



National Women's  
Council of Ireland

Comhairle Náisiúnta  
na mBan in Éirinn

## **VALUING CARE WORK**



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## FOREWORD

The National Women's Council of Ireland decided to undertake research on valuing caring work being convinced that the Government and society's failure to value care was causing inequalities for women in a range of spheres. As the national representative organisation for women, representing over 300,000 women in Ireland, the NWCI has been consistently urged by its members and women throughout Ireland to demand that unpaid caring work be given value and recognition.

The Government chooses to invest heavily in the roads infrastructure but makes little attempt to develop the care infrastructure which continues to be inadequate for both children and frail elderly people who require care. The Government chooses to respond to the economic downturn by going back on its commitment to increase Child Benefit by E30 in Budget 2003. As a consequence, further children will remain in poverty and childcare costs will continue to spiral, forcing more and more women out of the labour force and capping a vital payment to women caring for children in the home.

There is little political will to advance individualisation of the social welfare system. This affects carers in particular. 90% of carers in Ireland are denied the possibility of Carer's Allowance as their eligibility is determined according to the household means rather than the level of their caring responsibilities. Lone parents who cohabit with unemployed male partners lose their One-Parent Family Payment and become an adult dependant, costing the woman both her financial independence and 30% of her income.

This is an issue that will affect almost every woman in Ireland at some stage in her life. It is when a woman becomes a carer that she begins to realise the structural inequalities that come into operation serving to limit her potential. This need not be the case. Other EU countries invest heavily in their care infrastructures and it is no coincidence that support for care is most developed in countries like Sweden and Finland with the most impressive record on women's equality.

It is crucial that the Government should take action now to prevent yet another generation of Irish women from suffering poverty or intolerable stress as the consequence of the official failure to value unpaid caring work. If Ireland is to take its EU responsibilities seriously in terms of encouraging more women into the paid workforce, it needs to act now to put the corresponding care supports in place.

Gráinne Healy  
Chairwoman, National Women's Council of Ireland  
December 2002

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Do we have a right to care? Why should women's unpaid caring work be valued? What implications are there for women if their caring work is not valued? What can be done to value caring work?

In recent years, the debate on women's caring work has been more about divisions between different groups of women than about solutions to assist the majority of women with caring responsibilities. Instead, women in employment have been pitted against women in the home, women with young children against those without children. What has not been recognised is that most women at some stage in their lives will have caring responsibilities, be they for young children, elderly parents, relatives with disabilities, partners with chronic illnesses. This issue of valuing caring work is one that potentially affects all of us.

However, when we examine the current priorities of Government and employers, we find that little has been done to put the necessary supports in place to assist those with caring responsibilities. We are a society, not an economy and yet it is our economy's needs that are consistently given priority. The Government has committed itself to achieving an EU target that 60% of all women between fifteen and sixty-four should be in paid employment by 2010. However, not enough funding has been committed for the necessary care infrastructure to support that target. At the same time, priority is being attached to improving productivity and competitiveness resulting in additional pressures for those already in employment.

What does it mean for women if we continue in the current situation where so many have to juggle increasing workloads with looking after children or the elderly at a time when childcare and eldercare are scarce and expensive? Will it impact on women's equality if nothing is done to support them in performing caring work? Does the lack of official interest in valuing women's caring work infringe equality for women?

The National Women's Council of Ireland has undertaken this research to outline the implications for women if Government and employers fail to take the issue of care seriously. This publication outlines a series of recommendations aimed at valuing caring work. This represents a compilation of NWC policy recommendations up to December 2002. Our research, *A Woman's Model for Social Welfare Reform* further develops these recommendations.

The study draws on an equality framework devised by Kathleen Lynch, John Baker and Sara Cantillon (Equality Studies Centre, UCD) for the National Economic and Social Forum in 2001 that has 4 inter-linking dimensions:

- affective equality;
- economic equality;
- social/cultural equality; and,
- political equality.

This equality framework underpins the NWC study, emphasizing the interlinkage between the right to care and the achievement of equality in Irish society.

In this study, the NWC understands women's work to encompass both paid employment and unpaid caring work. The term 'employment' is used when referring to participation in the paid workforce while 'work' will be used to refer both to paid and unpaid work. This study examines:

- the inequalities experienced by women in the paid workforce because their caring work is not valued;
- the escalating care crisis which has developed because the Government has not done enough to support care;
- current care policies;
- why more needs to be done by the Government and employers; and,
- what supports are available in Sweden, Norway, Finland and France.

This study is underpinned by the following principles:

- all women should have the right to exercise free choices in terms of participating in paid employment or caring for their families;
- women's caring work should be valued;
- women have the right to economic independence; and,
- women should not experience discrimination in paid employment as a consequence of their caring roles;

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report the NWCI calls on the Government to adopt the following recommendations to value care work and address the current care crisis:

- The Government should reform the social welfare system so as to recognise and value the caring work performed by women as outlined in 'A Woman's Model for Social Welfare Reform' (NWCI 2003).
- All women engaged in full-time caring work should be given pension and social insurance credits for periods of up to twenty years to enable them to qualify for full contributory old-age pensions and Maternity Benefit. This entitlement should be available retrospectively so that older women, including those now of pension age, can qualify.
- The Government should implement its commitment without delay that all women of pension age be given the full, non-contributory pension, rather than the Qualified Adult Allowance, the lower payment to which they are currently entitled.
- Caring for an elderly dependant or for a person with a disability should be viewed as work requiring a wage. As a first step, the means test should be abolished for the Carer's Allowance, enabling all carers to qualify for this payment. The level of this payment should be benchmarked to Gross Average Industrial Earnings and indexed accordingly.
- The Carer's Benefit and Allowance should be converted into a wage.
- All social welfare payments involving a care element, including the One-Parent Family Payment, should be benchmarked to Gross Average Industrial Earnings and indexed accordingly.
- The rate of Maternity Benefit should be increased.
- Paid maternity leave should be extended from eighteen weeks to twenty-six weeks.
- A care strategy should be put in place by the Government to expand the system of supports for carers, including increased provision for respite services, public health nurse services and occupational, physio- and speech therapy supports.
- A Cost of Care Allowance should be available to those providing full-time care for family dependants in their own homes.
- The Health Strategy should receive the necessary resources to fund the commitment to primary care for the elderly.
- The Government should set in place a ten year programme to put an adequate childcare and eldercare infrastructure in place, involving the commitment of resources equal to those now dedicated to the roads network.
- The Government should offer children a right to childcare appropriate to their needs.
- Cost of childcare should be on a sliding scale and directly relate to parents' ability to pay.
- A code of practice should be put in place to protect the rights of older people providing childcare for family dependants.
- There should be a substantial improvement in the supports offered to parents in the workplace. All parents should be entitled to a parental leave payment, enabling either parent to engage in full-time care of their children until their youngest child has reached 5. After that, a part-time payment should be available until the child has reached eleven. A part-time unemployment payment should also be available for women who are available only for part-time work because of their caring responsibilities.
- 5 days' paid paternity leave should be available for fathers at the time of their child's birth.
- Employers should receive supports from the Government to introduce family-friendly policies for their employees. These should include the introduction of tax exemptions to cover expenses arising from the introduction of such policies.
- Family-friendly policies such as job sharing, term-time working, time banking, and flexi-time should become statutory, obliging employers to make these options available to all employees with caring responsibilities.
- Legislation extending rights to family-friendly policies to all acting in loco parent is, including same-sex couples, should be introduced by the Government without delay.
- A system of official enforcement of family-friendly policies should be put in place. These should include audits by the Equality Authority of workplaces to ensure that appropriate family-friendly policies are available to employees. Inspectors should be appointed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to police those workplaces found to be violating obligations to institute family-friendly policies for employees.
- Employees should have a system of redress to Rights Commissioners and the Employment Appeals Tribunal to force employers to introduce family-friendly policies.

- A mainstream National Support Programme for Women Returners should be established. This should include childcare and eldercare supports and flexible provision of training.
- The Family Reunification Procedures for migrant workers and their families should be amended to allow spouses access to the labour market. Currently they are barred from taking up work and are fully dependent on their partner.
- In the context of both equality and poverty proofing processes, the impact on women of caring work should be recognised.

## CHAPTER ONE: WOMEN'S CHANGING ROLES

There has been a fundamental change over the past 3 decades in the role of women in Irish society. Before 1973, a woman's primary role was as carer with many women being denied any choice in terms of remaining in the home or engaging in paid employment. Since the Constitution explicitly protected women's position in the home, those wishing to go out to work had few rights and little hope of career progression. The year 1973 was a watershed in the process of giving women choices as to how they wished to lead their lives. The marriage bar was ended that year, ensuring that women would have the right from then on to continue in paid employment after marriage. Similarly, Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community, also in 1973, obliged the Government to put into effect EEC directives aimed at securing equality for women in employment. EU measures to eliminate the gender pay gap, to introduce maternity and parental leave and to guarantee equality of treatment for women in the tax and social insurance systems became vitally important in creating an environment in which women were able to enter and remain in paid employment.

The objective of getting more women into the paid workforce now has priority at national and EU level. Recent governments have held the view that, as the best route out of poverty is a job, women should be supported to enter employment both for the good of the economy and as one of the most effective ways of combating poverty. Furthermore, the Irish Government has committed itself to an EU target, agreed at the Lisbon European Council, that 60% of all women between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four should be in employment by 2010.

A fundamental transformation has taken place over the past three decades in assumptions about women's roles. What has not been recognised is that equality in employment is dependent on caring work being valued. Furthermore, no corresponding structure has been put in place to secure the rights of those who have spent their lives doing unpaid care work. The implications of this situation can be seen in the number of women who lack adequate pension coverage, the high percentage of older women living in poverty and the difficulties experienced by older women who attempt to return to paid employment. Women who find themselves in a forced dependency position under the Family Reunification rules governing

migrant workers and their families face particular difficulties. Isolation, lack of opportunities to learn English, deskilling, financial dependence and increased susceptibility to poverty and depression are but some of the issues experienced by these carers. Government policy remains contradictory between its interest in encouraging more women into the workforce and the assumption that women will respond to all of society's caring needs on an unpaid basis. The consequences of this confusion in the Government's approach can be seen in a number of crucial areas:

- **Social welfare system:** the social welfare system remains structured on the male breadwinner model where, predominantly, the male partner is entitled to the main payment. The female partner is classified only as a dependant (or qualified adult) who does not have an entitlement to a payment in her own right. The principal payment for caring, Carer's Allowance, for instance, is determined according to household means rather than on the basis of the woman's care responsibilities. Since no value is placed on the demands of the caring role, most women carers are viewed officially as adjuncts of their partners and remain financially dependent on their partner's income.
- **Care infrastructure:** the care infrastructure remains underdeveloped both for childcare and eldercare. While the Government has started a programme of investment in childcare, most childcare is still provided in the informal economy or by private providers who, because their services are labour-intensive, are obliged to charge high fees. Similarly, eldercare is increasingly available only through private providers with the result that costs are extremely high.
- **Caring as the woman's role:** it is still expected that women will undertake most caring responsibilities. Since the longest period of child-focused leave is maternity leave, available only to women, and since men are reluctant to avail of unpaid parental leave, official Government policy reinforces the notion that men do not have a duty to care for their children.
- **Macho workplace culture:** the Government's priority is to make the Irish workforce competitive on international markets to attract

global companies to set up operations in Ireland rather than in low-wage economies. It resists obligations which would require employers to fund mandatory family-friendly policies. It is equally resistant to improvements in care entitlements. Instead, it has allowed a macho workplace culture to develop where performance is measured in terms of the number of extra hours worked by the employee.

The real losers are women with caring responsibilities. Since there is an inherent conflict between an approach that seeks to encourage women into employment and yet fails to value care, what is needed is a fundamental re-appraisal of the Government's priorities. The NWCi considers that the Government needs to engage in a process of equality proofing of its policies to evaluate their real impact on women. Furthermore, it needs to adopt an equality framework to policy development which recognises the importance of women's caring roles and the inter-connections between caring and equality in the economic and political spheres.

## EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

Do women suffer from inequality because of their caring role? In February 2001, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) commissioned Professor Kathleen Lynch, Dr. John Baker and Dr. Sara Cantillon of the Equality Studies Centre in UCD to develop an equality framework. The framework presented to the NESF included 4 interlinking elements:

- political equality;
- economic equality;
- social / cultural equality; and,
- affective equality.

In this framework, affective equality is understood to mean:

- human dependence and interdependence;
- inequalities in love and care; and,
- other solidarity-based human relationships and supports.

According to the NESF report, the objective of affective equality challenges us to:

- develop a public focus on care, interdependence and loving relationships that involve contributions from both men and women;
- assess the impact of changing individual and collective behaviour on public and private

relationships and consider the values that are informing choices;

- design supports for the development of emotional intelligence and capacities to enrich caring and loving relations; and,
- develop a knowledge base on the needs of dependants and carers and respond to their needs.<sup>1</sup>

While there is widespread recognition of an individual's rights to political and economic equality, the concept of affective equality is new and unfamiliar for many in Irish society. What policy-makers are being asked to recognise is that an individual or a group will not have full equality if they do not also have the right both to be cared for and to care for others. If supports and protections are not in place to guarantee the person's affective equality, then all other forms of equality will also be diluted.

The NESF equality framework highlights the importance of caring work. The NWCi considers this emphasis on valuing care work as crucial to advancing women's equality. When the equality framework is applied to Irish employment policy, it demonstrates the failure to value and share caring work. This failure effectively diminishes women's economic equality as it seals women into low paid, low status, employment. Similarly, women's political equality is limited by caring responsibilities that make it extremely difficult for women to participate in decision-making processes.

## CARING WORK – WHAT DOES IT INCLUDE?

International definitions of caring work include:

- an obligation which has costs in terms of time and energy; and,
- a service that is indispensable for the continuation of the entire society.

This puts a number of important limits on what constitutes caring work. A person is engaged in caring work when she or he performs an indispensable service for another person which that person could not otherwise do for herself or himself. A parent who looks after a child is engaged in caring work since that child cannot rear himself or herself. That care work is essential and indispensable for the child. A daughter who cares for an incapacitated parent is also engaged in caring work since the vulnerable parent needs this care and cannot do it for himself or herself. The person looking after a person with a chronic illness or disability can also be seen to be undertaking caring work when such care is

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<sup>1</sup> National Economic and Social Forum, A Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues, Forum Report no. 23, Dublin, National Economic and Social Forum, 2002.

necessary and when the person cared for cannot undertake this task independently.

The primary focus of this study is unpaid care work. Workers providing domestic care face similar issues of undervalue and lack of support. This is of particular significance for migrant women workers. We recognise this distinction and that the specific issues faced by low paid domestic care workers need to be fully explored; however, this falls outside the scope of this study.

So, care is an indispensable service for a dependent person, which has to be done by somebody. All other actions to support others such as preparing a dinner for adult children or ironing a partner's shirts do not constitute caring work but rather services which could be done by the person on whose behalf the action is undertaken. The NWCI is adopting this restrictive definition of care for 2 reasons:

If care work is indispensable, then it has to be provided by somebody, raising the question of who is providing that service. Is it a mother struggling to combine this indispensable care work with full-time employment? Is it a mother caring full-time in the home without any payment whatsoever? Is it a care provider, trying to offer a quality service without adequate support?

If care work is essential, then as an essential service, it should be given due value.

As an essential service, it needs Government investment.

## CHAPTER TWO: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CARING IS NOT VALUED: SCENARIOS

If care work is under valued and unsupported, what are the practical implications for the carers, predominantly women? What impact is the under-valuing of caring work having on women's lives? The failure to value caring affects many people on a daily basis, making their lives intolerable or restricting their life choices. The NWCI, based on feedback from our membership has developed a series of scenarios to convey the difficulties common to women.

### 1. THE GLASS CEILING

Ciara is married with 2 children, living in Dublin. She has been working for ten years in middle management as an Assistant Principal in the civil service. She is highly regarded as a competent and talented worker. Her colleague, Owen, who entered the civil service on the same day, has just gained promotion to the grade of Principal Officer within the Department. While Ciara has similar qualifications and experience, she did not go forward for promotion. When asked why she did not put herself forward, Ciara explained that, in spite of the Civil Service Gender Equality Policy, positions at Principal Officer level would require her to commit long hours during the week and to be available for weekend meetings with senior management, whenever necessary. As Ciara's children are 5 and 8, she cannot make the commitment to overtime until they are older. While family-friendly policies are widely available within the civil service, Ciara is not aware of Principal Officers who have availed of these options without affecting their careers.

### 2. NO CHOICE FOR LOW-PAID WORKERS

Tanya is just ending her maternity leave after the birth of her third child. She has worked in the local factory for the past 7 years but is now being forced to leave her job as it will be too difficult for her to combine paid work and looking after 3 children. She is already paying half of her take home pay to the crèche for her first 2 children and can expect to pay E300 or more of her weekly pay if she decides to put all 3 children into the crèche. Tanya does shift-work and the range of family-friendly options is limited. It is not possible for her to take parental leave as she could not do without pay for fourteen weeks since she would still be expected to pay crèche fees or risk losing her children's places there. Because the company

closes for 2 weeks in the summer and for a week at Christmas, she has very little leeway in terms of annual leave to take off when her children fall ill. She no longer thinks it worthwhile to suffer such stress for her child for the sake of €100 which is what she will have left in take-home pay. While it will be a struggle to cover the mortgage, she feels forced at this stage to leave her job.

### 3. LIMITED OPTIONS FOR WOMEN RETURNERS

Noreen is fifty, has 4 children and is living in a small rural town. She worked as a secretary in the 1970s until the birth of her first child. Her children are now in their twenties and Noreen has decided that she wants to return to employment. As her secretarial skills are now outdated and as she has no computer experience, she has made enquiries with FÁS about the possibility of going on one of their training courses. She has been told, however, that those on the Live Register take priority and that it is unlikely that she will get on the course of her choice. Noreen did a range of casual jobs while her children were young, demonstrating new products in the local supermarket and distributing census forms. She applied to a number of local offices for a post as a receptionist or secretary but did not have any success, because she lacks computer skills. She finally got a job at the check-out in the local supermarket. She is earning slightly above the minimum wage at E6.90 an hour.

### 4. LONE PARENTS HAVE NO RIGHT TO RELATIONSHIPS

Sandra is a lone parent living in Galway with 2 children under 4. She is living on a One Parent Family Payment of E163.40 per week. She was in a relationship with Gary for a year and would have liked for them to move in together. Gary was receiving E124.80 unemployment assistance per week. However, because Gary is currently unemployed, their combined income would drop to E241.20. This is because the social welfare system is not individualised but administered according to a male breadwinner model. If Sandra were to cohabit with Gary, she would be treated as his adult dependant. She would have to give up her One-Parent Family Payment and Gary would receive the household's social welfare payment. Furthermore, the Government enforces a limitation rule providing Gary only 70%

extra to cover Sandra as his adult dependant. This placed a lot of pressure on the relationship, which broke up because Gary felt he could not take on a young family with such a heavy loss of income. As Sandra's children are so young, she is not in a position to consider looking for a job. As a result, she expects that she will spend the next 3 years out of employment. She is aware that the longer she is out of work, the poorer her chances of getting a good job when she returns. She also realises that when her children go to school, the only part-time jobs that will enable her to be available to pick up her children after school will be in either catering or cleaning, earning little more than the minimum wage.

## 5. MIGRANT WORKERS FACE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Yolanda has just joined her husband who has been working here on a work permit for just over one year. They have two children aged 10 and 7. Yolanda is a trained nurse and left her position in the Philippines so that the family could be together. Her husband has been working overseas for the past 5 years. Both children are in school every day and Yolanda has been offered a part time job in the local nursing home. She cannot take up the position as dependents of migrants are barred from taking up work. The family are finding it difficult to survive on one salary and have to now consider the likelihood of Yolanda and the children having to return to the Philippines. It is unlikely that the family will be able to live together as a unit again for the next 5 years.

## 6. NO SUPPORTS FOR CARE

Margaret is fifty-five and has been looking after her mother for the past 3 years. Her mother is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and now requires full-time care. Margaret, who is in full-time employment, has investigated the options open to her. While her mother should qualify for a home help, this service is not available on a full-time basis because demand is too great. Margaret would like to look after her mother in her own home. If she engages a full-time carer it will cost her at least €280 per week, just to pay that carer the minimum wage for the period during which she will be away from the house at work. Although she qualifies for Carer's Leave, she does not think that she would be able to cover her mortgage and other household expenses on the €132.70 per week in Carer's Benefit for which she is eligible. However, putting her mother in a nursing home is also likely to be extremely expensive, costing her €400 per week, even if her mother receives the full level of subvention available from the health board (€190.50).

## 7. NO RECOGNITION OF A LESBIAN'S

## RIGHT TO CARE

Sarah and Anne have been in a relationship for the past 5 years. They would like to have a child together and Sarah is very anxious to become a mother. However, while Sarah will qualify for Maternity and Parental Leave, Anne will be offered no supports to allow her to play an active role in the early years of their child's life. From the very moment of their child's birth, she will be obliged to take her annual leave if she wants to attend the birth, to support Sarah in her first week as a mother and to look after their child when ill.

The above scenarios have been chosen to illustrate the difficult choices being faced by women with caring responsibilities. Key difficulties include the following:

- because the culture of work has not changed to accommodate caring work, many women are being denied the possibility of promotion. This leads to a continued absence of women in senior management and to the persistence of a gender pay gap;
- since childcare continues to take such a large proportion of average income, many women are being forced to decide to leave the workforce, particularly as childcare remains scarce for those with babies;
- women who take that decision to leave their jobs to look after their children find themselves faced with downward mobility and limited opportunities to return to employment later since they have little access to education and training to refresh existing skills;
- current policies prevent lone parents dependent on social welfare from having choices around engaging in relationships;
- migrant women who find themselves in a forced dependency position under the Family Reunification rules face particular difficulties as carers, including isolation, lack of opportunities to learn English, deskilling, financial dependence, poverty and depression;
- the absence of an adequate eldercare infrastructure forces those caring for vulnerable older relatives to source care from private providers at exorbitant cost or to struggle financially on the low rate of Carer's Benefit; and,
- the lack of recognition of non-traditional families, particularly same-sex couples, denies these parents any official rights to family-friendly entitlements.

# CHAPTER THREE: NO VALUE FOR CARE – LITTLE EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

## GENERAL CONTEXT

EU measures to promote women's equality have helped to create the conditions for women to enter paid employment in a variety of areas, to have financial independence and to access crucial supports, as necessary, such as social insurance during periods of unemployment and pension rights for their old age. However, not all women have benefited and even where they enjoy greater choices than before, women still have fewer employment opportunities than men. Even now, women earn 15% less than men. Women are concentrated in sectors that tend to be low-paid and less secure than those dominated by men. Women still find it extremely difficult to get to the top of their workplaces. Only 3% of managing directors in Ireland are women.<sup>2</sup>

The restricted and difficult choices faced by many women with caring responsibilities are linked to a series of structural inequalities experienced by women in an economic environment where caring is given no value. The contribution of carers to society remains totally hidden in official records of economic progress:

Conventional accounts of how economies work do not bring out the centrality of care work and the particular way in which unpaid provision of care relates to the market and the State.<sup>3</sup>

Why do women still not enjoy full equality in their experience of employment? Is this because society still refuses to value women's caring roles? Is it because women are expected to clone themselves so that they can perform 2 full-time jobs simultaneously – that of carer and of employee? What implications for women stem from the failure to value caring?

## CARING – STILL WOMEN'S WORK

Although a greater number of women have entered the labour market in recent years, women's employment choices are often made to accommodate their home situations and responsibilities. To a large extent, men continue to be viewed as the breadwinner, while women remain responsible for caring. Women's participation in the paid labour market has not been matched by a corresponding increase in men's participation in unpaid caring work. Instead, women are required to balance paid employment and caring work. However, women and men cannot be on equal terms in the workplace if women are still seen as bearing the primary responsibility for care.<sup>4</sup>

Even in Scandinavia where female labour market participation approaches that of men, the assumption remains intact that women are responsible for caring.<sup>5</sup> In countries such as Norway, which has a long tradition of high female involvement in the labour force, women continue

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Draft National Plan for Women, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Progress of the World's Women, UNIFEM 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Drew, 'Changing Family Forms and the Allocation of Caring' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, London, Routledge, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Sweden: Government Offices, 'Highlighting Pay Differentials Between Men and Women', 2000. Accessed online at [www.naring.regeringen.se/inenglish/info/index.htm](http://www.naring.regeringen.se/inenglish/info/index.htm) on 28 June 2001.

to be responsible for much of the family's childcare. This leaves the male partner free to spend extra hours at the office.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, although 85 % of Danish women aged between twenty-five and forty-nine are in the labour force, they are often still considered responsible for tasks such as collecting their children from school, which are contingent on time-dependent work.<sup>7</sup> Fathers have become more involved in childraising in Scandinavian countries in recent years, but not to an extent that parallels the shift of women from full-time homemakers to full-time (or even part-time) employees.<sup>8</sup>

Is there a possible solution? One of the most important steps is to improve the care infrastructure in Ireland. A recent report on women in business, commissioned by Enterprise Ireland, recommended investment in childcare as a vital means of overcoming barriers for women

in management. This report, recognising the difficulty for women of combining family responsibilities with developing businesses, specifically pointed to the need for care supports:

The need for facilities for child and elder care is great, especially in countries where the woman's role is still heavily associated with sole responsibility for domestic care.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the Government needs to review its family-friendly policies to see how they can encourage fathers to take a more equal role in caring work.

#### STRONG INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN THE IRISH WORKFORCE

Over the past twenty years, there has been a steep increase in the number of women in paid

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<sup>6</sup> Idem.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Emerek, 'Atypical Working Time' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

<sup>8</sup> Arnlou Leira, 'The Modernisation of Motherhood' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

<sup>9</sup> Sia Group, *Report to Enterprise Ireland Policy and Planning on Developing Women in Enterprise*, Dublin, Enterprise Ireland, 2001.

employment in Ireland, particularly among married women. The current female participation rate is 48.7%, higher than the EU average of 47%. The latest figures show that 32,900 more women entered the Irish labour force in the twelve-month period under review. Furthermore, among married women, the participation rate has reached 48.1%.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, in 1971, there were only 39,200 married women in paid employment or 14% of the total female workforce.<sup>11</sup> Over the following twenty-six years, the number of married women grew by 256,600 in the labour force. By 1997, over 52% of the female workforce was married.<sup>12</sup>

However, if marriage is no longer a barrier preventing women from participating in paid employment, caring is still crucial in determining what sort of decisions a woman will make concerning employment. The 2 groups who are

least likely to be in the paid workforce are women with children and older women. In their study of women in the labour force, Frances Ruane and Julie Sutherland found:

Current figures hint at the emergence of a woman's maternal status as being the primary determinant of labour force participation.<sup>13</sup>

The link between having children and labour force participation can be clearly seen in recent surveys. In 1997, for instance, the figures for women aged between twenty-five and twenty-nine showed that 87.6% of single women and 91.2% of married women without children were in employment while the figure for married women with children was 51.3%. Similarly, for the group aged between thirty and thirty-four, 85% of single women and 87.4% of married women with no children were in employment while the figure

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<sup>10</sup> Central Statistics Office, Quarterly National Household Survey, September 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Frances P. Ruane / Julie M. Sutherland, *Women in the Labour Force*, Dublin, Employment Equality Agency, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> *Idem*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

dropped to 52.4% for married women with children.<sup>14</sup>

The recent ESRI study on women returners, "Getting out of the house": Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training also found that having children under 5 remained a serious barrier for women wishing to return to employment.<sup>15</sup> Women are still being forced to leave their jobs involuntarily because they find it impossible to combine paid work with their caring responsibilities. A survey by Isis Research Group on the needs of new mothers in the workplace indicated that several women found the pressures

of the dual burdens of work and new motherhood to be too difficult to sustain on a full-time basis and that they were therefore withdrawing reluctantly from the work place.<sup>16</sup> In a recent survey by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 30% of male respondents said that their partner had left work in order to look after childcare needs on a full-time basis compared with less than 3% of female respondents.<sup>17</sup>

The legacy of the undervaluing of caring is also evident in the experiences of older women with regard to employment. Since women were previously expected to leave their jobs when they

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Helen Russell / Emer Smyth / Maureen Lyons / Philip J. O'Connell, "Getting out of the House": Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute / Liffey Press, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Isis Research Group, New Mothers at Work: Identifying the Needs of New Mothers in the Workplace, Dublin, Employment Equality Authority, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Congress Report on Survey of Childcare Practices, Identifying Members' Childcare Needs, Dublin, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2002.

got married or had children, older women remain much less likely to be in the paid workforce than those from other age groups. In the 1997 CSO Labour Force Survey, only 39% of women between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four and 26.3% of women over fifty-five were in employment.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Ireland's employment rate even for women over thirty-five is below the EU average.<sup>19</sup> Studies have repeatedly shown that the lowest rates of labour force participation are for women over sixty.<sup>20</sup> The ESRI also found that older women were at a serious disadvantage when they sought to return to paid work as the longer the person spent out of the workforce, the lower her chances of getting a job<sup>21</sup>.

What are the implications of these statistics for women and their caring work? The NWC

contends that the lower percentages of women with children and older women in the workforce are a direct consequence of the Government's failure to address and value caring. In the absence of an adequate childcare infrastructure, many women with children have no choice but to withdraw from the workforce, particularly as there is no extended leave available to enable a woman to look after her children for their first years and still remain connected to the workforce. Similarly, while FÁS has recently introduced a pilot scheme for women returners, the 'Expanding the Workforce Initiative', in Dublin and Limerick, there is still no mainstream education and training programme for women returners available nationwide. Most women returning to paid work after a long period out of the workforce have to make this transition without the benefit of training,

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<sup>18</sup> Frances P. Ruane / Julie M. Sutherland, *Women in the Labour Force*.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, *Employment Policies in the EU and in the Member States Joint Report 2001*, European Commission, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Coughlan, *Family-Friendly /Work-Life Balance Policies*, Dublin, Irish Business and Employers Confederation Research and Information Service, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Russell / Emer Smyth / Maureen Lyons / Philip J. O'Connell, "Getting out of the House": Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training.

thus increasing their risk of entering low-skilled, inevitably low-paid, employment.

Furthermore, the Government's emphasis on the increase in the number of women in employment fails to recognise that there are still a large number of women on home duties. According to the CSO Labour Force Survey (1997), there were 588,000 women on home duties in 1997.<sup>22</sup> Ireland is among the countries identified in the European Commission's 2000 Joint Report on employment as having the largest gender gap in employment rates at 20%.<sup>23</sup> The participation of women in the labour market in Ireland is the fifth lowest in the EU, ahead of only Spain, Greece, Italy, and Luxembourg. The highest rates of female labour force participation occur in Denmark (75.5%), Sweden (72.2%), Finland (70%) and Norway (70%).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Austria (62.5%, Germany (62.1%) and France (61.6%) all have large numbers of women in paid

employment.<sup>25</sup> Why is the pattern so different in these countries? The NWCI argues that the crucial reason why female labour force participation is much higher in these countries is because their Governments value caring and are prepared to invest heavily in extensive care infrastructures.

#### Part-time Work / Low Pay

Women are much more likely than men to choose part-time work because it often represents the only feasible means of combining caring work with paid employment. This has been recognised by the EU:

As responsibility for the care of children and other dependants continues to fall mainly on women, part-time work enables them to combine employment with their responsibilities as carers.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Frances P. Ruane / Julie M. Sutherland, *Women in the Labour Force*.

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, *Employment Policies in the EU and in the Member States / Joint Report 2000*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Pernille Lønne Mørkhagen, 'The position of women in Norway', Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed online at <http://odin.dep.no/odin/engelsk/norway/social/032005-990436/index-dok000-b-a.html> on 27 June 2001.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* These figures relate to 1998.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, *Bridging the Gender Gap: Reducing Segregation in the Labour Market*.

Many women work part-time, while few men do; 33% of women and 6% of men working in the EU are in part-time employment.<sup>27</sup> The CSO's 1997 Labour Force Survey found that 111,100 women in Ireland were engaged in part-time work compared to 37,000 men. Of those women, 72,400 were married.<sup>28</sup> Barry has also found that of the one-sixth of the workforce in part-time employment, over 70% of these workers are women.<sup>29</sup> However, while part-time employment offers more flexibility for women with caring responsibilities, it does so at a price. Many part-time positions are low-paid.<sup>30</sup> This situation was confirmed by the ESRI when it examined the impact of the minimum wage and found that more women than men had been earning below the minimum wage and were typically working less than 30 hours per week, generally as clerical workers or in the services sector.<sup>31</sup>

The NWCI argues that the large percentage of women in low-paid, part-time work is the direct consequence of society's failure to value caring. Since family-friendly policies have yet to be integrated throughout the labour force, many workers are forced to choose low-paid jobs as these are the only options with any degree of flexibility. Furthermore, flexible working hours are often available only for entry-grade posts, reinforcing the tendency for part-time work to be low-paid.

## UNEQUAL PAY

Although the EU's Equal Pay Directive entered into force in 1976, Irish women still earn less than their male counterparts. This applies even to women just out of university. The Higher Education Authority found that of recent

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<sup>27</sup> Sweden: Government Offices, 'Highlighting Pay Differentials Between Men and Women'

<sup>28</sup> Frances P. Ruane / Julie M. Sutherland, *Women in the Labour Force*.

<sup>29</sup> Ursula Barry, *Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001*, Dublin, Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre, University College Dublin, May 2001 (unpublished).

<sup>30</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland Millennium Project, *Creating Opportunities... Making Choices: Women and Work*, Dublin, National Women's Council of Ireland, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> ESRI, *Final Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Implementation of a National Minimum Wage*, Dublin, ESRI, 1999.

graduates with primary degrees, 775 males but only 529 females were earning more than 19,000 pounds.<sup>32</sup> When the ESRI analysed data from the Living in Ireland Survey (1997),<sup>33</sup> it found that the gap between male and female average hourly earnings stood at 15.5%. It saw women's caring responsibilities as one of the primary reasons for this difference since women with children typically spent up to 9 years less than men in the paid workforce.

There are two immediate implications from the ESRI's analysis. Firstly, if women take time out of the workforce to look after their children, they lose out in terms of seniority and pay increments, particularly in the public service. Secondly, they often find that when they decide to return to employment at a later stage, they are forced to take jobs at lower levels than those that they originally held. This pattern of downward mobility was found by the ESRI to be particularly prevalent for women returners with most being forced to access a narrow range of low-paid jobs such as cleaning, catering and childcare.<sup>34</sup> As its solution to this problem, the ESRI indicated the

need for a childcare policy that facilitates individual choices and meets the needs of children.<sup>35</sup>

The salary gap is also caused by the disproportionate number of women with caring responsibilities in part-time or temporary positions.<sup>36</sup> If women choose caring over career, either by opting out of the workforce or by choosing part-time work, men come to occupy jobs closer to the top of the hierarchy. As a consequence, they are more likely to receive benefits that are not considered wages, such as company cars, but which serve to increase the total difference between the remuneration received by men and women.<sup>37</sup>

The link between caring and the gender pay gap can be seen most clearly in the fact that the gap is widest for older women, a greater proportion of whom spent their working lives as carers. Women under thirty working full time earn on average at least 80% of men's earnings. In older age groups, wage differentials increase and women average only 70% of men's earnings.<sup>38</sup> However, the

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<sup>32</sup> Higher Education Authority, *First Destination of Award Recipients in Higher Education (2000): a Report on the Initial Employment, Further Study and Training Patterns of Certificants, Diplomates and Graduates*, Dublin, Higher Education Authority, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> A Barrett and T. Callan (eds.), *How Unequal? Men and Women in the Irish Labour Market*, Dublin, ESRI, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Helen Russell / Emer Smyth / Maureen Lyons / Philip J. O'Connell, "Getting out of the House": *Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training*.

<sup>35</sup> Economic and Social Research Institute, *How Unequal? Men and Women in the Irish Labour Market*.

<sup>36</sup> Ursula Barry, *Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001*.

<sup>37</sup> Sweden: Government Offices, 'Highlighting Pay Differentials Between Men and Women'.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*.

gender pay gap extends beyond salaries to pensions. The salary gap continues to affect women even after they retire from paid employment. Because pensions are based on lifetime earnings, women's lower wages result in lower pensions, and therefore less security in old age.<sup>39</sup>

The gender pay gap is further exacerbated by the lack of value placed on paid caring work. Women-dominated occupations such as those related to caring are usually lower-paid than those areas and positions in which men are in the majority.<sup>40</sup>

## GLASS CEILING

Since women are expected to combine caring work with the responsibilities of ever more demanding paid jobs, one of the casualties for many women is career progression. It is impossible for many women to consider going forward for promotion if a position at middle or senior management demands long hours or round-the-clock availability. Similarly, many companies consider women with caring responsibilities not to be interested in promotion.

Even in Denmark, the country with the highest female labour force participation in the world, once women have children, they are viewed as giving priority to their families rather than to their careers.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence of sexist perceptions and of the lack of adequate supports, women are severely under-represented in mid and high-level jobs.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in Norway and Sweden, men occupy most higher-paying and higher-ranking positions in public and private bureaucracies, finance and banking institutions, trade unions, and universities.<sup>43</sup> Women fill only 3 to 6% of top management posts throughout the EU and 30% of middle management posts. Furthermore, the recent trend towards leaner structures and flatter hierarchies in many companies has had a greater impact on women than on men as many middle management positions have disappeared, particularly those related to the specialised functions that women perform (in personnel, administration and financial management).<sup>44</sup>

The pattern is identical in Ireland. Although women in Ireland constitute 64% of the civil service, only 10% of the top posts are held by

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ursula Barry, Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001.

<sup>41</sup> Lis Højgaard & Malou Juelskjaer, 'Literature Review for Denmark' in Margret Fine-Davis, Jeanne Faghani, Dino Giovannini, Lis Højgaard, Hilary Clarke, Fathers and Mothers Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance: Final Report, Dublin, University of Dublin Trinity College, 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Sweden: Government Offices, 'Highlighting Pay Differentials Between Men and Women'

<sup>43</sup> Arnloug Leira, 'The Modernisation of Motherhood'.

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, Bridging the Gender Gap: Reducing Segregation in the Labour Market.

women.<sup>45</sup> A recent survey of gender equality in the civil service highlighted the barriers experienced by women with caring responsibilities.<sup>46</sup> In this survey, women were found to be more likely to have childcare responsibilities and difficulties, less likely to apply for promotion through competition, more likely to job-share and to have lower long-term career aspirations than their male counterparts. Evidence from case studies found that women continued to be disadvantaged because of the burden of having to reconcile work and family pressures. Pressures were found to be increasingly acute in the long-hours culture. Both men and women considered that women were more likely to experience discrimination in terms of promotion if they availed of a job-sharing option. In addition, women are frequently negatively impacted by relocation because of male promotional opportunities. As a consequence, women are being forced to make a choice between promotion to senior level and a family, with a much higher proportion of senior women remaining single and childless.

This finding parallels the situation in the US where a 1996 report by the US Department of Labour found that US women managers were more likely to be single (never married) than their male counterparts.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in a recent survey by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 90% of those stating that they had not applied for promotional opportunities because of childminding responsibilities were female.<sup>48</sup>

## WOMEN RETURNERS

If a woman decides to take time out of the paid workforce to care for her children and then decides some years later to return to paid employment, she will have to overcome a number of barriers such as the high cost and low availability of childcare, the lack of updated skills, difficulty in accessing training and the absence in many workplaces of working hours compatible with family responsibilities.<sup>49</sup> These barriers often combine to create a pattern of downward mobility where the woman returner is forced to take a lower-paid job than the one she left to care for her family. Since society fails to value women's caring work, women returners may not have self-confidence to seek jobs appropriate to their level of experience.<sup>50</sup> Not only will the woman returner be more likely to be pushed into low-paid, low-skilled employment, she will also suffer in terms of her pension entitlements. Firstly, she will lose out on pension credits for those years spent out of the labour market. Secondly, since men earn more than women, they also receive higher pensions reflecting their higher salaries.<sup>51</sup>

However, in spite of those difficulties, many women returners are not eligible for all State training programmes since eligibility for many programmes is based either on the Live Register or on the household income. This reflects the general lack of priority attached to providing training for women, including those already in paid employment, because of their caring responsibilities.

Women traditionally receive less training from their employers and because they are also paid

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<sup>45</sup> Ursula Barry, Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001.

<sup>46</sup> Peter C. Humphreys, Eileen Drew, Candy Murphy, Gender Equality in the Civil Service, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Sia Group, Report to Enterprise Ireland Policy and Planning on Developing Women in Enterprise.

<sup>48</sup> Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Congress Report on Survey of Childcare Practices, Identifying Members' Childcare Needs, Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Coughlan, Family-Friendly / Work-Life Balance Policies.

<sup>50</sup> Veronica McGivney, Returning women: their training and employment choices and needs, Leicester, NIACE, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Norway, Fifth Periodic Report Submitted by Norway under Article 18 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, accessed online at <http://odin.dep.no/bfd/engelsk/publ/rappporter/004041-990027/index-dok000-b-f-a.html> on 27 June 2001.

less they find it more difficult to invest in their own training. Women are regarded as unreliable 'human capital' because they have children.<sup>52</sup>

The NWCI considers that the only feasible solution to the problem of educational and skills disadvantage experienced by women is for the Government to implement the NESF recommendation to establish a mainstream National Support Programme for Women Returners.<sup>53</sup>

## WORK CULTURE

Little attention is devoted to the work culture which inhibits women from continuing in employment or putting themselves forward for management positions. The culture of paid work has become increasingly pressurized, with a person's commitment being measured in terms of hours spent in the office or available on call during weekends. Even Enterprise Ireland has recognised that there are certain areas, such as science and technology, where women with family responsibilities are particularly disadvantaged by the work culture itself:

with longer than average hours being the norm and physical presence denoting dedication to the job at hand, women in this area are particularly disadvantaged.

Furthermore, in the culture of the scientific and technological workplace, taking leave still reflects poorly on science professionals' commitment to science.<sup>54</sup> While there has been a significant change in the way in which the individual engages in paid employment, while work practices and conditions of working have changed, these changes have preserved the male-oriented focus of the workplace. Although the working week is more flexible than ever before, women with caring responsibilities still tend to be viewed as atypical employees. This is evident even in the manner in which employers tend to view flexible working hours. The I.T. consultant (normally male) contracting his expertise to companies at hours convenient to him will receive significantly higher financial reward and will be perceived as more attached to the labour market than the retail worker (usually female) whose working hours are determined according to her caring responsibilities.

In many senses, while a degree of flexibility has been introduced into the changing work environment, the increased emphasis on performance and productivity demands increased commitment from employees. A division has accordingly occurred between those viewed as having a high degree of attachment to the workforce and those whose labour market attachment is perceived to be weak.

The evolution of the labour market in accordance with male norms has made the workplace a highly gendered space. Women who have chosen to engage in paid employment have been obliged to do so in a sphere that is defined by male priorities. As a consequence, women with caring responsibilities remain seriously disadvantaged by the work culture itself.

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<sup>52</sup> G. Kinnock, 'Investing in Women's Training – a Strategic Solution to Economic Challenges' in T. Rees (ed), *The Axia Project: Revitalising Companies by Realising Women's Economic Potential*, Cardiff, Welsh Development Agency, 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Ursula Barry, *Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001*; National Economic and Social Forum, *Alleviating Labour Shortages*, Forum Report no. 19, Dublin, National Economic and Social Forum, 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Sia Group, *Report to Enterprise Ireland Policy and Planning on Developing Women in Enterprise*.

## CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE

### INTRODUCTION

Since historically women were expected to withdraw from paid employment to look after their children and other dependants, an adequate care infrastructure was not developed in Ireland. Ireland continues to lack the sort of comprehensive care infrastructure necessary to support a high level of female participation in paid employment. The deficit is particularly apparent in relation to childcare where the strong increase in the number of women in the paid workforce has led to a deepening childcare crisis.

### CHILDCARE

Government spending on childcare in the early 1990s made limited provision for services for children in disadvantaged areas and children whose parents were engaged in national training schemes.<sup>55</sup> For those parents who were working outside the home, childcare was left to a laissez-faire economy dictated by the rise and fall of the market. As more women entered or returned to the workforce with the growth of the economy, the cost of childcare grew.<sup>56</sup>

The high cost of childcare continues to dissuade married women from entering the labour market. The cost of childcare puts further pressure on

women's incomes, so that many families find they actually have more money if only one parent works and the other stays home with the children.<sup>57</sup> The shortage of affordable, accessible, and high quality childcare is one of the greatest barriers to women's full participation in the labour force. When women were asked why they left a job, why they were not seeking a job, or why they were working part-time, domestic and family responsibilities were the reason most frequently cited.<sup>58</sup> In a survey done in the UK (Parents' Demand for Childcare- DfEE, March 2000), two-thirds of women said that they would re-enter the labour market or an educational program if they had good quality, convenient, reliable, and affordable childcare was available.<sup>59</sup>

Ireland has one of the poorest levels of childcare provision in the EU. By the mid-1990s, it had the poorest level of provision for children aged up to 3 (at 2%) and the second lowest for children aged between 3 and 6.<sup>60</sup> This situation is expected to continue for the medium-term as demand for childcare has been predicted to increase between 25% and 50% over the period from 1998 to 2011.<sup>61</sup> Parents in Ireland spend an estimated average of 20% of their earnings on childcare, compared to an average of 8% in the EU as a whole. Because of the high cost of childcare, women with more than 1 child are unlikely to take paid employment unless their wage expectations

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<sup>55</sup> Margret Fine-Davis, 'Literature Review for Ireland' in Margret Fine-Davis, Jeanne Fagnani, Dino Giovannini, Lis Højgaard, Hilary Clarke, *Fathers and Mothers Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance: Final Report*.

<sup>56</sup> NWC Millennium Project, *Creating Opportunities... Making Choices: Women and Work*.

<sup>57</sup> Ursula Barry, *Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001*.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Coughlan, *Family-Friendly / Work-Life Balance Policies*.

<sup>60</sup> Theodoros N. Papadopoulos, 'Greek Family Policy from a Comparative Perspective' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

<sup>61</sup> Goodbody Economic Consultants, *The economics of childcare in Ireland*, Dublin. Goodbody Economic Consultants, 1998

are high.<sup>62</sup> A recent survey by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions of its members found that the most common range of weekly expenditure on childcare is between E102 and E126, with no significant difference in average expenditure between those working full-time or part-time.<sup>63</sup>

A 2001 study commissioned by the Chambers of Commerce Ireland found that 72% of employers cited the high cost of childcare and 67% the lack of available childcare places as major barriers to recruit and retain employees.<sup>64</sup>

The childcare crisis has been exacerbated by two competing policy assumptions. Firstly, it is expected that childcare will be provided essentially on a commercial basis within the private sector. Secondly, this sector, while expected to operate on commercial terms, is equally expected to fulfil stringent regulations aimed at ensuring the provision of a quality service to children and parents. These competing assumptions have served to increase the cost of childcare significantly, particularly for younger children, as it is difficult for creches and nurseries to maintain the ratio of 1 childcare worker to every 3 children at an affordable cost for parents.

As women face a greater risk of low pay than men and as many of the jobs created over the past 5 years have been in the relatively low-paid services sector, the cost of childcare poses a major problem for those low-paid workers wishing to engage either in full-time or part-time employment. When the current level of the minimum wage (E6.30) is compared to the average hourly cost of childcare, it is possible to see how difficult it is for low-paid women to continue in employment.

Many women have no choice but to source their childcare needs in the informal economy. However, childcare in the informal economy is, by its nature, completely unregulated. There are no

safeguards in place to ensure that children are receiving any sort of quality of care. Furthermore, those offering childcare in the informal economy may not have received any prior training to enable them to offer an appropriate service to children and their parents.

In many cases, grandmothers are being required to provide childcare to enable their own children to engage in paid employment. While family-based care may be the most appropriate option for the particular child, it can give rise to particular difficulties. Grandparents or siblings may run the risk of exploitation since there is no official code of practice on which they can draw to secure their rights. Older grandparents may be obliged to provide full-time care for young children at a time when they may be physically too frail to undertake this work on a full-time basis. Grandparents may also be expected to look after their grandchildren on an unpaid basis. As a consequence, grandmothers may be unable to exercise a choice as to how they live their lives. They may be denied the right to consider returning to paid employment. They may also be denied the opportunity to enjoy a period of leisure in their retirement. Organisations representing older women such as the Older Women's Network have expressed the concern of their members at the instances of exploitation being experienced by older women as a consequence of the current childcare crisis. They have urged the Government to develop a code of practice to protect the rights of older people in relation to childcare.

## ELDERCARE

The care infrastructure for eldercare is similar to that of childcare in that it is underdeveloped, scarce and very often unaffordable. With increases in life expectancy, eldercare is becoming increasingly important and will become

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<sup>62</sup> Ursula Barry, Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 1998-2001.

<sup>63</sup> Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Survey of Childcare Practices, Identifying Members' Childcare Needs.

<sup>64</sup> Idem.

even more critical in the years ahead. Most caring work for older people falls on women.<sup>65</sup>

The typical carer for an older person is a woman in her fifties or sixties caring for her elderly parents often while continuing to care for her own children and / or grandchildren.<sup>66</sup> While data is lacking concerning the percentage of employees caring for an older person, 1 UK study estimated that one-third of employees care for a dependent adult.<sup>67</sup> Of family caregivers in Ireland 13% left their jobs to care for an elderly parent.<sup>68</sup>

Eldercare presents certain challenges that childcare does not, including the fact that the carers themselves are usually older and may have less physical strength. It is impossible for carers to know how long they will be required to keep caring for the elderly person and there are fewer supports. Many caregivers give up their careers and social lives for extreme fatigue and sometimes poverty when making the decision to engage in caring work.<sup>69</sup>

The commitment in the Health Strategy that increased resources will be allocated to the development of a primary care structure for older people needs to be implemented urgently. Many older people find it impossible to access home help assistance to provide the necessary supports to enable them to remain in their homes. Similarly, a much more extensive public health nurse service is needed to provide the nursing care necessary for older people requiring medical care.

In the absence of a sufficient level of primary care in Ireland, many older people are required to enter full-time residential care. It is acknowledged that there are not enough beds available in the public nursing home sector to meet the demand for residential care.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence, older people and their families are obliged to look for beds in private nursing homes. The growth in

demand for a service, which is available only from private providers seeking to run residential facilities on a commercial basis, has led to a severe increase in the cost of private residential care. The system of subvention currently available to offset these costs is of limited effectiveness in supporting older people and their families. The level of subvention, rising from E114.30 to a maximum of E190.50 per week does not begin to cover even half the average weekly costs of a private nursing home.

Secondly, if families cannot afford residential care for their elderly relatives and if an extensive home-based care facility is not available, then it becomes more likely that women, as traditional carers in Irish society, will be expected to take on this task. It is difficult for a woman to exercise a real choice as to whether she should look after a frail older relative or return to paid employment if her decision will either deny her relative that necessary care or will result in a substantial cost to the family for residential care. As a consequence, middle-aged women who spend many years caring for their children on an unpaid basis may be forced into a position where they are obliged to spend further years caring for older dependants without any monetary payment.

#### CARERS – POOR REWARD FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION

Only 10% of all carers are eligible for Carer's Allowance because that payment is governed by a household means-test. In 1999, there were 14,387 recipients of Carer's Allowance in Ireland, of whom 79% were female.<sup>71</sup>

If female carers do not qualify either for Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit, their only options are the tax-based Home Carer's Allowance, credited to the man's salary, and the Homemaker's Disregard (see following chapter). Furthermore, little progress has been made on

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<sup>65</sup> Eileen Drew, 'Changing Family Forms and the Allocation of Caring'.

<sup>66</sup> Judith Phillips, 'Paid Work and Care for Older People: A UK Perspective' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

<sup>67</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> Janneke Plantegna, 'Unpaid Work' in *Women and Work*, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Report of the Ombudsman on Nursing Home Subvention.

<sup>71</sup> Anne Coughlan, *Family-Friendly / Work-Life Balance Policies*.

advancing the individualisation of the social welfare system which could potentially offer the most effective means of valuing women's unpaid work. The NWCI commissioned research to reform the social welfare system, focusing both on individualisation and on recognising care work. This report recommends a range of short to long-term measures by which to implement this reform.<sup>72</sup> Our report shows that the social welfare system remains based on the male breadwinner model where women are offered rights derived from those of their male partner. Women continue to be regarded by the social welfare system as qualified adults rather than as individuals in their own right.

The social insurance system equally remains structured on the basis of the person's contributions through paid employment. As it currently exists, the social insurance system is based on the premise that the person will spend at least 40 years in paid, full-time employment during which the individual will have made sufficient social insurance contributions to be in a position to receive a contributory old-age pension. The bulk of social insurance fund's resources are committed to providing pensions for formerly full-time employees for an unlimited period. As currently structured, the fund inherently disadvantages women with caring responsibilities. Women tend to spend fewer years in paid employment than men, since they are more likely to withdraw from the workforce either temporarily or permanently to care for their children or other dependent family members. Since no mechanism has been put in place to value women's unpaid caring work, the period spent out of the workforce represents years rendered invisible in the current social welfare system. The outcome for female carers is a significantly higher than average risk of poverty.

## LONE PARENTS

The impact of the lack of value placed on caring work in Irish society can be seen most acutely in the treatment of lone parents. Ireland has the highest percentage of lone parent families in the EU with 10.6% of households headed by lone parents.<sup>73</sup> As the Living in Ireland Survey (1997) demonstrates, lone parents remain, like older women, one of the groups at most risk of poverty in Ireland. Tony McCashin undertook a study in 1996, which highlighted the poverty experienced by many lone parents:

Virtually none of the women [in the sample] enjoyed what might be called a social life. Almost none of them had had a holiday in recent years, very few of them had a hobby or leisure activity or even bought a newspaper.<sup>74</sup>

However, when the National Economic and Social Forum reviewed the issue of lone parents in 2001, it focused on strategies for improving their labour force participation, confirming the lack of value placed on their caring role. The report saw participation in employment as the means of offering lone parents the best prospects for improving income and standards of living for themselves and their children.

It saw particular barriers for lone parents in progressing towards employment. It considered that young women who become lone parents are especially disadvantaged compared to their peers. This is notable as lone parents under 25 form over 20% of those receiving One-Parent Family Payment. The NESF report highlighted the need for more flexibility in terms of timing of programmes, seeing lone parents' need for family-friendly options as particularly acute. However, the report also recognised that lone parent participation on mainstream employment and training programmes remains very poor. With the exception of Community Employment, Jobstart and Jobs Initiative and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, lone parents make up less than 2% of all participants. The report also advocated the need for more flexibility in reimbursement of childcare expenses.

The Government's response has failed to introduce that necessary flexibility. When FÁS introduced an initiative to offer childcare support of E63 per week to women undertaking employment and training courses, it was forced by the Government to offer this support only to women who could produce official receipts. This has effectively meant that women using mothers or other family members to look after their children cannot avail of this support. Women living in poverty who wish to return to paid employment, in accordance with the Government policy that employment is the primary route out of poverty, are being penalised.

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<sup>72</sup> NWCI, A Women's Model for Social Welfare Reform.

<sup>73</sup> Eileen Drew, 'Re-conceptualising Families' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

<sup>74</sup> Tony McCashin, *Lone Mothers in Ireland: a Local Study*, Dublin, Oak Tree.

# CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE

## 1. GOVERNMENT POLICY PRIORITIES

### **Maximise Female Participation in the Workforce**

A key economic priority for the Government and the EU is to maximise the number of women in the labour force.

If Europe is to enjoy continued economic growth and remain a world player alongside the US and Japan, it must make optimal use of its workforce. Women have been entering the labour market in unprecedented numbers during the past decade, though they remain under-represented in some economic sectors and are still under-represented at the higher end of the job hierarchy. This segregation of the labour market reduces its efficiency. Only by using the potential offered by all workers can European productivity be maximised. While many employers face skills shortages that they cannot meet, potential women employees are in jobs that may not fully utilise their abilities. Europe cannot afford to let this situation persist.

The European Union is particularly interested in encouraging Governments to support more women into the paid workforce. The recommendations of the Joint Report for 2001 on employment policies in EU member-States specifically urges Ireland to promote greater female labour force participation:

Ireland should continue to strive for balanced and sustained employment growth exploiting increased participation, especially of women ...<sup>75</sup>

However, the European Employment Strategy does recognise that corresponding supports need to be put in place to enable women to return to the paid workforce:

Particular efforts should be undertaken to mobilise and integrate further into the labour market economically inactive people, in particular women, by ... increasing the number of affordable childcare places and taking action with the aim of reducing the gender pay gap.<sup>76</sup>

The reconciliation of work and family life is a prime focal point of the current European employment strategy.<sup>77</sup> The Government has also indicated in the National Plan for Women that care supports will need to be in place if women are to enter the workforce in larger numbers.

6.3 Ireland will advance a strategy aimed at increasing the proportion of women in employment, promoting family-friendly policies in employment, increasing childcare places and taking action with the aim of reducing the gender pay gap.<sup>78</sup>

### **Promote Volunteering**

The Government is increasingly looking to voluntary forms of contribution as a means of resolving the contradiction between its priority to encourage more women into the workforce and the lack of value placed on care. In the foreword to A White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity, Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector, launched in September 2000, the Taoiseach, Mr.

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<sup>75</sup> European Commission Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, Employment Policies in the EU and in the Member States Joint Report 2001, European Commission, 2002.

<sup>76</sup> European Employment Strategy Recommendations to Ireland 2002, Presentation to the Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme Monitoring Committee, Dundalk, 25 October 2001.

<sup>77</sup> European Commission, Bridging the Gender Gap: Reducing Segregation in the Labour Market.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Ireland Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, September 2002, Dublin, Stationery Office, 2002.

Bertie Ahern T.D., emphasised the importance currently attached to volunteering:

Voluntary activity forms the very core of all vibrant and inclusive societies ... In a time of great change in our country, we must work hard to protect and enhance the spirit of voluntary participation and we must see this as a key social goal.<sup>79</sup>

The current childcare programme funded under the National Development Plan (NDP) is being delivered in many areas by voluntary community groups which have responded to the need for childcare provision in their areas. Women are much more likely than men to volunteer with 40% of women volunteering in 1997 compared to 28% of men. Indeed, Freda O'Donoghue sees volunteering as a feminised space.<sup>80</sup> The limits of this option as an effective response to Ireland's current care crisis can be seen in the fact that while the highest rates of volunteering are among those in their 40s (50.8%), the largest decline was also recorded in this age group possibly because of increased demands on their time. The NWCI considers that while volunteering makes a vital contribution to Irish society, it should not be seen as a substitute for necessary Government action to value care.

## CARE – CURRENT STATUTORY ENTITLEMENTS AND PROGRAMMES

### Childcare

The Government has sought to address the childcare crisis in a two-pronged strategy aimed at increasing supply and supporting parents. Under the National Development Plan, E437 million has been allocated to fund a childcare programme covering capital costs for childcare facilities and staffing grants. Child Benefit was increased by £50 in Budgets 2001 and 2002 for the first and second child and £60 for the third and subsequent children. It was increased by €8 in Budget 2003 for the first and second child and €10 for the third and subsequent children. Child Benefit now stands at €125.60 for the first and second child and €157.30 for the third and subsequent children. A childcare allowance of €63 per week was also approved for participants on FÁS courses.

### Maternity Leave

In 2000, the NWCI participated in a social partnership working group established to review the Maternity Protection Act 1994. One of the outcomes of this group was to recommend an improvement in maternity leave provisions to 18 weeks' paid maternity leave plus an additional 8 weeks' unpaid leave.<sup>81</sup>

### Parental Leave

Parental leave was introduced in 1998. Under current provisions, employees with children under 5 are entitled to 14 weeks' parental leave. Each parent is entitled to 14 weeks which is non-transferable.

### Carer's Leave

Carer's leave was introduced in July 2001. An employee is entitled to carer's leave, without pay, of up to a maximum of 65 weeks in respect of any relevant person, (a relevant person must, generally, require full-time care and attention) to enable him/her to provide full-time care and attention to that person. The employee may be entitled to Carer's Benefit if s/he satisfies PRSI qualifying conditions. Carer's Benefit is set at E132.70 per week to cover caring responsibilities for 1 person and E199.10 for responsibilities for more than 1 person. Allowances are provided of E16.80 (full-rate) or E8.40 (half-rate) for each child dependant.

A means-tested Carer's Allowance is also available for those who do not have enough PRSI contributions or who are caring for dependants on a long-term basis. However, that allowance is means-tested on the household income. The current rate is E129.60 weekly at the maximum rate for those caring for 1 person and E190.90 for those caring for more than 1 person.

### Adoptive Leave

The Adoptive Leave Act came into force in 1995 and was amended in February 2001. It entitles either the adopting mother or sole adopting father to 14 weeks' paid leave and 8 weeks' unpaid leave. In general, adoptive leave is available to adopting fathers only in cases where the adopting mother dies. This forces the adopting mother to play the role of the primary carer for at least the first fourteen weeks of parenthood.

### Protection of Part-Time Work

The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act, 2000, which transposed the provisions of the

<sup>79</sup> National Committee on Volunteering, Tipping the balance: report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland, Dublin, National Committee on Volunteering, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Freda Donoghue, Women and Volunteering – a Feminised Space?, a paper presented at The Bigger Picture: A Reflection on Volunteering in Ireland in 2001, International Year of the Volunteer, NUI Galway, 7 July 2001 (unpublished).

<sup>81</sup> Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, Report of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dublin, Stationery Office, 2001.

European Part-Time Work Directive, came into operation on 20 December 2001. Under that act, a part-time employee cannot be treated in a less favourable manner than a comparable full-time employee in relation to conditions of employment.

**Homemaker's Disregard**

Since 1994, a Homemaker's Disregard has been available, enabling those caring for children under twelve to have their years of caring work "disregarded" when their final pension eligibility is being calculated. The disregard is available for periods of up to twenty years.

## CHAPTER SIX: WHY MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE

### CHILDCARE

While the resources already committed by the Government to childcare represent a substantial financial investment, they are inadequate in the face of a deepening crisis in childcare supply. The current childcare programme aims to fund 28,208 new childcare places by 2006. However, the Goodbody report on childcare indicated that 40,000 new places would be needed by 2011 just to keep pace with existing demand and a further 14,000 places if more mothers returned to paid jobs than previously anticipated.

The childcare programme being delivered under the NDP has a number of anomalies which need to be addressed if it is to be made more effective. Firstly, the rigidity of the current system provides a disincentive to employers to take action to support their employees' childcare needs. Employers can apply for subsidies to provide childcare supports for their employees only if they decide to build childcare facilities either at the workplace or in a facility reserved exclusively for their employees. If a group of employers decide to come together to build a facility jointly, they do not receive a subsidy. Similarly, if employers decide to fund childcare places in existing creches for their employees, they will not receive funding from the childcare programme for this initiative, although they will be permitted to offset this expenditure against tax.

Secondly, the programme has established a cap on the amount of funding available in any given year to subsidise staffing costs. Community childcare facilities can apply only for a maximum of €80, 000 per year to subsidise staffing costs. The current programme fails to address the increasing staff costs faced by many community childcare providers. In the absence of the necessary funding, childcare providers are forced to charge parents higher fees to meet their increasing staff costs.

Similarly, while the increase in Child Benefit is welcome as an anti-poverty measure and as a contribution to childcare costs, it does not begin to address parents' childcare needs in a situation where ever-increasing demand is leading to increased costs.

The international models presented in chapter 7 involve much more substantial investment on childcare than the relatively modest expenditure currently provided by this Government.

### NWCI RECOMMENDATION

Subsidisation of childcare by the state through a mixed delivery (including community based, public, small scale private and home based care) of 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 so as to provide low cost places for those families. Childcare costs would therefore be on a sliding scale and directly relate to parents' ability to pay.

This policy of subsidisation of supply must be central to supply side policies and has been developed in other countries in Europe, for example, Finland and Sweden. Funding to childcare facilities should be delivered through the County Childcare Committees. This supply side policy should provide equal access to quality and affordable childcare for all parents and result in children of mixed social class availing of the same facilities in their local communities.

### FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

The main tool which the Government has used to bridge the gap between the need to get more women into the workforce and the conflicting pressure on workers to find space to look after children and elderly dependants is to promote family-friendly options. In theory, policies such as flexi-time, job-sharing, term-time working or career breaks allow workers to balance their home and work lives. They are intended to provide some recognition of workers' caring responsibilities.

Some progress has been made on making family-friendly policies available in Irish workplaces. However, one serious weakness remains in the way in which the Government approaches family-friendly policies. At the moment, the Government is interested in family-friendly options primarily because they support more women to enter the workforce and because, in a time of labour and skills shortages, they enable employers to retain key staff. So, family-friendly policies are valued only for the benefit which they bring to the economy. Their usefulness in giving workers opportunities to care for family members remains of secondary importance.

In a situation where caring work remains unvalued, family-friendly options are limited in their effectiveness. What they do is to provide a safety-net for workers so that the pressure of

juggling employment and family responsibilities does not become unbearable. In their current form, family-friendly policies are less effective as a means of valuing unpaid caring work.

When the perspectives of Government and employers are examined, what clearly emerges is the fact that workers' caring responsibilities are expected to fit around the needs of the economy. Firstly, the Government sees family-friendly policies as voluntary options which employers can introduce if they have the resources or the need to do so. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness made it clear that any progress on enhancing family-friendly options would be on a voluntary basis. The PPF recommended that a National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies should be established to support family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise. However, the focus of this activity will be to support and guide the voluntary development and implementation of family-friendly policies.<sup>82</sup> The PPF equally made it clear that when it was looking to promote family-friendly policies, the needs of business would take precedence while those of workers would be of secondary importance:

The emergence of a tightening labour market and the increased emphasis on human resources as a competitive element serve to underpin the importance of developing innovative ways of maximising the available labour supply. Similarly, the importance of facilitating equality of opportunity for men and women in the workforce also underscores the desirability of developing policies that can assist parents in reconciling work and family life. Family-friendly policies can serve a dual purpose of contributing to the needs of business as well as meeting the needs of employees with family responsibilities.<sup>83</sup>

#### WHY FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES – THE BUSINESS CASE

For employers, family-friendly policies arise from 2 imperatives – the need for growing flexibility in abilities and organisational structures to meet changing market demands and the skills and labour shortages forcing employers to examine new ways of retaining and recruiting staff.

Research carried out in 1999 in the high-tech sector showed that flexible working arrangements were the second most popular initiative after pay in terms of initiatives introduced to recruit or retain staff.<sup>84</sup> IBEC has identified the following reasons why family-friendly options are good for business:

- they lead to reduced casual sickness absences;
- they improve retention of skilled staff;
- they improve a company's chances of recruiting good workers;
- they lead to improved productivity, motivation and commitment;
- they can lead to potential cost savings, with lower recruitment costs in times of lower staff turn-over, and lower overheads where options such as home-working are used; and,
- they enhance a company's corporate image.<sup>85</sup>

#### Weaknesses of this approach

It is important that employers realise there are clear business reasons for introducing family-friendly policies. Employers who have introduced such options have found them to increase productivity among workers. However, the NWC1 would argue that the Government's approach needs to focus not just on the needs of employers but equally on those of workers. A clearer balance needs to be forged between the rights of employers and those of employees.

The Government's emphasis on the needs of the economy and of business has a number of serious consequences for those with caring responsibilities. Firstly, while 53% of companies in the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector offer family-friendly options, there is absolutely no pressure imposed on the remaining 47% to do anything for their workers. Similarly, companies place restrictions on the type of workers for whom family-friendly options are available. Generally employers perceive such arrangements to apply mainly to female employees with childcare arrangements. As a result, such arrangements were more widely available in organisations with a high proportion of female employees and for employees in clerical and administrative roles. Employers in a number of companies stated that

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<sup>82</sup> Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000).

<sup>83</sup> Idem.

<sup>84</sup> Anne Coughlan, Family-Friendly / Work-Life Balance Policies.

<sup>85</sup> Idem.

it is not feasible to provide the arrangements for production operatives.<sup>86</sup>

Family-friendly policies have had little effect on the culture of work more generally. Demands on workers have increased rather than diminished, with most workers being expected to demonstrate ever-increasing productivity and to shoulder larger work burdens. Commitment is measured in the number of hours that a person spends in the office and the degree to which that person is on-call during evenings or weekends. As a result, those who avail of family-friendly options are often perceived to be less committed to their jobs than those prepared to work long hours to accomplish company objectives. Since the Government has emphasised the business case for family-friendly options rather than the right of workers to care for their families, it has done nothing to counter the long hours culture present in many Irish businesses. Even in the Civil Service, which has a long tradition of family-friendly policies, there is a widespread perception among civil servants that those availing of options such as job-sharing were less likely to succeed in interviews for promotion than those working full-time. Most of those availing of family-friendly options continue to be grouped in the lower ranks of the Civil Service.

Thirdly, all existing family-friendly options are unpaid. While certain options such as flexi-time and time-banking do not result in loss of income, most employees who decide to avail of a family-friendly option end up earning less money than a full-time employee. A person on parental leave loses pay for a period of 14 weeks. A person on a career break loses seniority and pension rights as well as pay. The job-sharer's salary is reduced by as much as 50%, the term-time worker by up to 25%. Loss of income remains one of the main reasons why men are so reluctant to avail of family-friendly options. Giving employees paid leave would assist in getting more men to share caring responsibilities. If men as well as women were to avail of family-friendly options, the macho work-culture would be less prevalent. It would become more acceptable for all employees to give more importance to their caring responsibilities. Care would become an integral part of most employee's working lives rather than an add-on to be squeezed into the interstices of hectic work schedules.

#### NWCI RECOMMENDATION

<sup>86</sup> Hugh Fisher, Investing in People: Family-Friendly Work Arrangements in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, Work-Life Balance in the new Millennium, Dublin, Equality Authority, 2000.

<sup>87</sup> Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Parental Leave Act 1998, April 2002, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dublin, Stationery Office, 2002.

In view of the urgent need for more effective family-friendly policies throughout the workforce, the NWCI recommends that family-friendly options should become statutory with all employees having an enforceable right to such options. This would have the effect of making family-friendly options integral to all workplaces, thus transforming the culture of work fundamentally.

#### PARENTAL LEAVE

The major weakness of parental leave in its current form is that it is unpaid. Surveys commissioned by the Review of the Parental Leave Act Working Group in 2001 found that only 20% of employees, mainly in the public sector, were taking the leave. The absence of a payment for parental leave was identified as the principal barrier preventing more employees from availing of this entitlement.<sup>87</sup>

It is also evident that an entitlement to 14 weeks' leave will not support a parent's choice to care for her or his children during their early years. Most EU countries such as Austria, Germany, Sweden, Finland and Italy provide paid parental leave for periods ranging from ten months to 3 years, in addition to childcare and maternity leave.

#### NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS

A model should now be put in place in Ireland to facilitate parental choice by providing full-time paid parental leave for either parent until a child is 5.

A half-time payment should be available for parents of children up to age eleven.

#### MATERNITY LEAVE

The Review of the Maternity Protection Act in 2000 did not agree to a NWCI proposal that fathers be given 5 days' paternity leave at the time of their child's birth. The NWCI considered that the introduction of paternity leave would have represented a first step in supporting fathers to perform their caring roles. It would also have challenged the automatic assumption of Government and employers that caring responsibilities are held only by women. The failure of representatives on the group to agree to

this proposal reflects the continuing assumption that women will shoulder caring responsibilities and that they can do so without the support of their partners.

One crucial issue, which was not addressed within the Review of the Maternity Protection Act, was that relating to the Maternity Benefit rate. Employers are still not obliged to contribute anything to compensate employees during maternity leave. While public sector employees receive their full salaries during this period, many private sector employees receive only a social insurance payment, Maternity Benefit. Maternity Benefit is equal to 70% of a person's gross income, with the minimum payment at 135.60 and the maximum at 232.40. While this payment is higher than other social welfare payments, it can still represent a substantial loss of income for many employees. Consequently, many women who decide to have children are immediately penalised in financial terms at a time when they can have large outlays related to baby equipment. Furthermore, it puts lower-income employees under pressure to return to their jobs early in order to minimise their loss of income.

#### NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS:

Introduce 5 days' paid paternity leave.

Review the Maternity Benefit rate.

Extend paid maternity leave from eighteen weeks to twenty-six weeks.

#### HOMEMAKER'S DISREGARD

The 2 major problems that the NWCI sees with this scheme are firstly, that it is not available retrospectively to those women who have spent their lives caring for their families. Secondly, the NWCI considers that caring work should be viewed as a contribution to Irish society and valued accordingly rather than as something to be disregarded.

#### NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS

Turn the system of Homemaker's Disregards into a system of Homemaker's Credits.

Make these credits retrospectively available.

#### VALUE FOR CARING

One of the priorities identified in consultations on the National Plan for Women was that unpaid caring work for older people and dependants with disabilities should be valued. The recommendations put forward included the demand that an adequate care infrastructure should be developed. It was also recommended that the household means test for Carer's Allowance should be abolished, that only the carer's own income should be taken into account. The Government was also urged to increase the rate of the Carer's Allowance. It was recommended that the Government should introduce a Cost of Providing Care payment.<sup>88</sup> The NWCI urges the Government to implement these recommendations without delay.

#### NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS

Abolish the means test for Carer's Allowance and review its adequacy.

Introduce a Cost of Care Allowance.

Convert carers' benefit and allowance into a wage.

#### MEN'S CARING ROLES

Family-friendly policies are essential to work-life balance, but they are not enough. In order to prevent family-friendly options from simply reinforcing gender norms, men must increase their role in caring. For men and women to be economically equal, they must share paid and unpaid employment equally.<sup>89</sup> Although family-friendly policies lessen the salary gap by allowing women to remain in the workforce, when the division of caring work remains unchanged, the salary gap is also reinforced through women's shorter working hours.

If society and particularly men do not assume with solidarity the responsibilities of caring for the family,

<sup>88</sup> Genesis Europe, Aspirations of Women collected in the course of the Consultation Process on the National Plan for Women 2002: Towards a National Women's Strategy, September 2002, Dublin, Stationery Office, 2002

<sup>89</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions, 'Gender and Working Conditions in the European Union'.

we will be curbing the opportunities of half of humanity. (José Antonio Ocampo)<sup>90</sup>

The NWCI has consistently argued that the Government needs to put policies in place which encourage men to assume their caring responsibilities. Men are much less likely to plan their working hours and employment situations according to the demands and timing of caring responsibilities at home. In fact, changes in men's working hours tend to be towards longer days rather than shorter ones.<sup>91</sup> This evidence reveals that gender norms in caring roles are continuing unchanged, with women still responsible for the majority of home and caring work even though they are also employed outside the home.<sup>92</sup>

A strategy needs to be put in place to encourage men to share caring responsibilities more equitably. This strategy also needs to work to change employers' attitudes. Even in Denmark, where it is the norm for fathers to take paternity leave, 20% of male employees experience hostility from their employers when taking childcare leave.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Progress of the World's Women UNIFEM, 2000.

<sup>91</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions, 'Gender and Working Conditions in the European Union'.

<sup>92</sup> Eileen Drew and Ruth Emerek, 'Employment, Flexibility and Gender'.

<sup>93</sup> A survey by Dines Andersen and Anne-Dorthe Hestbæk cited in Lis Højgaard & Malou Juelskjaer, 'Literature Review for Denmark'.

CHAPTER SEVEN:  
INTERNATIONAL MODELS

## SWEDEN

In Sweden 70% of women and 73% of men age sixteen to sixty-four are employed. This is one of the highest percentages of women's employment and one of the lowest gaps between women and men's employment in the EU.<sup>94</sup>

### **Childcare**

The philosophy of subsidised childcare coincides with Sweden's commitment to gender equality. The Swedish Government believes that its highly developed, comprehensive childcare system has been a precondition for the changes in family patterns and gender roles that have taken place

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<sup>94</sup> Skolverket (Sweden's National Agency for Education), 'Child Care in Sweden'. Accessed online at <http://www.skolverket.se/english/system/child.shtml> in July 2001.

since the 1970s.<sup>95</sup> Sweden recognises that gender equality will not come simply from women entering the labour market, but must be accompanied by changes in men's roles and the redistribution of home, caring, and paid work responsibilities. The Swedish Government actively encourages shared parental responsibility. Policies that encourage and enable

both parents to accept paid employment are viewed as furthering this aim. Recently, the approach to childcare has been re-centred around a child's right to care.<sup>96</sup>

**Right to childcare**

Since 1985, every child between the ages of 1 and 6 has had a right to childcare. This right to

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<sup>95</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

care was extended to school-age children (6 to 12 year olds) in 1995.<sup>97</sup> This right includes children between the ages of 1 and 5 whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave caring for a younger child.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, if a child up to the age of twelve needs special support, either temporarily or permanently, s/he is

guaranteed a place in childcare regardless of their parents' employment status.<sup>99</sup>

**Access**

Local authorities are obliged to provide childcare spaces, without unreasonable delay, to children whose parents are employed or studying or who

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<sup>97</sup> Lars Gunnarsson, Barbara Martin Korpi, Ulla Nordentam, Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden: Background Report Prepared for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden, December, 1999. Accessed online at <http://utbildning.regeringen.se/inenglish/publications.htm> in July 2001. check

<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden, 'Maximum Fees and Universal Pre-School', May 2000. Accessed online at <http://utbildning.regeringen.se/inenglish/publications.htm> in July 2001.

<sup>99</sup> OECD, 'OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden', December 1999. Accessed online at <http://www.oecd.org/els/education/ecec/docs.htm> in July 2001.

have special needs. In spite of an increased birthrate, a record number of new childcare places were created in the mid 1990s, virtually eliminating waiting lists.<sup>100</sup> In Sweden 98% of local authorities can offer a place to school-age applicants within 3-4 months.<sup>101</sup>

#### **Form and uptake of childcare**

Sweden subsidises both pre-school and family-based care for 1-5 year olds 90% of pre-school children avail of these options.<sup>102</sup> Most 6 year olds attend a voluntary pre-school class, which was established in 1998. The pre-school class is free to students, and local authorities are required

to provide it for at least 525 hours per year.<sup>103</sup> In 1998, 91% of Swedish 6 year olds attended the pre-school class.<sup>104</sup> A free, universal pre-school class will be extended to 4 and 5 year olds in January 2003.<sup>105</sup> Children under the age of 1 are almost always taken care of at home by a parent on paid parental leave.<sup>106</sup>

#### **Funding and parental fees**

Expenditure on childcare was E4.37 billion (SEK 39.7 billion) in 1999.<sup>107</sup> This includes the costs of care for both pre-school and school-age children.<sup>108</sup> Parents pay a monthly charge for childcare. The charge can vary greatly depending

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<sup>100</sup> Swedish Institute, 'Childcare in Sweden', factsheet published by the Swedish Institute, October 1999. Accessed online at [http://www.si.se/e\\_infosweden/653.cs?dirid=1358](http://www.si.se/e_infosweden/653.cs?dirid=1358) in July 2001.

<sup>101</sup> OECD, 'OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden'.

<sup>102</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden, 'Maximum Fees and Universal Pre-School'.

<sup>106</sup> OECD, 'OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden'.

<sup>107</sup> National Agency for Education, Descriptive Data on Child Care and Schools in Sweden in 2000, Report no. 192. Accessed online at <http://www.skolverket.se> in July 2001.

<sup>108</sup> OECD, 'OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden'.

on the income of the parents, the number of children in the family, the amount of time the child spends at the centre, and the local authority in which the centre is located.<sup>109</sup> The average share of disposable income spent on childcare varies from 7-12%.<sup>110</sup> Some local authorities waive fees for low-income families.<sup>111</sup> Since January 2002, grants have been available from the Government for local authorities to cap childcare fees at a reasonable level.<sup>112</sup>

#### **Leave to care for sick children**

Sweden has provisions to help working parents cope with unexpected emergencies, such as the sickness of a child or childminder. These provisions allow either parent to take time off work to care for their child while still receiving a salary. Sweden's temporary parental benefit scheme entitles parents to up to 120 days a year to care for a sick child under the age of twelve. These days are paid at 80% of the parent's salary and can be taken by either parent.<sup>113</sup>

#### **Parental leave**

Sweden's policies are focused on enabling women to reconcile their caring responsibilities with paid employment and on encouraging fathers to take a greater role in parenting. Each father is entitled to 2 weeks' paid paternity leave at the time of his child's birth. Furthermore, both parents are entitled to sixteen months' (480 days) paid parental leave, following maternity leave. This leave can be shared between parents, with the restriction that at least 1 month must be taken by the mother and 2 by the father or else forfeited.<sup>114</sup> The first twelve months (360 days) of leave are paid at 80% of the parent's wages, up to a set ceiling, and at a guaranteed minimum for low income and unemployed parents. Payment for the next 3 months' (90 days) leave is offered to everyone at a flat rate.<sup>115</sup>

Leave in Sweden can be taken in a flexible format, by the day, half day, quarter day, or eighth of a day, allowing parents, for instance, to reduce their time at work by an hour each day while retaining their benefit. Parental leave can be

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<sup>109</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, 'Swedish Family Policy', Fact Sheet, no. 2, January 2001. Accessed online at [http://www.social.regeringen.se/pressinfo/pdf/familj/familjepolitik\\_en.pdf](http://www.social.regeringen.se/pressinfo/pdf/familj/familjepolitik_en.pdf) on 12 July 2001.

<sup>110</sup> OECD, 'OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden'.

<sup>111</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden, 'Maximum Fees and Universal Pre-School'.

<sup>113</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, 'Swedish Family Policy'.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*.

claimed at any time until the child is 8 years old.<sup>116</sup>

Since the introduction of a father's month and mother's month to Swedish parental leave policy in 1995, the use of parental leave days by fathers has risen. In 1990, 7% of parental leave days were taken by fathers. In 2000, over 12% of parental leave days were taken by fathers.<sup>117</sup> Ulla Bjornberg's study of gender roles in Sweden found that over half the men surveyed had adapted their jobs to the needs of their families, by decreasing their hours, changing jobs, or turning down promotions. Bjornberg found that Swedish men were more likely than men in other countries to derive their identities to a greater extent from their home lives rather than their jobs.<sup>118</sup>

### **Eldercare**

Almost 1 in 5 people in Sweden today is an old age pensioner and the number of both old and very old people will increase in the years to come. Sweden has many provisions that benefit both the elderly and their caregivers. Although many elderly people are cared for by family members, Sweden has a strong system of public care provisions that can help out or take over when the

family can no longer manage, or there are no close relatives.

At the centre of Sweden's policy for eldercare is a system of home-helps. A staff of 120,000 home-help auxiliaries work in institutions and /or go to the homes of eligible elderly people to assist them with their day-to-day activities. The average home-help recipient receives 30 hours of care per month. While most recipients receive less than 20 hours of care per month, some receive up to 120 hours and a few receive full-time care. The availability of full-time home help is in keeping with the right to live at home that was established in Sweden's Social Services Act. According to the Act, all Swedes are entitled to live at home, regardless of the level of care required. In 1997, 146,000 elderly people (over the age of 65) received home-help support. 20% of elderly people over the age of 80 had home helps, and 23% lived in institutions.

### **Older women**

One of the goals set at the European Council's meeting in Stockholm in March 2001 was for the employment ratio for 55-64 year olds to increase by 50% by 2010. The Swedish government is providing study allowances to students between

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<sup>116</sup> Address given by Ingela Thalén, Swedish Minister for Social Security, at the conference 'A Question of Time', 17 June 2001, in Stockholm. Accessed online at [http://www.regeringen.se/galactica/service=irnews/owner=sys/action=obj\\_show?c\\_obj\\_id=40295](http://www.regeringen.se/galactica/service=irnews/owner=sys/action=obj_show?c_obj_id=40295) on 10 July 2001.

<sup>117</sup> Idem.

<sup>118</sup> Ulla Bjornberg, 'Family Orientation Among Men: A Process of Change in Sweden' in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*.

the ages of 51 and 55 to enrol in vocational courses that will train them in areas in which there is or will be a labour shortage.<sup>119</sup>

## NORWAY

### Childcare

A childcare benefit scheme was introduced in Norway in 1998. Parents can choose between a place for their child in subsidised childcare or a

cash benefit intended to allow a parent to stay home with children under the age of 3.<sup>120</sup>

The cash benefit option offers up to E4,582 (NOK 36,000) annually to families for each child aged between 1 and 2 who does not take a place in childcare.<sup>121</sup> The benefit is reduced proportionally if children are enrolled in childcare for up to 33 hours a week.<sup>122</sup> Some families take the benefit and use it to hire a childminder or au pair.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Sweden's Action Plan for Employment 2001

<sup>120</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Norway, Fifth Periodic Report Submitted by Norway under Article 18 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<sup>121</sup> Pernille Lønne Mørkhagen, 'The position of women in Norway'.

<sup>122</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Norway, 'The Norwegian Social Insurance Scheme', January 2001. Accessed online at <http://www.dep.no/shd/engelsk/publ/veiledninger/030041-120007/index-dok000-b-f-a.html> on 27 June 2001.

<sup>123</sup> Pernille Lønne Mørkhagen, 'The position of women in Norway'.

**Leave to care for sick children**

In Norway, each parent of a child under the age of twelve is entitled to ten days off at full pay to care for a sick child. Parents with more than 2 children are entitled to fifteen days each, and lone parents are entitled to 20 days per year. These days can also be taken when the person usually responsible for the care of their child (childminder, other parent, nursery school teacher, etc) is ill.<sup>124</sup>

**Parental Leave**

Norway also has a father's month as part of its parental leave scheme. It was introduced in 1993, and the percentage of new fathers who used the leave increased from 45% in 1994 to 70% in 1995.<sup>125</sup> As in Sweden, the Norwegian parental leave scheme is extremely flexible. Parents can use a variety of options to extend their paid parental leave by combining shorter working hours with caring for their children at home. Aside from the 3 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after birth reserved for the mother and the month reserved for the father, the parents can split the leave as they like. The other option is to take a

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<sup>124</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Norway, Fifth Periodic Report Submitted by Norway under Article 18 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<sup>125</sup> Pernille Lønne Mørkhagen, 'The position of women in Norway'

full year at 80% of pay or 42 weeks at full pay. All parents in Norway also have the right to reduce their working hours by 20% if it is not overly inconvenient for their employers. However, very few men take this option.<sup>126</sup>

As in Sweden, there is evidence that gender norms are changing in Norway. Young men are more likely to take time off when their children are young. While 40% of Norwegian men with children of pre-school or school age work more than 45 hours a week, this percentage has fallen

by 7% in the past 5 years. However, it is still very unusual for men to reduce their hours or scale back their career plans in order to care for their children.<sup>127</sup>

### **Pensions**

Norway has enacted changes to its pension scheme to address this problem of pension inequalities experienced by women. Norway's Centre for Gender Equality noted that 58% of women receive only the basic national old-age pension, compared to 27% of men.<sup>128</sup> In Norway,

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<sup>126</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1997-1999), Norway. Accessed online at <http://odin.dep.no/bfd/norsk/publ/rapporter/004005-994007/index-dok000-b-f-a.html> in July 2001.

carers can now receive pension credits for their work. Since 1992, people in Norway who care at home without pay for their own children under age of 7, the elderly, the sick, or people with disabilities can earn pension points entitling them to a supplementary pension.<sup>129</sup> Carers receive up to 3 pension points a year. This is equivalent to the pension points earned on an annual salary of E24,611 (NOK 193,360).<sup>130</sup>

#### **Eldercare**

Norway also has a system of paid family home helps.<sup>131</sup> If a person in Norway who has been working as an unpaid carer for more than 5 years cannot find a job upon returning to the labour force, they are guaranteed a basic income until they reach pension age.<sup>132</sup>

## **FINLAND**

Finland has an individualised welfare system meaning that the allowances paid to one partner are not affected by those received by the other.<sup>133</sup>

#### **The right to childcare**

All children in Finland under the age of 7 have an unconditional right to a place in subsidised childcare provided by their local authority since 1996. Finland's childcare policy has the dual objective of supporting parents with their caring responsibilities and promoting the development of children.<sup>134</sup> Local authorities are required to provide a place in childcare for every child that needs one in the format which best meets the needs of both parents and children. Most children

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<sup>129</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Norway, Fifth Periodic Report Submitted by Norway under Article 18 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<sup>130</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Norway, 'The Norwegian Social Insurance Scheme'.

<sup>131</sup> Judith Phillips, 'Paid Work and Care for Older People: A UK Perspective'

<sup>132</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>133</sup> KELA- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, 'KELA 2001: A Guide to Benefits'. Accessed online at <http://www.opas.vn.fi/english/index.html> on 12 July 2001.

<sup>134</sup> *Idem*.

are in a childcare facility full-time, but part-time and round-the-clock care are available to fit parents' working schedules and to accommodate shift work.<sup>135</sup>

#### **Access and uptake**

A study conducted in 1999 found that most local authorities were able to provide children with a childcare place, with only 6% of authorities having a shortage of places.<sup>136</sup> Publicly-supported childcare includes crèche facilities, support for childminders and Montessori schools. In January 1999, 49% of pre-school children were enrolled in some form of public childcare. Since 1 August 2000, all 6 year olds have the right to attend a year of pre-school free of charge. Local authorities are required to provide at least 700 hours for the year, or about 18 hours per week, of pre-school classes to all 6 year olds wanting to avail of this facility.<sup>137</sup>

#### **Funding and parental fees**

The annual cost of municipal day care is E1.4 billion (FIM 8.3 billion).<sup>138</sup> One half of Finnish social service expenditure is devoted to childcare and half of all social service staff are childcare providers.<sup>139</sup> Parental fees for public childcare cover an average of 15% of total costs. Fees vary depending on family size and household income.

The maximum fee for full-time public childcare stood at E185 (FIM 1100) per month in 2000.<sup>140</sup>

#### **Alternatives to public childcare**

If parents do not enrol their children in a public childcare facility, they can receive either a home care allowance (see below) or a private childcare allowance. The private childcare allowance, introduced in 1997, is intended to assist families with the cost of private childcare.<sup>141</sup> The private childcare allowance is payable for each child in the family from the end of parental leave until the child begins school. This allowance is paid directly to the private childcare provider.<sup>142</sup>

#### **Child home care allowance in Finland**

Finland's child home care allowance is a cash benefit paid to help defray the cost of caring for children who do not take a place in subsidised public childcare. Children in families receiving the child home care allowance can be cared for by a parent, another relative or a private childcare provider.<sup>143</sup> The child home care allowance is provided until the youngest child reaches the age of 3 and enrolls in a public childcare facility. The child home care allowance can also be paid if the child attends pre-school on a part-time basis.<sup>144</sup>

The child home care allowance can be used in conjunction with childcare leave. Childcare leave

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135 'Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland: Background report prepared for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy', May 2000. Accessed online at [http://www.vn.fi/stm/english/publicat/publications\\_fset.htm](http://www.vn.fi/stm/english/publicat/publications_fset.htm) in July 2001.

136 *Idem.*

137 *Ibid.*

138 *Ibid.*

139 Anneli Anttonen, 'The Welfare State and Social Citizenship' in Kaisa Kauppinen and Tuula Gordon (eds.), *Unresolved Dilemmas: Women, Work and the Family in the United States, Europe and the Former Soviet Union.*

140 'Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland'.

141 *Idem.*

142 KELA- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, 'KELA 2001: A Guide to Benefits'.

143 *Idem.*

144 *Ibid.*

can be taken following paid maternity and parental leave. It offers full employment security until the youngest child reaches the age of 3, and although the leave itself is unpaid, the parent can receive the child home care allowance for the duration of the leave. Only one parent can take the leave at any one time.<sup>145</sup> Childcare leave is also available on a part-time basis, giving parents the option of reducing their working hours until the end of their child's first year of school.

#### **Eldercare**

Finland also has a system of home helps to which every individual has a right. Its main purpose is to support elderly people to stay at home rather than to have to move into a residential nursing home.<sup>146</sup>

## **FRANCE**

#### **Childcare**

In 1995 the "Caisses d'Allocation Familiales" (Family Allowance Fund, or CAF) made the equivalent of E548.8 million available for developing childcare facilities, together with E747 million provided by the Government and local authorities. France has increased the number of places available in public and private crèches by 65% over the past ten years. Childcare options include the école maternelle, a publicly funded pre-school, and halte-garderie, a nursery to which children can go occasionally or for a few hours a day. Of all children under 3, 30% attend public childcare facilities each day. Public childcare fees are lower for low-income families.<sup>147</sup>

In addition to childcare centres, France has two state allowances intended to help defray the cost of childminders. These are intended to offer parents choices with regard to the childcare options most suitable to their children's needs. The Allowance to Families for the Employment of a Registered Childminder (AFEAMA) was created in 1990 and increased in 1995. The allowance is intended for dual-income families to employ a registered childminder to care for children under 6 years of age outside the home. The allowance is not means-tested. The payment corresponds to the social security contribution due when the childminder is paid, plus €122 per month for a

child under 3, or €61 per month for a child under 6, plus a tax deduction of up to E571 per year. In addition to helping families with childcare costs, the scheme is also intended to bring childminding out of the informal sector. It has been very popular, with 400,000 recipients and 320,000 registered childminders participating in 1997.

The second childcare allowance option for French families is the Allowance for Childcare at Home (AGED). It is intended for dual-income or lone working parents to employ a childminder to care for children under 6 years of age in the children's home. Like the AFEAMA, it is not means-tested. The allowance amounts to a maximum of €630 per month for children under 3, and half that for children aged between 3 and 6. The scheme also includes a tax deduction of up to 50% of the cost of care, up to E6,857 per year. There were 76,000 recipients in 1997.

#### **Childbearing benefit**

The family model used by the French government assumes that women bear the bulk of the responsibility for child rearing, even though it has long been accepted, and even encouraged, that French women work outside the home.<sup>148</sup> The childbearing benefit in France is called APE. It is basically a "mother's salary," paid for the second or later child when either parent stops working and stays home to care. If the parent works part-time, the APE payment is reduced. The APE is not means-tested, so it is available to families of any income level. It is also not taxable. It was paid at a flat rate of €452 per month in 1996.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> 'Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland'.

<sup>146</sup> Anneli Anttonen, 'The Welfare State and Social Citizenship'.

<sup>147</sup> Jeanne Fagnani, 'Recent Changes in Family Policy in France: Political Trade-offs and Economic Constraints'.

<sup>148</sup> Idem.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

It is no longer acceptable for women to suffer poverty and intolerable levels of stress because the Government fails to value care or to support carers. Women are rendered more and more unequal in Irish society because of the lack of Government action.

The Government needs to act to resolve the current care crisis. The NWCi is calling on the Government to adopt the following short- to medium-term recommendations so as to:

- promote women's equality;
- provide value for care work;
- secure the rights of children and the elderly; and,
- achieve the EU objective of increased female labour force participation.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Government should reform the social welfare system so as to recognise and value the caring work performed by women as outlined in '**A Woman's Model for Social Welfare Reform**' (NWCi 2003).
- All women engaged in full-time caring work should be given pension and social insurance credits for periods of up to 20 years to enable them to qualify for full contributory old-age pensions and Maternity Benefit. This entitlement should be available retrospectively so that older women, including those now of pension age, can qualify.
- The Government should implement its commitment without delay that all women of pension age be given the full, non-contributory pension, rather than the Qualified Adult Allowance, the lower payment to which they are currently entitled.
- Caring for an elderly dependant or for a person with a disability should be viewed as work requiring a wage. As a first step, the means test should be abolished for the Carer's Allowance, enabling all carers to qualify for this payment. The level of this payment should be benchmarked to Gross Average Industrial Earnings and indexed accordingly.
- The Carer's Benefit and Allowance should be converted into a wage.
- All social welfare payments involving a care element, including the One-Parent Family Payment, should be benchmarked to Gross Average Industrial Earnings and indexed accordingly.
- The rate of Maternity Benefit should also be reviewed.
- Paid maternity leave should be extended from eighteen weeks to twenty-six weeks.
- A care strategy should be put in place by the Government to expand the system of supports for carers including increased provision for respite services, public health nurse services and occupational, physio- and speech therapy supports.
- A Cost of Care Allowance should be available to those providing full-time care for family dependants in their own homes.
- The Health Strategy should receive the necessary resources to fund the commitment to primary care for the elderly.
- The Government should set in place a ten-year programme to put an adequate childcare and eldercare infrastructure in place, involving the commitment of resources equal to those now dedicated to the roads network.
- The Government should offer children a right to childcare appropriate to their needs. Cost of childcare should be on a sliding scale and directly relate to parents' ability to pay.
- A code of practice should be put in place to protect the rights of older people providing childcare for family dependants.
- There should be a substantial improvement in the supports offered to parents in the workplace. All parents should be entitled to a parental leave payment, enabling either parent to engage in full-time care of their children until their youngest child has reached 5. After that, a part-time payment should be available until the child has reached eleven. A part-time unemployment payment should also be available for women who are available only for part-time work because of their caring responsibilities.
- 5 days' paid paternity leave should be available for fathers at the time of their child's birth.
- Employers should receive supports from the Government to introduce family-friendly policies for their employees. These should include the introduction of tax exemptions to cover expenses arising from the introduction of such policies.
- Family-friendly policies such as job sharing, term-time working, time banking, flexi-time should become statutory, obliging employers to make these options available to all employees with caring responsibilities.
- Legislation extending rights to family-friendly policies to all acting in loco parentis, including same-sex couples, should be introduced by the Government without delay.

- A system of official enforcement of family-friendly policies should be put in place. These should include audits by the Equality Authority of workplaces to ensure that appropriate family-friendly policies are available to employees. Inspectors should be appointed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to police those workplaces found to be violating obligations to institute family-friendly policies for employees.
- Employees should have a system of redress to Rights Commissioners and the Employment Appeals Tribunal to force employers to introduce family-friendly policies.
- A mainstream National Support Programme for Women Returners should be established. This should include childcare and eldercare supports and flexible provision of training.
- The Family Reunification Procedures for migrant workers and their families should be amended to allow spouses access to the labour market. Currently they are barred from taking up work and are fully dependent on their partner.
- All Government policies should be equality proofed. The Government should introduce an equality framework which recognises the centrality of care.