in conflict resolution situations both in respect of Northern Ireland and internationally. They called for greater female participation in conflict resolution. They also expressed particular concern at the Government's decision to offer use of Irish airports to the US military action against Afghanistan and demanded that future decisions with implications for Irish neutrality be taken only following consultation with the electorate.

Sexual Abuse / Violence as War Crimes

Rationale

International recognition of systematic sexual abuse and violence against women and girls in armed conflicts as a war crime is relatively recent. The systematic rape of women and girls from opposing or minority communities, the sexual enslavement of women in camps are being increasingly recognised as crimes against humanity in international war tribunals.

Recommendation

- Provide humanitarian relief from Ireland specifically to offer support to women victims of war. In particular, the Irish Government must work to strengthen international support for women in armed conflict areas, including the provision of witness protection in war crime tribunals.

Women in peace-keeping roles

Recommendation

- Activities that aim to increase the number of women in decision-making in conflict resolution must be supported. Women should be included in key positions in conflict mediation in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

Gender Sensitive Asylum Policy

Rationale

Women and children seeking refugee have the right to an asylum application process which is gender sensitive. This process starts with the nature in which the asylum seeker is received upon arrival into the country, to the provision of information on the asylum process; gender sensitive treatment by all personnel with whom she comes in contact; and the use of gender-sensitive criteria by appropriately trained and informed personnel in determining the outcome of her application. The Government must implement to a broader gender-sensitive asylum policy which recognises the particular circumstances of women who seek asylum. To date the Government has failed to adopt gender guidelines to assist in the refugee determination process. This failure is particularly disappointing given the steps taken to recognize gender-based persecution in the Refugee Act. The Irish Council for Civil Liberties Women's Committee has issued a Statement of Best Practice concerning refugee women and has pointed to the particular problems faced by many refugee women in establishing credibility.

Recommendation

- Develop and implement gender-guidelines which refer to every aspect of the asylum application process, as well as to the reception and integration of asylum seekers in Ireland. (ICCL Women's Committee, *Women and the Refugee Experience: Towards a Statement of Best Practice*). The correct implementation of these guidelines should be ensured by the use of targets and independent monitoring and evaluation.

Appropriate counselling / services for women asylum seekers who have experienced trauma and gender-based torture

Recommendation

- Recognising the trauma experienced by refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing situations of armed conflict and oppression, the Government should provide free, culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive counseling and other services to women asylum seekers, especially for women who have been subjected to gender-based torture.

English language courses

Recommendation

- Provide gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate, English language courses to women asylum seekers and refugee with appropriate childcare support.

Irish neutrality and the use of Irish airports and airspace

Rationale

A resolution of the NWCI's annual general meeting in 2001 called on the Irish government to withdraw its offer of Irish airports and airspace for the use of foreign military aircraft and the transport of military personnel and equipment to facilitate the war in Afghanistan.

Recommendation

- Consultation is needed regarding the use of Irish airports. A democratic decision is necessary on whether to support situations of armed conflict. Therefore future decisions with implications for Irish neutrality should be taken only following consultation with the electorate.

The Arms Trade and its Funding

Rationale

At times, Ireland has taken a leadership role in supporting conflict resolution internationally. However, this role is contradicted by, for example, the additional military spending resulting from joining the Partnership for Peace, and failing to hold a referendum on PFP membership.

Recommendation

- The Irish Government should take leadership against the arms trade and its funding.

Promoting a critical analysis on the causes of armed conflict

- A critical analysis of the factors that contribute to armed conflict, using development education, should be incorporated into school curricula.

Women and the Economy

Introduction

Women have historically experienced a high degree of economic inequality in Ireland, principally because they were excluded from the workforce, expected to assume an unpaid caring role and because the instruments of wealth-creation (property, wealth and education) remained overwhelmingly male-dominated. While a series of EU directives and Government policy has sought to address the situation of women in the paid workforce, its narrow focus has resulted in the perpetuation of inequalities in relation to women and the economy. Women's unpaid, caring role remains unrecognised, unvalued and unmeasured, with such women denied basic entitlements in terms of social insurance and pension credits.

Similarly, in the current economic structure, certain fundamental problems exist even for women in paid employment as they remain at higher risk of low pay and insecure employment than men. According to the Women and Poverty in Ireland study, women face a higher risk of being in low paid employment than men and 30% of women employees are below the low pay threshold, in comparison with 18% of men. Furthermore, the absence of adequate childcare makes it difficult for many women to access full-time employment. In addition, women returners face a series of barriers such as the need for education and training, for information and psychological supports if they are to avoid the trap of low-paid, unsustainable employment.

The absence of adequate childcare and family-friendly provisions make it difficult for most women to achieve career progression. The management culture has been slow to change in most areas of the economy – only 9% of Secretaries-General and 12% of Assistant Secretaries within the civil service are female, while only 3% of managing directors and 21% of senior managers are women. As a consequence, given the preponderance of men in business and senior public sector roles, economic policy is determined almost wholly by men. Furthermore, 90% of the land of Ireland is held by men, exacerbating the exclusion of women from wealth-creation in this country.

The issues raised within the NWCI consultation of its affiliates reflected the complexity of the relationship between women and the economy, prioritising childcare, family-friendly policies, women's unpaid caring roles and the issue of career progression.

Family-friendly policies

Rationale

The reconciliation of work and family life is critical to the achievement of gender equality in Irish society and, in particular, of equal participation in employment. The absence of family friendly policies in employment makes it more difficult for women to remain in paid work, to have real choices

regarding work options or to improve their labour market position with regard to pay and promotional opportunities. As Ireland continues to lag behind its EU partners in the range of family-friendly entitlements offered to families, the introduction of payment for parental leave would be a first step in recognising parents' caring responsibilities. However, in the long-term, the Government needs to recognise that the principal means of encouraging more women into employment is through the provision of adequate parental leave entitlements. The NWCi wishes to remind the Government that parents in Germany, France, Spain, Austria, Finland and Sweden all receive more than 18 months' leave. Furthermore, parental leave is offered on a paid basis in most EU countries (Austria, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden and Belgium (the latter in certain circumstances)).

Recommendation

- Introduce a payment for parental leave on the same level as for Maternity Benefit.
- Extend the duration of parental leave to one year, in line with average EU entitlements.

Unpaid Work

Rationale

NWCi affiliates feel strongly that the Government has failed either to recognise or value the contribution made by women in terms of unpaid caring work. They demanded that unpaid work be measured through Time Use Surveys and recorded in National Satellite Accounts.

Recommendations

- Unpaid caring work should be measured and valued.
- Women should be supported in their choices to enter paid employment or to do caring work
- More funding should be put into the measurement of unpaid work, for instance, through comprehensive time-use surveys.
- The means-test should be abolished for the Carer's Allowance.

Career Progression

Rationale

The issue of career progression emerged as a priority for NWCi affiliates. While recognising the structural barriers which prevent many women from progressing within their chosen careers, affiliates considered that more information was needed both on the glass ceiling and to ascertain whether or not women are reluctant to enter management roles.

Recommendations

- Research should be undertaken to ascertain whether or not women are reluctant to enter management roles and to investigate the impact of the glass ceiling, including on women in education.

- Supports and encouragement should be put in place for women to go forward for leadership roles and jobs.

Social Insurance Entitlements / Pensions

Rationale

While the issue of individualisation has already been raised in the section on women and poverty, NWCi affiliates raised the issue of social insurance credits repeatedly in discussions on women and the economy. They considered that it was a matter of economic equality that women's contribution in respect of caring work be recognised formally by the State. One key issue which emerged was that of the PRSI situation of women working in family businesses and on family farms. Affiliates felt strongly that the anomaly whereby women working in family businesses or on family farms are not entitled to social insurance credits for their work should be resolved as a matter of priority.

Recommendation

- Family businesses should be registered in both partners' names – women in family businesses (including family farms) should be entitled to PRSI and pensions.

Low Pay / Gender Pay Gap

Rationale

While welcoming the Government commitment to undertake research on male-female wage differentials, NWCi affiliates considered that action should be taken to eliminate the gender pay gap. In this regard, they recommended that the Government examine pay relativities between different jobs to ensure that cultural assumptions no longer determine the value of women's work and women's skills. They also attached priority to Government action to establish progression routes out of economic dependence and low pay.

Recommendations

- The Government should undertake research to look at pay differences between different jobs.
- It should take urgent action to eliminate the gender pay gap.
- It should establish progression routes out of economic dependence for many women who are in poverty traps.

Asylum-seekers' right to work

Rationale

NWCi affiliates repeated throughout the consultation process that asylum-seekers should be given the right to work. This emerged as a key priority and has been signalled elsewhere in this submission.

Recommendation

- Asylum seekers who have been in the country for more than six months and are awaiting a decision on their application should be granted the right to work.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

Introduction

The indicators provided in Part II of the draft National Plan for Women themselves reveal how much progress will need to be made before women achieve parity in participation in decision-making in Ireland. They confirm that only 20% of Government Ministers are women, only 13% of TDs and 15% of councillors. Furthermore, as research commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform confirms, there has been no improvement in the percentage of women elected to the Dáil since 1992 or in the percentage of women elected as local councillors since 1991. (**Y. Galligan : *The development of mechanisms to monitor progress in achieving gender equality in Ireland, 2000***). As Dr. Pauline Conroy observes, “at this rate of change, equality of Oireachtas representation will be achieved in the year 2036.” (**P. Conroy : *Reflecting at the crossroads, 2001***).

It is critical that the Government should take action to increase women’s participation in political decision-making. Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam specifically requires each national Government to take action to eliminate discrimination on grounds of gender while article 137 of the treaty mandates national authorities to combat social exclusion (***An Equality Authority position on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2001***). However, the Government is equally obliged to respect the democratic principle by ensuring that barriers to participation by women in politics are removed. As Monique Leijenaar has stated “Political participation necessitates the articulation and defence of the interests of the group or groups that are represented.” (**M. Leijenaar : *How to create a gender balance in political decision-making, 1997***). If women are not supported to participate in politics, then the interests of women will not be represented adequately. Furthermore, given the heterogeneity of women, it is both impossible and undemocratic for token women to articulate the needs of other female interest groups.

The NWCi’s affiliates have consistently expressed their concern both at the low level of female participation in national politics and at their exclusion from local decision-making structures. Both research commissioned by NWCi affiliates which will be launched on International Women’s Day (***Áit ag an mBord, 2002***) and the NWCi’s Millennium Project which ascertained the views of affiliates on local development have highlighted the need for supports to be put in place to encourage greater female participation in local decision-making structures. One of the key findings of the Millennium Project was the level of powerlessness experienced by women with regard to decisions concerning their local communities. They recommended that local authorities consult with women’s groups, that they undertake information campaigns to inform people about local power structures and that they include female representation on key local committees. (**NWCi : *Building solidarity – women and local development, 2000***).

Research being undertaken by the NWCI on women's participation in politics has identified effective EU models which could be emulated by Ireland. In France, a parity law was passed in 2000 which determines the level of funding received by political parties according to their record in achieving parity of representation by men and women in certain elections. This has led to a clear improvement in female participation rates in elections covered by the new parity law. The NWCI is calling on the Government to introduce a system of parity democracy on the lines of the French model since such action is necessary to bring about women's equal participation in politics.

The NWCI is also calling on the Government to take urgent action to ensure that all Departments and State agencies observe the 40:60 gender balance strictly when appointing candidates to State boards.

Recommendations

- Introduce a gender equality clause in the Constitution
- Ensure that political party funding is dependent on gender balance in all party structures & policies
- Introduce an annual report of figures at all levels of decision-making
- To ensure their right to effective participation and self-representation, establish a designated budget line for the support of:
 - disabled women's groups
 - minority ethnic women's groups
 - women refugee and asylum seekers' groups.
- Ensure the rigid application of 40:60 gender balance on State Boards.
- Resource the NGO Coalition on Violence against Women.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

Introduction

“A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions include [...] monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organisations and community organisations from the grassroots upwards.” (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 201)

The introduction of gender proofing of measures included in the National Development Plan has begun the process of developing a gender perspective in policy formulation and project selection. However, progress on gender proofing has been uneven across Government Departments and State bodies. Where Departments have resisted this process, their record of reporting on gender issues has been poor. As the Beijing Platform for Action recognised, there is an urgent need for political level co-ordination of gender proofing, to ensure that Departments comply fully with current requirements and that the proofing system is extended to all Government decisions. While the existing Gender Equality Unit within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has worked assiduously to provide information and support to Departments on gender proofing in the National Development Plan, it does not have the authority to force Departments to comply with obligations regarding gender equality. Similarly, it has not been given institutional powers to ensure that reporting on gender beyond superficial statements. The review of poverty proofing by the National Economic and Social Council has also confirmed the need for political level leadership and senior civil service support for the effective implementation of proofing systems (**NESC, 2001**).

If progress is to be made to eliminate existing structural inequalities with regard to gender, the Dáil needs also to re-assume a more proactive monitoring role in ensuring that the needs and interests of women are addressed. It should also have a monitoring role in ensuring that current initiatives lead to a real reduction in the level of inequality experienced by women.

The Beijing Platform for Action envisaged proactive involvement of NGOs and community-based women’s organisations in working together to eliminate inequality. There is also an urgent need for support for civil society in helping to overcome inequality through education, information, support and networking for women. Women’s groups can play an important role in monitoring progress on equality both at national and local level. However, most non-governmental groups continue to be seriously under-resourced - research commissioned by the NWCI in 2001 confirms that 64% of women’s groups are surviving on less than £1,000 per year. It is impossible for many groups to plan a programme of activities in circumstances where they are forced to operate effectively without real funding. These groups play a vital

role in supporting their local communities through a diverse range of activities. If women's groups are to be resourced adequately and, if civil society is to be supported, as was recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government needs to establish a dedicated budget-line for that purpose.

Recommendations

- Extend the system of gender proofing to all Government decisions
- Redefine a definition of gender-proofing & gender-auditing
- Establish a comprehensive gender equality monitoring mechanism which would include :
 - A Minister at Cabinet level acting as chair
 - Full participation of senior civil servants with responsibility and authority for implementation of Government policy
 - Formal links to key mainstream agencies and other relevant bodies
 - Specific targets, indicators and review procedures for progressing and measuring gender equality.
- Re-establish a dedicated Women's Rights Oireachtas Committee
- Establish a budget-line in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform which would allow for multi-annual funding of women's groups of annual grants of £5,000.

Human Rights of Women

While the Equal Status and Employment Equality Acts are welcome, much more proactive action is needed by the Government to promote diversity in Ireland and to eliminate discrimination. Women who are particularly likely to experience discrimination include lone mothers, older women, homeless women, women experiencing male violence, lesbian women, ethnic minority women including Traveller women, refugees and asylum-seekers, women with caring responsibilities, women with crisis pregnancies, women with disabilities, women in prostitution and women prisoners. Women are faced with multiple barriers to civil, political and socio-economic rights.

A human rights framework assumes all rights are interdependent, and it seeks to address multiple barriers at a variety of intersections.

Using elements contained in Article 1 of CEDAW and CERD as a starting point, **discrimination is:**

- any **distinction, exclusion or restriction**
- made on the basis of **race, ethnicity, colour, descent, nationality** (CERD) and **gender** (CEDAW)
- as it intersects with **sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, caste, class and other status**
- which has the **effect** (regardless of having been intended or unintended) or **purpose**
- of impairing or nullifying the **recognition, enjoyment or exercise,**
- on the **basis of equality**
- of **human rights and fundamental freedoms** in all fields (civil, political, economic, cultural, social, public and private).

Locating an intersectional perspective in the human rights context provides tools for realizing the interdependence of rights in a variety of contexts. For example:

- Achieving civil and political rights depends on realising economic, social and cultural rights (ie we cannot secure meaningful equality without abolishing poverty).
- Achieving meaningful ethnic and racial justice depends on guaranteeing gender equality, eliminating homophobia and xenophobia, and transforming society to respond fully and respectfully to those who are differently-abled.

The Irish Government continues to resist progress towards a rights-based approach to entitlements. It resisted the incorporation of the European Charter on Fundamental Rights into the Treaty of Nice. It has also resisted incorporating a rights-based approach to the current Disability Bill. The NWCi demands a revised bill, which would provide the fundamental *right* for

disabled people to participate in a meaningful way in the social and economic life of Ireland. NWCi affiliates asked, in particular, that the Government should view human rights abuses as a major factor when making collective decisions at EU and international level. They also asked that the Irish Government should support the UN Protocol on Trafficking and promote it at EU level

Recommendations

- Move beyond single-issue frameworks, using an intersectional approach in the human rights context designed to inform strategies to help *all groups* secure an adequate standard of living and reach their full potential.

In their consultation, NWCi affiliates called on the Government to recognise and legislate for and promote the following rights:

- Women's human rights to equal pay and equal career prospects and their right to State support for quality childcare
- An end to direct provision and dispersal and the right of asylum-seekers and refugees to have information within the asylum process
- The implementation of a system of individualisation of the tax and social welfare systems – women should be treated as people in their own right in the tax and social welfare systems
- Right of women to be protected from violence in their home environment
- Right of Travelling Community and Gypsies to have their culture recognised as a human right

Childcare

The NWCI undertook a comprehensive consultation of its members on the issue of childcare in 2001 – key priorities arising from that consultation have been included in this submission, given their significance to NWCI affiliates. It is considered that the existing commitments in Part I of the draft National Plan for Women will not adequately address the current childcare crisis. If capacity is to be increased, supply must not be sourced exclusively through private providers but supported through a comprehensive, child and parent focused model.

Supply of Subsidised Childcare

Rationale

The rights of children and parents to affordable, accessible quality childcare should be recognised and supported by the state. In exercising those rights parents should be enabled to choose the most appropriate childcare to meet the needs of their children. Childcare has a contribution to make towards combating poverty and must be designed so to ensure equality amongst children and families, equality amongst men and women and support of quality regulated childcare services.

In our view, this involves a two-pronged approach;

- a subsidy to parents for childcare costs
- a range of facilities to meet the variety of children's needs in a manner that prioritises access and affordability for those living on low incomes.

The majority of Government support for childcare should be invested in the development of supply so that every child has access to a childcare place. This would involve;

- Subsidisation of childcare by the state through a mixed delivery of childcare (community based, public, small scale private and home based care) for childcare places for all children.
- Childcare places for families on social welfare, in education and training and those on low incomes should receive additional subsidisation.
- Childcare costs would therefore be on a sliding scale and directly relate to parents' ability to pay.
- The NAPS should establish a target that by 2007 all children of parents in education, training and employment will have access to an affordable, quality childcare place.
- The diversity of families should be recognised in the development of childcare facilities, training of childcare workers, provision of materials used in childcare settings and in the provision of supports for young mothers.

This policy of subsidisation of supply must be central to supply side policies. Such policies have already been successfully developed in other EU

countries such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark which enjoy a high rate of female participation in the labour-force.

Women and the Media

Introduction

Little progress has been achieved on improving the involvement or portrayal of women in the media. NWCI affiliates considered the media, at editorial level in particular, to have a low level of interest in their work and activity. They expressed particular concerns in relation to the exploitative portrayal of violence against women, ageism, ease of access to pornography and the negative portrayal of refugees and asylum-seekers. The NWCI wishes to express its concern at the weakness of commitments outlined in Part I of the draft National Plan. It reiterates the need for leadership by the Department of Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht and the Islands in addressing the inequalities which have been experienced by women both in terms of their portrayal in the media and their representation in decision-making in this area.

Recommendations

- The NWCI recommends that the Department of Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht and the Islands develop a comprehensive strategy regarding women and the media between now and 2005.

- The NWCI calls for the establishment of a statutory Press Council to oversee & monitor all aspects of the media in Ireland including
 - Education & training of media professionals (incorporating a compulsory feminist module)
 - Ensuring equal representation in the media at levels where news value decisions are made
 - Promoting a gender equality perspective with regard to the portrayal of young women, girls and older women so as to eliminate dehumanising images and promote diversity.

Women and the Environment

Introduction

While a process of gender proofing has been undertaken on environmental measures included within the National Development Plan, an overall gender perspective has not been integrated into planning with regard to the environment. Links between high levels of pollution and health problems such as breast cancer and asthma need to be researched and addressed. Research is also needed on the gender dimension of housing.

The need for a gender perspective on environmental issues is borne out by recent research on one particular area – that of women and fuel poverty. A recent large-scale survey by UCD to identify social groups most suffering from fuel poverty in Ireland between 1994 and 2001 found that the burden of fuel poverty in Ireland is borne disproportionately by certain social groups, many of whom are women. These include: widowed persons, lone pensioners, lone parents, those who work in the home, and those with a large number of dependent children. It also found an association between fuel poverty and ill-health (JD Healy : *Women and Fuel Poverty in Ireland, 2002*).

One of the NWCI's affiliates' key concerns was that of decision-making in relation to the environment. The NWCI's Millennium Project's research on women and local development confirmed women's sense of exclusion from decision-making on issues relating to their communities (**NWCI : *Building solidarity – women and local development, 2001***). During the consultation process for the National Plan for Women, NWCI affiliates called for mechanisms to be developed which would allow for greater consultation and participation by community women's groups in planning and development at a local level. In this regard, they recommended that organisations addressing issues related to women and the environment need to be adequately supported.

While the existing commitments in Part I of the draft National Plan promise welcome improvements in terms of safety and disability access to public transport, women need a much-improved public transport system. The issue of access for rural women to public transport needs to be addressed. Furthermore, a voucher system needs to be put in place which would permit older people to avail of their entitlement to public transport.

Recommendations

- Establish a mechanism by which community groups can participate more meaningfully in decisions relating to their environment, for instance on issues such as waste management, the ratio of public spaces and playgrounds to housing density, public transport and disability access.
- Undertake an eco-audit to look at overarching themes such as the relationship between culture and the environment, economy and environment and the built environment and work management
- Review and increase targets for social housing in the NDP.

- Establish a voucher system so that older people in rural areas can avail of their entitlement to public transport.
- Undertake research on the gender dimension of housing and on the link between environment and health.

The Girl Child

Introduction

While the National Children's Strategy offers a significant framework in which to advance children's rights, girls' rights continue currently to be neglected with little recognition of their experience of gender inequality.

Children in Ireland are almost twice as likely to be poor as adults. Child poverty in Ireland one of the highest in Europe affecting between one-quarter and one third of Irish children. Ireland has a severe problem of child poverty, the results of the research on **Child Poverty in Ireland** shows that 26% of all children under the age of 18yrs are living below the 60% income poverty line. NWCI affiliates, accordingly, strongly considered that a target should be introduced, as recommended by the Community and Voluntary Pillar in the Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy that the elimination of child poverty should become a target of Government policy.

They also recommended significant increases in child benefit to address child poverty. Child benefit should be targeted to meet the real costs of rearing a child with regard to costs of food, nutrition, clothing, education, health, recreation and general development costs.

One of the other key recommendations which emerged consistently in the NWCI's consultation of its members was the need for greater action within the educational system to challenge gender inequality and stereotyping. Supports were called for to support girls in taking cross-gender educational choices.

Recommendations

- Establish a benchmark for child minimum income support to be paid within Child Benefit.
- An analysis of the causes of armed conflict should be incorporated into school curricula
- The Government (Department of Education) should take responsibility for raising awareness of gender dimensions in the socialisation of children.
- Cross-gender choices should be supported – positive actions should be undertaken to encourage girls' participation in male-dominated areas.
- A gender component should be integrated into all courses at 3rd level, not just in Women's Studies

Conclusion

The level of enthusiasm demonstrated by women throughout Ireland confirms that they see this draft National Plan for Women as a vital opportunity to achieve structural change and to eliminate the inequalities which are still experienced by women in Ireland. This is not the time for a sticking-plaster approach or for a plan which will gather dust on a bureaucrat's shelf. Women's lives are being affected, on a daily basis, by their experience of inequality. It is time for the system to change. It is up to the Government to provide the political will to achieve that systemic change. What is required is a radical overhaul of our decision-making processes, our cultural assumptions, our societal expectations. Mary Robinson indicated the scale of the challenge in a speech on 25 February 1992 :

"If the imbalances of the past came, and I believe they did, not simply from legislative and economic inequality but from profound resistances and failures of perception, then it follows that to right that balance we must do more than review our legislation and re-state our economic structures. We must also fundamentally re-appraise our view of who and what is valuable in our society. We must look with fresh and unprejudiced eyes at the work of women, the views of women, their way of organising and their interpretation of social priorities. To achieve this, we must, I believe, begin at the beginning and alter our way of thinking." (**Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993**)

Precisely 10 years later, it is time to alter our way of thinking so that inequality is no longer tolerated and that, finally, women get their fair share.