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# PRE-BUDGET 2013 SUBMISSION

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SEPTEMBER 2012

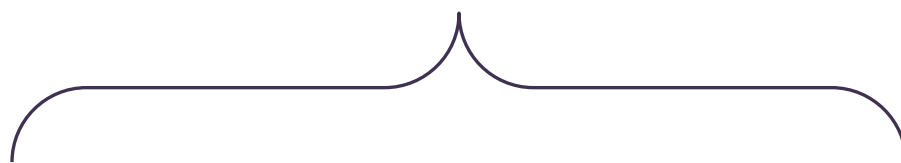
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Our vision is of an Ireland where all women and men have equal power to shape society and their own lives. We work to promote equality and empower women.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Summary of NWCI Recommendations for Budget 2013 .....	3
Introduction & Context.....	7
<i>National Context</i> .....	8
<i>International Context</i> .....	11
NWCI Recommendations for Budget 2013 .....	12
1. <i>Protecting All Our Children</i> .....	12
2. <i>Women – employment &amp; unemployment</i> .....	14
3. <i>Protecting the most vulnerable women</i> .....	17
4. <i>Pensions</i> .....	22
5. <i>Taxation reform</i> .....	23
6. <i>Women and Health</i> .....	24
7. <i>Violence against Women</i> .....	26
8. <i>Protecting the Voice of Women</i> .....	28

# SUMMARY OF NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET 2013

## Crosscutting Recommendation

Gender proof all measures contained in Budget 2013

## 1. Protecting All Our Children

### 1.1 Child Benefit

- 1.1.1 Child Benefit remains universal and payment levels are maintained at current rates.

### 1.2 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

- 1.2.1 Extend the free pre-school year so that all children can enter ECCE at the age of three years.
- 1.2.2 Introduce a second universal free pre-school year.
- 1.2.3 Introduce a publicly subsidised system of out of school hour's care using existing school infrastructure.

## 2. Women – employment & unemployment

### 2.1 Welfare to Work

- 2.1.1 Adoption of a Gender Equality Strategy within SOLAS and National Employment and Entitlements Services that will;
  - Introduce innovative welfare to work strategies which have specific gender dimension and account for women's work patterns.
  - Introduce flexible education and training provision on high skill training programmes
  - Provide supports to women, particularly women with care responsibilities to enable them to access the full range of education and training options.

### 2.2 Supporting Part-Time & Low-Paid Workers

- 2.2.1 Protect pay rates of employment governed by JLCs and REAs at current levels;
- 2.2.2 The Department of Social Protection recognise atypical work patterns by calculating unemployment on the basis of hours rather than days per week.
- 2.2.3 Reverse the basis on which a working week is calculated from a five to a six day week.
- 2.2.4 As a temporary provision, reduce the hour's threshold for FIS to support job retention during the recession.

### 2.3 Social Welfare Rates

- 2.3.1 Maintain social protection payments at current levels

### 2.4 Qualified Adults

- 2.4.1 Abolish the limitation rule.
- 2.4.2 All qualified adults to be paid the same rate as main claimant and paid directly to the individual.
- 2.4.3 Fund a short qualitative study of adult dependants be completed as a matter of urgency in the next 6 months which would give vital information to inform the development of a single payment and the accompanying activation of adult dependants.

### 3. Protecting the most vulnerable women

#### 3.1 Lone Parents

3.1.1 Reverse the reduction in the youngest age of the child from 7 years to 14 years.

3.1.2 Halt any further reduction in the earnings disregard of the OPFP

#### 3.2 Women with disabilities

3.2.1 Government immediately reverse cuts to Homecare Packages and Home Help.

3.2.2 Organisations supporting and advocating for the rights of people with disability be allocated with the necessary resources to function effectively.

#### 3.3 Traveller and Roma Women

3.3.1 Government centralise, ring-fence and protect the Traveller health budget.

3.3.2 Maintain at least at existing levels funding of Traveller projects.

3.3.3 That a specific additional budget be allocated to the Local and Community Development Programme through the National Traveller Partnership and to funding lines for national Traveller organisations to undertake work with Roma women to be undertaken in partnership with the Roma community.

#### 3.4 Migration and Integration

3.4.1 Increase the level of weekly payment to asylum seekers

3.4.2 Ring fence funding for local organisations working to address racism, promote integration and address the needs of women from minority ethnic communities

3.4.3 Allocate funding for the development of a comprehensive national framework for addressing racism in the Scheme of Grants to Support National Organisations

#### 3.5 Habitual Residence Condition

3.5.1 In the medium-term abolish the HRC as a regressive policy.

3.5.2 In the short-term:

- Carry out a gender and equality impact assessment of the HRC;
- Remove the HRC as a condition for access to child benefit;
- Provide an exemption from the HRC for women who are experiencing domestic violence and for women who need to access health services on health grounds.
- Provide an exemption from the HRC for Traveller and Roma women in recognition of their nomadic tradition.

### 4. Pensions

4.1 Maintain the rate of the Contributory and Non Contributory Pensions

4.2 Introduction of a universal pension for all, funded through the removal of tax reliefs for private pensions.

## 5. Taxation reform

### Income Tax

- 5.1 Introduce a refundable tax credits system to ensure that all those in the tax system fully benefit from tax credits.

### Taxing Wealth

- 5.2 Introduce a third tax band for high earners (over €100,000 per annum).
- 5.3 The cost of tax expenditures be reduced to the EU average over the medium-term – with the burden of that reduction to be borne by high income groups.
- 5.4 All tax expenditures must be fully quantified and subject to a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. This would include distributional, equality and economic impact analyses.
- 5.5 Provisions of all tax reliefs at the standard rate tax band.

## 6. Women and Health

### 6.1 Resourcing Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives

- 6.1.1 Establish a gender mainstreaming unit within the Department of Health as recommended by the National Women's Strategy to oversee and implement the HSE Gender Mainstreaming Framework document
- 6.1.2 Provide a specific budget line to implement the HSE Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

### 6.2 BreastCheck

- 6.2.1 Deliver on commitments in the Programme for Government and extend the eligible age bracket for Breastcheck to cover women aged 65-69.
- 6.2.2 Awareness raising programmes amongst GPs and women for early detection of breast cancer particularly in the 40-49 age group.
- 6.2.3 Maintain supports for community based women organisations that are assisting the National Cancer Support Service in improving uptake rates in disadvantaged or isolated areas.

### 6.3 Women and Smoking

- 6.3.1 Develop and resource community based smoking cessation services for women, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities. Services should be designed to meet the specific health needs of each target group and take into account health literacy levels and attitudes towards smoking.

## 7. Violence against Women

### 7.1 Domestic and sexual violence

- 7.2.1 Increase funding to organisations providing front-line services and supports to survivors of violence against women by 10% to offset budgets cuts in recent years.
- 7.2.2 Increase funding to advocacy organisations working at a representative, policy and support level by 10% to offset budgets cuts in recent years.
- 7.2.3 To ensure access to safe, emergency accommodation for women experiencing male violence, a target of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population should be agreed and resources ring fenced to make progress towards that target.
- 7.2.4 Allocate resources to fund a SAVI 2 Report in relation to the nature and extent of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland and research into the economic cost of domestic violence in Ireland.

## 7.2 Female genital mutilation

- 7.2.1 Allocate resources for the establishment of an inter-departmental committee on FGM who would be tasked with the role of drawing up a National Action Plan to Combat FGM. Provide resources for a nationwide information awareness campaign on the new legislation

## 8. Protecting the Voice of Women

- 8.1 Ensure that there is no further degradation of funding for women's rights and gender equality.
- 8.2 Increase funding to the NWCI by 10% to offset recent budget cuts.
- 8.3 Increase funding to the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks through the Local and Community Development Programme by 10% to offset recent budget cuts – to be distributed to the local women's' organisations.

## INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Since the foundation of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) in 1973, Ireland has made significant progress in relation to women's equality. Despite this, full gender equality in Irish society has yet to be achieved. Irish women continue to work fewer hours, earn less and are under-represented in the Oireachtas and in local and regional authorities than men<sup>1</sup>. Women are far less likely to be in the Labour Force and are almost 25 times more likely to looking after home/family than men. In 2009 women's income was around 73% of men's income and even after adjusting for the fact that men work longer hours, a woman's hourly earnings were around 94% of men's<sup>2</sup>. Disposable income for households headed by a male continue to be significantly higher than those for households headed by a female and deprivation rates are higher for women and households headed by a woman than men or households headed by a man<sup>3</sup>.

It is now accepted that breaking down barriers to gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship would create new sources of economic growth. However, gender equality is not just about economic empowerment. It is a moral imperative, it is about fairness and equity, and includes many political, social and cultural dimensions. Gender equality is also a key factor in self-reported well-being and happiness across the world. (*Gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship: final report to the MCM 2012 (OECD2012)*)

Evidence of the significant impact of the recession on women is now emerging. Women's unemployment is now growing at a far faster rate than men's<sup>4</sup>. Evidence from the Trade Unions is showing that abuse of women's rights in the workplace has escalated in the recession. As primary care givers, women are struggling to manage the constantly reducing household budget and debts to provide for their families. To that end, the NWC wish to restate the necessity for *gender proofing* all measures contained in Budget 2013, a measure reinforced by TASC<sup>5</sup> proposals that all budgetary measures under consideration be subjected to an equality audit, whereby a full distributional analysis is undertaken to identify how different groups in society are likely to be affected, to inform a process of gender-proofing the budget.

Budget 2013 will be framed against a continuing deterioration of the country's finances and within the context of Government commitments to budget adjustment of at least €3.5billion in its Memorandum of Understanding for financial support with the EU/ECB/IMF. Notwithstanding these obligations, the NWC would like to remind Government of its ongoing commitment to protect the most vulnerable in Irish society and its national and international obligations to achieving equality between men and women.

Recent ESRI research<sup>6</sup> confirms that contrary to previous budgets (2008 to 2011), Budget 2012's combination of Indirect tax increases and welfare cuts imposed greater percentage losses on those with low incomes - reductions of about 2 to 2½ per cent for those as against losses of about ¾ of a per cent for those on the highest incomes. The NWC would reiterate this in light of the impacts that recent budgets have had on women. Cuts to child benefit, earnings and indiscriminate increases in taxes, as well as cuts to public services on which women and their families rely, have significantly impacted on the incomes and lives of many women. Simultaneously women are experiencing reduced support in their communities as locally based women's organisations, domestic violence services, frontline services and advocacy organisations have all curtailed their services and in many cases have been forced to close, due to cuts in their funding, at a time when the demand for these services is increasing considerably. Further cuts to the income and services will have a devastating effect on the lives of women, their families and their communities.

### Crosscutting Recommendation

Gender proof all measures contained in Budget 2013



## National Context

### Women & employment

In the second quarter of 2012, the female labour force participation rate was 52.7% compared to a male labour force participation rate of 67.9%<sup>7</sup>. Women represented 44.7% of the labour force in 2011. Half of the labour force in the age group 20-24 was female, the highest proportion across all age groups.

Latest figures<sup>8</sup> indicate that the employment rate for men is now 62.9% and the employment rate for women is 55.4%, significantly lower than the EU 2020 targets, even allowing for the reduced Irish target. Women's employment rates continue to decline. The EU Lisbon target rate for women in employment was 60%, a target that was met by Ireland in 2007 and 2008, but not in 2009, 2010 or 2011, when the rate had fallen to 56%<sup>9</sup>. Information from the Quarterly National Household Survey<sup>10</sup> indicates that women's employment rate is currently 54.9%, a rate not seen since 2001. The new employment target set by Europe 2020 is to raise the employment rate for men and women to 75%. Ireland has a reduced target as a result of being a Programme country of between 69-71%. Without a comprehensive strategy for employment, particularly women's employment, Ireland is at risk of failing to reach this target.

Women's employment is more likely to be part-time and lower paid than men's employment. The Mandate Trade Union report *Decent Work? The Impact of the Recession on Low Paid Workers* describes precarious work as "uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" and states that women are over-represented in the 'precariat', which has suffered an above average rate of job loss since the onset of the recession, with female employment being worst hit. The Behaviour and Attitudes survey carried out as part of the report reports on the fall in pay of approximately 40% of these workers over the last year and demonstrates what it describes the "extraordinary level of working time flexibility demanded by retail employers" (p. 4). The report cites Turner & O'Sullivan's (2012) paper on employees working for pay rates determined by Joint Labour Committees (JLCs), finding that they are twice as likely to be women as men.

Companies seeking cost saving measures are increasingly targeting supports for women, such as supports to statutory maternity payments. The Unite Trade Union has stated that it is dealing with abuse of women's rights in the workplace more than ever during these difficult economic times<sup>11</sup>.

In its Annual Report for 2011<sup>12</sup> the Equality Authority stated that gender continued to be the most frequent ground for employment related queries and the third most frequent ground under the Equal Status Acts to its Information Centre. Gender (along with disability) continued to account for the largest share of case files under the Employment Equality Act. This will put continued pressure on women to leave the workforce, with serious personal and social consequences.

Women are still earning substantially less than men in Ireland despite efforts to promote equality in the workplace. According to a study by the European Commission, women here earn on average 17.1 per cent less than men and twice as many men compared to women earn over €50,000 a year<sup>13</sup>. Discrimination against women, undervaluing of women's skills and the low number of women in senior and leadership positions, as well as women's continuing role as primary care givers were all suggested as reasons for this gender pay gap.

### Women & unemployment

In the first quarter of 2012, there were 309,000 persons unemployed, an unemployment rate of 14.7%, the second highest ever recorded<sup>14</sup>. The unemployment rate for women, which stood at about 4% over the last few years, increased sharply in 2009 to 8.1% and has risen over the last two years to 10.4% in 2011<sup>15</sup>. The recession is having increasingly harsh effects on women's employment. For example figures from the Quarterly National

Household Survey show that while male unemployment increased by 1.8 per cent, female unemployment increased by 10.4 per cent in the year to the end of March 2012. Figures just released for Quarter 2 2012 show a continuation of this trend. In that period, that there was an increase of 4,000 unemployed people, 3,600 of whom were female – for every man newly unemployed there were nine women.

Though not designed to measure unemployment as it includes part-time, seasonal and casual workers who are entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance, the latest figures from the Live Register<sup>16</sup> estimates that in the past year the number of men on the register fell by almost 9,500 but the amount of women claiming jumped by nearly 3,500.

Reductions in public sector jobs are disproportionately affecting women, as women are disproportionately represented in areas of work such as health and education, sectors that are experiencing severe cuts, redundancies and job losses.

## Women & income

In general terms income inequality grew between 2010 and 2011 and the Gini coefficient<sup>i</sup> now stands at 33.9% and the income distribution (quintile share ratio) at 5.5%. Women's income<sup>ii</sup> continues to decrease both in real terms and when compared to men. In 2010, there was a difference of over €10,000 for households headed by a male in comparison to households headed by a woman. In all cases the households headed by a male had disposable incomes above the average for the State and the households headed by a female had disposable incomes lower than the State average. Lone parents households (87% of which are headed by a female) had significantly lower levels of disposable incomes. Except for the first and last decile along the income distribution, women tend to be over-represented in the lower income deciles and men over-represented in the higher income deciles.

## Women & poverty

In general terms, poverty increased across all measurements between 2009 and 2010<sup>17</sup>. Households are finding it more and more difficult to manage finances and make ends meet. As the primary managers of households and household finances, women are disproportionately bearing the brunt of this responsibility.

**At risk of poverty:** The *at risk of poverty*<sup>iii</sup> rate increased from 14.1% to 15.8%. The rate for children was significantly higher than the average for the State at 20.5%. Households with one adult and children had the second highest rate amongst all household types at 20.5%.

**Deprivation:** Rates of deprivation continue to increase. Those reporting enforced deprivation of two or more items increased from 13.8% in 2008 to 17.1% in 2009 and 22.5% in 2010. The rates were higher for women (23.4%) than for men (21.6%) and significantly higher for households headed by a female (26.7%) and for lone parent households (49.8%).

**Consistent poverty:** The consistent poverty rate<sup>iv</sup> is also increasing. In 2008 the consistent poverty rate was 4.2%. It increased to 5.5% in 2009 and to 6.2% in 2010, a figure not seen since 2006. The figure is slightly higher for women than men but significantly higher for lone parent households (9.3%), children (8.1%) and households headed by a female (8.2%), which are significantly more likely to be in consistent poverty than households headed by a male (4.9%).

<sup>i</sup> A Gini coefficient of 0% corresponds to perfect equality while higher Gini coefficients indicate a more unequal distribution

<sup>ii</sup> Figures refer to annual average household disposable income

<sup>iii</sup> The *at risk of poverty rate* is largely a measurement of income.

<sup>iv</sup> The *consistent poverty rate* is a measurement of income and deprivation.

**Debt:** In 2010, over 22% of households were in arrears with at least one bill or loan<sup>v</sup>, similar to the figure for 2009 of 24.2% of households, and a significant increase on the figures for 2008 (10.2%). One third of households (33%) that were at risk of poverty in 2010 were in arrears with at least one loan or bill. Over 11% of households stated that they had to go into debt in the last 12 months to meet ordinary household expenses and over half (50.9%) of households stated that the household did not have the ability to pay an unexpected expense of about €1,100 without borrowing. In 2012, over 65% of households stated that they had some degree of difficulty in making ends meet.

## Particularly vulnerable groups of women

**Lone Parents:** Though the lowering of the poverty threshold in 2010 combined with a slightly higher equivalised income shows a slight improvement in terms of at risk of poverty and consistent poverty rates amongst households with one adult and children, lone parent households, 86.5% of which are headed by a woman, continue to be amongst the poorest households in the country. In 2010, the *at risk of poverty rate* for households composed of one adult with children remained high at 20.5%.<sup>vi</sup> In the same year, almost 70% of lone parent households stated they had experienced deprivation compared to the State average of 36% and significantly higher than any other category<sup>18</sup>. Research undertaken by TASC found that single parent households (the vast majority of which are headed by a woman) lost proportionately more of their income compared to other households, as a result of the budgetary measures introduced in Budget 2011<sup>19</sup>.

**Older Women:** There are 115,120 women aged 75 years and over in Ireland<sup>20</sup>. There are 51,063 women aged 75 years and older living alone and 14,098 women aged 85 years and older living alone in the State. They account for almost 70% of all older people living alone. While the NWCI recognises that pension payments to older people have been largely protected in recent years, it is also important to note that the income of older people is amongst the lowest in the State and the income of households where the head of household was aged 65 years and over experienced a further decrease of €1,601 in income between 2009 and 2010, resulting in average income being reduced from €29,711 to €28,110 (from €30,137 in 2008)<sup>21</sup>. The invisibility of the reality of older women's lives has increased as a result of the withdrawal of funding from the Older Women's Network, (OWN).

**Women Headed Households:** As can be seen from the information above, households headed by a female and households where there is a high likelihood that the head of household is a woman (such as lone parent households) experienced some of the worst levels of poverty and deprivation in the State.

Deprivation for households headed by a female increased from 17.7% in 2009 to 26.7% in 2012, the highest increase across all households and significantly higher than the increase for the State. Households headed by a female also saw one of the biggest increases in rates of consistent poverty (from 7.0% in 2009 to 8.2% in 2010).

<sup>v</sup> Rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, arrears on other bills.

<sup>vi</sup> Though this represented a decrease when compared with the 2009 rate of 35.5%, the CSO state: "As the equivalised income of this group tends to fluctuate around the at risk of poverty threshold from year to year, changes in the threshold can have a disproportionate impact on the at risk of poverty rate of this group" (CSO (2011). EU SILC 2010, p. 28).<sup>vi</sup>

## International Context

Notwithstanding the economic difficulties that Ireland continues to face, the State has a number of national and international commitments that it is obliged to fulfil.

**EU Women's Charter:** In an acknowledgement that gender inequalities have direct consequences on economic and social cohesion, on sustainable growth and competitiveness, as well as on demographic changes, the EU Commission adopted a Women's Charter in 2010 to strengthen the commitment of member states to equality between women and men. The Charter highlights the necessity to take gender equality into account in relation to five areas, including economic independence, equal pay, the representation of women in decision-making and positions of power, and respect for women's dignity and integrity and an end to gender-based violence

**European Pact for Gender Equality:** The European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020 reaffirms the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all policies and particularly urges member states to:

- eliminate gender stereotypes, ensure equal pay for equal work and promote the equal participation of women in decision-making;
- improve the supply of affordable and high-quality childcare services and promote flexible working arrangements;
- strengthen the prevention of violence against women and the protection of victims, and focus on the role of men and boys in order to eradicate violence<sup>22</sup>.

**EU Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015:** Building on the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, as well as the European Pact for Gender Equality, this Strategy spells out actions under five priority areas defined in the Women's Charter, and one area addressing cross-cutting issues

**National Reform Programme (Europe2020 Strategy):** In order to achieve the targets established by the Europe 2020 Strategy, Ireland has committed itself to raising to 69-71% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64. Ireland has also revised its poverty target to reducing the number experiencing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2%, which will lift at least 200,000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion between 2012 and 2020.

**EU Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men:** the EU Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has acknowledged that women have been severely affected by the crisis, particularly in terms of their working conditions, their access to employment, their place in society as a whole and gender equality and have stressed the need for a targeted response addressing the real effects of the crisis on women<sup>23</sup>. In their latest annual report on gender equality<sup>24</sup>, the Committee has stated that improving equality between women and men is essential to the EU's response to the current economic crisis. The report, *inter alia*, emphasis the economic and business case for gender equality, the consequences of the crisis and recovery measures for women and gender equality, the advantage of tackling the gender pay gap at EU level, both for economic growth and meeting poverty targets, the economic case for promoting a balanced representation of women and men in economical decision-making, and the human and economic costs of violence. The Committee calls on EU countries, "to get more women into the labour market if they are to meet the EU's overall objective of 75% employment rate for all adults by 2020"<sup>25</sup>.

## NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET 2013

# 1. Protecting All Our Children

## 1.1 Child Benefit



For families, particularly women and children, Child Benefit is one of the most important features of the Irish economic landscape. It is a universal payment that made directly to all mothers, unless otherwise stipulated. The universality of child benefit is based on an understanding that those with children have higher costs than those without and therefore income is distributed from those who do not have children to those who do. It acknowledges that children are key to society and necessary economically and will be the ones to pay for the pensions of those now paying their Child Benefit. It is also part of an overall package of Child Income Supports that target child-related assistance to families who are at risk of poverty<sup>26</sup>. Child poverty remains a consistent challenge in Ireland<sup>vii</sup>.

Child Benefit recognises the role that is played by women as care givers and that fact that income may not be distributed equally within the home. Research<sup>27</sup> in the UK shows that the vast majority of child benefit is spent either directly (on childcare, clothing, nappies, etc) or indirectly (on household bills that support the household in which the child lives) on children. In the Irish context, child benefit is also seen and used as a key mechanism to counteract the lack of investment and availability of affordable childcare where costs for full-time care for one child can be as much as €220 per week<sup>28</sup>, a fact acknowledged by the Government when they introduced the series of increases to the Child Benefit payment to account for 'increasing childcare costs'.

Child Benefit has been consistently reduced in recent budgets. It is no longer paid to for those over 18 years of age but in fulltime education. As part of the last budget, rates for third and subsequent children were cut in January 2012 (by €19 for the third child and by €17 for the fourth and subsequent children). From January 2013, the rate will be standardised at the rate of the first child (currently €140 per month). Grants paid at 4 and 12 years of age to mothers of twins and triplets have also been withdrawn. These changes have resulted in significant losses to families, particular families with more than two children. A family with five children, for example, will see this will mean a drop in Child Benefit from €801 a month in 2011 to €700 a month from January 2013, a fall of €1212 a year.

The universality of Child Benefit has been coming under increasing attack. Arguments against universality focus on the fact that some higher income families may not need Child Benefit payments and it should become part of the system that targets lower income families. The NWCI has consistently stated that it is neither effective nor appropriate to use Child Benefit as a mechanism for redistribution of wealth in Ireland. The NWCI restates its view that taxation of earned income and assets provides a much more appropriate mechanism for the redistribution of wealth and should be used as such in these recessionary times and calls for Child Benefit payments to remain universal and maintained at current rates with no further restrictions.

### Recommendation

1.1 Child Benefit remains universal and payment levels are maintained at current rates.

<sup>vii</sup> The latest figures available state that children (0-17) make up 27.1% of the total population but 35.5% of the population in poverty. They remain the most exposed age group with a consistent poverty rate of 8.1% in 2010, compared to the State average of 6.2% and a rate of 0.9% for those aged over 65 (CSO 2011, EU SILC 2010)

## 1.2 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

The importance of good quality Early Childhood Care and Education is twofold. It is crucial for the future development of children *and* it is a key economic consideration because it facilitates parents, particularly mothers, to up paid. The importance of investment in early intervention and prevention was emphasised in the OECD 2009 report, *Doing Better for Children*. It argued that public spending on services for children should be front-loaded on children's early years (0-6):

*"Countries should invest more resources early when outcomes are more malleable and foundations for future success are laid. Well designed, universal interventions concentrated early in the life cycle can enhance both social efficiency and social equity. Concentrating investment early means that it is also most likely to be effective in breaking the dependence of children's outcomes on those of their parents –inter-generational inequality."*<sup>29</sup>

In relation to its economic importance, according to the OECD<sup>30</sup>, for example, childcare supports are a key factor in the determination of maternal employment behaviour during the early years (p. 141). In its report *Going for Growth: Economic Policy Reforms*, the OECD<sup>31</sup> highlights the fact that, in Ireland, women's labour market participation rates are well below those of best-performing OECD economies, especially for mothers, and high childcare costs and limited supply are major obstacles to participation.

Childcare costs in Ireland are amongst the most expensive anywhere. In their Gender Brief<sup>32</sup>, the OECD estimate the childcare cost in Ireland is 29% of family net income, more than double the OECD average of 13% and the third most expensive behind the UK and Switzerland. The National Consumer Agency (nationwide survey of childcare facilities found that the average cost of full-time care for one child was €181 per week and the price ranged from €220 to €145, a difference of 52%<sup>33</sup>. The NWCI welcomed the introduction of a year's free childcare for pre-school children. The introduction of the ECCE pre-school year is critical for child development and also for the development of quality ECCE infrastructure in Ireland. However, it is insufficient – both the perspective of a child's developmental needs and from the perspective of a working parent in need of affordable childcare.

General childcare provision is also insufficient, particularly in the context of changes to the One Parent Family Payment and the activation measures being targeted at those in receipt of the payment. The NWCI welcomes the statement from the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, outlining the fact that she believes that enhanced childcare provision needs to be in place before the age limit of the child is reduced to seven. The NWCI recommendations to build a quality ECCE infrastructure from infancy to school going years<sup>34</sup> remain relevant. It is crucial that childcare does not provide a barrier to women accessing or maintaining work.

Tensions between work and family life are at the heart of the employment puzzle when it comes to gender. Families with young children need affordable childcare if parents are to work. If childcare eats up one wage so that there is little or no financial gain from going out to work, parents (most often mothers) are less likely to seek a job (OECD (2012) *Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship*, p. 5)

*"I am undertaking tonight that I will only proceed with the measures to reduce the upper age limit to seven years in the event that I get a credible and bankable commitment on the delivery of such a system of child care by the time of this year's budget. If this is not forthcoming, the measure will not proceed".*

(<http://www.joanburton.ie/speeches/social-welfare-and-pensions-bill-2012>).

### Recommendations

- 1.2.1 Extend the free pre-school year so that all children can enter ECCE at the age of three years.
- 1.2.2 Introduce a second universal free pre-school year.
- 1.2.3 Introduce a publicly subsidised system of out of school hour's care using existing school infrastructure.



## 2. Women – employment & unemployment



A real issue of concern for the NWCI is the fact that while up to now, women in employment have been less affected by the recession than men, latest indications are that women's unemployment levels are increasing at a significantly faster pace than those of men<sup>viii</sup>. The Gender Pay Gap also remains a key concern for the NWCI, with women earning significant less than their male counterparts. There have been consistent calls on the Irish government to put a strategic response to the levels of unemployment in place.

Despite some efforts the levels of unemployment are continuing to increase and it is vital that the Government concentrate on efforts to encourage more people, particularly women, into employment.

### 2.1 Welfare to Work

In order to address the continuing decline in employment figures and the rise in unemployment, particularly in relation to women's unemployment levels, Budget 2013 must provide a clear strategy to sustain current levels of employment *and* stimulate new employment opportunities. Putting the supports, including affordable childcare, in place to sustain women workers to remain in their jobs is central to this strategy. Supporting women through the provision of appropriate education, training and relevant labour market experience to move from welfare to work is also crucial to enable women to play their rightful part in economic recovery. Ensuring that the work of SOLAS under the Department of Education and Skills and the National Employment and Entitlements Service develops and includes clear gender equality strategy to the provisions and measures under each body will be crucial, and will also contribute to realising Irish commitments under the EU pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020.<sup>ix</sup>

#### Recommendations

- 2.1.1 Adoption of a Gender Equality Strategy within SOLAS and National Employment and Entitlements Services that will;
- Introduce innovative welfare to work strategies which have specific gender dimension and account for women's work patterns.
  - Introduce flexible education and training provision on high skill training programmes
  - Provide supports to women, particularly women with care responsibilities to enable them to access the full range of education and training options.

<sup>viii</sup> In the year to the first quarter of 2012, male unemployment increased by 1.8%, while the female unemployment rate increased by 10.4% (QNHS Quarter 1 2012).

<sup>ix</sup> The Pact (March 7, 2011) calls on governments to promote gender equality in Europe by closing the gender gap in the labour market, promoting a better work-life balance for men and women, and combating all forms of violence against all women

## 2.2 Supporting Part-Time & Low-Paid Workers

In work poverty is a considerable concern for the NWCI. Between 2009 and 2010, in work poverty increased from 1.1% to 1.8%, and 17.3% of those at-risk of poverty were in work. Many women are engaged in shift work and atypical employment, and they are more likely to be low paid and on reduced hours. The Mandate Trade Union report<sup>35</sup> demonstrates that women are over represented in what it terms precarious work – work that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker, as well as part-time and casual work that requires significant levels of flexibility.

The NWCI welcomes the decision by Government to reverse the cut in the National Minimum Wage and to increase the threshold for payment of the Universal Social Charge to €10,036. However, the NWCI notes that considerably more employment in many of the ‘precarious’ sectors such as retail, cleaning, catering, hotel and security is governed by Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) or Registered Employment Agreements (REAs). Reforms introduced by the new legislation<sup>36</sup> reduce the powers of JLCs, and companies may now seek exemption from paying ERO and REA rates due to financial difficulty. This raises concerns for the NWCI<sup>37</sup> as work covered by JLCs is in the lower paid sectors and the majority of workers covered by JLCs are women, many of whom depend on the additional payments, such as those available for Sunday working, etc, to make ends meet.

In addition, the Irish social protection system is poorly equipped to address current labour market challenges such as increasing casual employment, greater demand for flexibility and in work poverty. The NWCI has long campaigned for a modern social protection system that supports women to remain engaged with the labour market, despite their sometimes atypical work patterns. Provision for systematic short time workers is extremely complex and rigid, excluding more workers than it covers. Under the current system, part time workers can only qualify for jobseekers’ payments (Jobseekers Benefit and Jobseekers Allowance) if their hours are worked within three days or less in a week. Many low paid part-time workers in, for example the retail and services sectors, work hours that are organised around the busiest parts of the day and so may be working limited numbers of hours but spread over more than the three day threshold, thus making them ineligible for social welfare support (and unable to take up another part-time job).

At a time when the OECD is calling for work incentives for women to be strengthened<sup>38</sup>, the Social Welfare Act 2011 changed the basis on which social protection is calculated for those working on a casual basis<sup>39</sup>, many of whom are women, from a six to a five day week, a cut of 20% for part-time/casual workers in receipt of these benefits. Presented as a measure to encourage people to take up work by making it a more attractive alternative, the NWCI regards it a regressive measure that will discourage many women from taking up or remaining in casual or part-time employment.

Family Income Supplement (FIS) plays an important role in supplementing the income of low paid workers. To be eligible for FIS a person must be employed for at least 19 hours a week, which is intended to promote a minimum level of labour market attachment. However, many people have had their hours cut and are no longer in a position to reach the 19 hours limit. Sixty per cent of FIS claimants in 2010 were women, and over half of claimants are lone parents, a group with an exceptionally high poverty rate. It is undoubtedly better to keep these workers in employment, and the social welfare system has a crucial role to play in this regard. Introducing greater flexibility with regard to the hour’s threshold as a temporary measure would play a valuable role in promoting much needed job retention.

### Recommendations

- 2.2.1 Protect pay rates of employment governed by JLCs and REAs at current levels;
- 2.2.2 The Department of Social Protection recognise atypical work patterns by calculating unemployment on the basis of hours rather than days per week.
- 2.2.3 Reverse the basis on which a working week is calculated from a five to a six day week.
- 2.2.4 As a temporary provision, reduce the hour’s threshold for FIS to support job retention during the recession.



## 2.3 Social Welfare Rates

The Social Protection system is of crucial importance to women vulnerable to, or living in, poverty. The majority of social welfare claimants are women, and women have a greater reliance on means-tested payments than men. Changes implemented after Budget 2012 have seen the real incomes of women reduced. As pointed out above, changes to Child Benefit have and will continue to affect incomes of women. Restricting eligibility for new claimants to the One-Parent Family Payment to those with children under the age of 12 in 2012, with further reductions to an eventual seven years on a phased basis, will have a significant impact on a very vulnerable part of Irish society. Eligibility for additional social protection payments for those on Community Employment Schemes (a pathway to work used by many women) have been withdrawn, removing incentives for many women to enter the workforce. Other reductions in, for example, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances are also having a very real affect on the ability of women to cope.

It is crucial that these cuts, the cumulative effects of which are profound on many women, particularly those that are already vulnerable to or living in poverty, are stopped. Social protection rates must be maintained at current levels. Stealth cuts must also stop.

### Recommendations

- 2.4.1 Abolish the limitation rule.
- 2.4.2 All qualified adults to be paid the same rate as main claimant and paid directly to the individual.
- 2.4.3 Fund a short qualitative study of adult dependants be completed as a matter of urgency in the next 6 months which would give vital information to inform the development of a single payment and the accompanying activation of adult dependants.

## 2.4 Qualified Adults

The status of Qualified Adult is assigned to a person who is not registered as unemployed independently and is considered to be a dependant of their partner for their income. With the exception of Jobseeker's Allowance<sup>x</sup>, the value of a Qualified Adult payment is 'limited' to a proportion of the full rate, even where the dependant partner meets the unemployment criteria.

There are 95,045 Qualified Adults across all job seeker payments, the vast majority whom are women. Treatment of them in this way acts as a disincentive to many signing on the Live Register, and if not registered as unemployed, women may not get access to labour market supports to support them return to work. It also reinforces female dependency and makes women vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. In the context of the current crisis, this is a short-sighted policy. As unemployment continues to rise, it is crucial that every opportunity is taken to address joblessness in households. Women are a vital resource in this regard. Independent, direct and full payment to *both* adults in a household will contribute to addressing women's poverty, support their economic independence and increase their personal autonomy.

### Recommendation

- 2.3.1 Maintain social protection payments at current levels

<sup>x</sup> Where if a person meets the criteria for a given payment they receive the full personal rate in their own right

### 3. Protecting the most vulnerable women

Despite ongoing commitments that the most vulnerable would be protected from the effects of the recession, increasing evidence is emerging that the recession is having a significant impact on women in vulnerable situations.



#### 3.1 Lone Parents

Households headed by a lone parent continue to be amongst the poorest in the country. The vast majority of lone parents in Ireland are women. Though between 48% and 60% of lone parents on social welfare are in employment, education or training<sup>40</sup>, many, though not all, lone parents rely on social welfare to some extent.

The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) is a means-tested payment those bringing children up without the support of a partner. Recent changes and restriction to the OFP have resulted in increased hardship for many lone parents. The upper age limit of the youngest child for new claimants, for example, has been reduced to 12 years of age and it will be reduced further to 7 years of age on a phased basis in following years. New participants on Community Employment schemes cannot claim OFP at the same time. Other earning disregards have also been affected with a reduction in the amount that can be earned from €146.50 to €130 per week from January 2012 and further incremental reductions planned to €60 per week by 2015. By 2015, a lone parent will lose his/her payment when their youngest child reaches 7 years of age and unemployed lone parents will move on to a Jobseekers payment and have to meet 'Genuinely Seeking Work' requirements.

OPEN, the One Parent Family Network have expressed concerns that, 'working lone parents will have to make a difficult choice between full-time work or full-time welfare'<sup>41</sup>. The NWCI, OPEN and Barnardos have combined to campaign against the age limit being reduced to seven (for the youngest child) for eligibility for the OPFA citing, *inter alia*, the lack of childcare, the lack of job opportunities, lack of supports for those working in a part-time capacity, lack of education and training places, and the likelihood of increasing child poverty rates.

It is vital that lone parents, already a very vulnerable group of mainly women, are constructively supported to enter or re-enter training and/or employment.

#### Recommendations

- 3.1.1 Reverse the reduction in the youngest age of the child from 7 years to 14 years.
- 3.1.2 Halt any further reduction in the earnings disregard of the OPFP

## 3.2 Women with disabilities

According to Census 2011, 13% of the population has one or more disabilities and according to the CSO special disability survey, 18.5% of the population has one or more disabilities<sup>xi</sup>. Since 2008 people with disabilities have been suffering cumulative reductions in essential income and service supports. The disability-specific services they need have been reduced and freezes imposed that ignore the ever-increasing demand that comes with an ageing population.



At the same time, generally available or universal services, such as social housing, health services, leisure and dental services, which disabled people also use, have been eroded. Legislative entitlements in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, the Disability Act 2005 and the Citizens Information Act 2007 have been stalled. Huge cutbacks have been announced in capital funds for social housing appropriate to people with special needs and funds for housing adaptation grants have been reduced. Recent job creation and training initiatives have done little to enable access for people with disabilities who seek work<sup>xii</sup>.

Cuts of up to €1.7million in funding of Home Care Packages and €10.5 million to Home Help will have a severe impact on the quality of life of people with disabilities and directly affect their ability to live independently.

Little attention however, has been paid to the specific experiences and needs of women with disabilities in Ireland. There is an unspoken assumption that policies and practices towards people with disabilities are gender neutral and a lack of understanding of the ways in which gender and disability issues interact. In practice, gender inequalities that permeate the structures of our society combine with disadvantages experienced by disabled women to create particular forms of exclusion and discrimination<sup>xiii</sup>.

### Recommendations

- 3.2.1 Government immediately reverse cuts to Homecare Packages and Home Help.
- 3.2.2 Organisations supporting and advocating for the rights of people with disability be allocated with the necessary resources to function effectively.

<sup>xi</sup> CSO (2008) National Disability Survey 2006 – First Results, page 20.

<sup>xii</sup> Disability Federation of Ireland Submission on Ireland's Austerity Budgets 2012 to 2016

<sup>xiii</sup> Disability and Women in Ireland 'Building Solidarity and Inclusion' NWCI of Ireland 2008

### 3.3 Traveller and Roma Women

The situation of the Traveller Community in Ireland remains characterised by profound disadvantage. The economic downturn, austerity measures and cut backs in essential services and in positive actions measures to promote equality, have had a particular impact on Traveller women who persistently experience deeply rooted levels of oppression, discrimination and social exclusion. Findings from the recent Traveller Health study, *Our Geels*<sup>42</sup>, reveal startling statistics and the persistently poor health status of Traveller women.

The gap between life expectancy for Traveller women and settled women is 11 years and Traveller women have three times the mortality rate of the general population

Published in 2010, the *All Ireland Traveller Health Study* paints a grim picture of the reality of Travellers lives. According to the survey, Traveller infant mortality (12 per 1,000) remains almost four times that of the general population<sup>43</sup>, while Traveller women's life expectancy is equivalent to the life expectancy of the general population in the early 1960s and is 11.5 years less than that of settled women<sup>44</sup>. The survey shows that in the Republic 62% of Travellers experienced discrimination, 55% of Travellers experienced discrimination in getting work, 61% of Travellers experienced discrimination in shops, pubs and restaurants, and 52% of Travellers experienced discrimination in dealing with police and the courts system. For Traveller women, it is often argued the experience of discrimination is more severe.

Cut backs in the Back to Education Initiative and in FAS supports are significantly impacting on the ability of Traveller women to access programmes which aim to tackle educational disadvantage and provide opportunities for further education and employment. Traveller organisations state that approximately 50% of the budget allocated to implement the National Traveller Health Strategy has been cut or reallocated. On the other hand, there is clear evidence of the value of Primary Health Care for Traveller projects, with proportionally more Traveller women than settled women accessing breast screening and smear tests.

In line with the general trend in immigration which characterised Ireland's years of prosperity, there has been an increase in the number of Roma women migrating to Ireland from, in particular, Central and Eastern Europe. Roma women experience many of the issues and difficulties faced by Traveller women. The Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, Thomas Hammarberg, has stated that *"Europe has a shameful history of discrimination and severe repression of the Roma. There are still widespread prejudices against them in country after country on our continent"*<sup>45</sup>. The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency documented the experience of minorities in an EU wide survey in 2008. They found that "on average – every second Roma respondent was discriminated against at least once in the previous 12 months"<sup>46</sup>. In the Irish case Roma women and the particular issues that they face have largely been excluded from policy developments in relation to migration, women and social exclusion.

#### Recommendations

- 3.3.1 Government centralise, ring-fence and protect the Traveller health budget.
- 3.3.2 Maintain at least at existing levels funding of Traveller projects.
- 3.3.3 That a specific additional budget be allocated to the Local and Community Development Programme through the National Traveller Partnership and to funding lines for national Traveller organisations to undertake work with Roma women to be undertaken in partnership with the Roma community.

### 3.4 Migration and Integration

Ireland has become an increasingly diverse country. According to Census 2011, almost 17% of the population were born outside of Ireland and there were 544,400 non-Irish nationals representing 196 different nationalities living in Ireland. Among the total non-Irish community the number of women increased by 76,500 or 39% between 2006 and 2011. This compares with an increase of 48,200 or 21.5% in non-Irish men<sup>47</sup>. The number of Polish women increased by 36,200 between 2006 and 2011, accounting for nearly half (47.3 per cent) of the total increase in non-Irish women.

Racial discrimination, both in terms of everyday abuse and discrimination and exclusion within Irish institutions, continues to persist. A report by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency found that Ireland was among the top five countries in the EU when it came to racial discrimination and abuse. 73% of those surveyed from Sub-Saharan Africa stated they had experienced racism in Ireland, as did 25% of those from Central and Eastern Europe.

Exploitation of migrant workers in the workplace is another core issue of concern. This includes the exploitation of domestic workers the vast majority of whom are women working in the private home experiencing excessive working hours, pay below the minimum wage, intimidation, disrespect and illegal deductions being taken from their pay.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Irish Government has not, as yet, ratified the ILO Convention no.189 on decent work for domestic workers.

The current long term system of direct provision for asylum seekers is inhumane and coupled with an allowance of €19 per week, makes the lives of most asylum seeking women difficult to bear ***“Living in direct provision puts us at a mental health risk... we feel isolated, depressed and sad”<sup>xv</sup>***.

#### Recommendations

- 3.4.1 Increase the level of weekly payment to asylum seekers
- 3.4.2 Ring fence funding for local organisations working to address racism, promote integration and address the needs of women from minority ethnic communities
- 3.4.3 Allocate funding for the development of a comprehensive national framework for addressing racism in the Scheme of Grants to Support National Organisations

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.mrci.ie/Domestic-Workers/>

<sup>xv</sup> AkiDWA (2010) *Am only saying it now: Experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland*

### 3.5 Habitual Residence Condition

Habitual residence is a condition (HRC) which must be satisfied in order to qualify for some social welfare assistance payments. It was introduced on 1st May 2004 and affects all applicants regardless of nationality. To demonstrate that you are 'habitually resident' in Ireland, you must have a proven close link to Ireland or other parts of the Common Travel area.

Pavee Point, the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland and other organisations have highlighted the difficulties faced by nomadic Travellers, Roma, migrant workers and asylum seekers in relation to the HRC. These communities can face restrictions to social welfare, health and other services if they do not satisfy the HRC. In particular, women from these communities who experience domestic violence and who fail to satisfy the HRC have experienced difficulties in accessing supports.

#### Recommendation

3.5.1 In the medium-term abolish the HRC as a regressive policy.

3.5.2 In the short-term:

- Carry out a gender and equality impact assessment of the HRC;
- Remove the HRC as a condition for access to child benefit;
- Provide an exemption from the HRC for women who are experiencing domestic violence and for women who need to access health services on health grounds.
- Provide an exemption from the HRC for Traveller and Roma women in recognition of their nomadic tradition.

## 4. Pensions

Older people have the lowest levels of disposable income and are heavily reliant on social transfers to keep them out of poverty.

Women's work patterns have significant implications for their pension entitlements in their later years. The OECD report on gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship<sup>48</sup> stated that though part-time or temporary work may sound attractive in the short-term to help juggle work and family commitments, it this can be a costly long-term choice for women in terms, not just of salary, but also pension entitlements and savings and job security (p. 5).



While over 80% of male pensioners are entitled to a State Contributory Pension based on their social insurance entitlements, less than 60% of female pensioners qualify for this payment. Women significantly rely on the state pension system as a result of not being in a financial position to invest in a private pension. Even amongst women in employment, in 2009 51% of women had no pension provision (neither occupational nor personal)<sup>49</sup>. The NWCI has recently expressed real concern at the new pension measures being introduced by the Department of Social Protection. The measures cut contributory payments to many from September 2012 by between €977 and €1,500 per year depending on their average annual reckonable contributions.

The thrust of Government policy regarding pensions has been to encourage people to invest in private pensions and the state has supported people to take out pensions by providing tax reliefs of €2.9 billion per annum. The near collapse of the private pension system raises considerable questions about this policy direction and means that there will be an increase in the reliance on the state pension for all people in their older years. This makes the need for reform of the state system more urgent.

Clearly a new direction is urgently required to ensure that all people have a decent standard of living in their older years. The NWCI has documented the discrimination against women in the state system and has developed a women friendly model of pensions in *Pensions: What Women Want – a model of pensions that guarantees independence*, (NWCI 2008).

### Recommendations

- 4.1 Maintain the rate of the Contributory and Non Contributory Pensions
- 4.2 Introduction of a universal pension for all, funded through the removal of tax reliefs for private pensions.



## 5. Taxation reform

It is clear that the impact of narrowing the tax base in previous budgets has contributed significantly to the current fiscal crisis. The NWCI has consistently advocated for a wider tax base so that a high level of public services can be delivered and maintained. In reforming the taxation system, basic principles of redistribution must apply where those who have the highest levels of income and accumulated wealth must contribute most to the state finances. The Community Platform paper<sup>50</sup> has demonstrated how, in contrast to these principles, the overwhelming majority of tax breaks benefit high income groups the current tax system<sup>xvi</sup>. It recommends a three to four year programme of phasing the number and cost of tax expenditures<sup>xvii</sup> down to EU levels would save an estimated €1.5 billion a year. The NWCI as an active member of the Community Platform concurs with the recommendations of the report.



### Recommendations

#### Income Tax

- 5.1 Introduce a refundable tax credits system to ensure that all those in the tax system fully benefit from tax credits.

#### Taxing Wealth

- 5.2 Introduce a third tax band for high earners (over €100,000 per annum).
- 5.3 The cost of tax expenditures be reduced to the EU average over the medium-term – with the burden of that reduction to be borne by high income groups.
- 5.4 All tax expenditures must be fully quantified and subject to a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. This would include distributional, equality and economic impact analyses.
- 5.5 Provisions of all tax reliefs at the standard rate tax band.

<sup>xvi</sup> It quotes an ESRI study, for example, that showed that 80% of the benefit of pension contributions goes to the top 20% of earners, while the Commission on Taxation found that these same earners benefitted by nearly €300 million a year in mortgage interest relief.

<sup>xvii</sup> The NWCI **does not** include Child Benefit in its understanding of tax expenditures to be reformed or abolished.



## 6. Women and Health

### Health Service Reform

The NWCI welcomes the government's plans for a radical reform of our health services which includes the introduction of universal health insurance and a new governance and organisational structure. However NWCI is concerned how reforms to improve access to healthcare can be introduced in the light of growing deficits and cuts in services. An inequitable two-tier and gender blind healthcare system coupled with draconian funding cuts are already resulting in wider health inequalities and poorer access to essential services. This is particularly affecting women living in poverty and disadvantaged communities, lone parents, older women, women with disabilities and people living in rural and isolated communities. Further cuts to our health services will have a detrimental impact on essential frontline services and seriously undermine the possibility of the reform programme being implemented in the foreseeable future in particular in the area of primary care and mental health. While the necessary resources need to be ring fenced to achieve the reform goals government has set for itself, the NWCI makes four recommendations on health services in the context of Budget 2013.

### 6.1 Resourcing Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives

Gender is a key determinant of health. Gender Mainstreaming is a globally recognised approach for achieving gender equality which can be implemented through an assessment of gender inequalities and by integrating a gender sensitive approach into health care policy planning and service delivery. The Irish government has made firm commitments both nationally and internationally to integrate a gender perspective into the planning, delivery, implementation and monitoring of health care (e.g. National Women's Strategy 2007-2016)

A Gender Mainstreaming Framework has been developed under the auspices of the HSE Gender Mainstreaming Steering Group<sup>51</sup>. This Framework provides a strategic and operational plan for uncovering and tackling entrenched gender inequalities and gender differences in health and addresses the complex interaction between gender and other social determinants of health for example socio-economic status, poverty, ethnicity, disability and age.

Budget 2013 represents an opportunity to provide the required resources to ensure that the development of the radically transformed health service promised in the Programme for Government builds in gender mainstreaming across the full complement of health services.

#### Recommendations

- 6.1.1 Establish a gender mainstreaming unit within the Department of Health as recommended by the National Women's Strategy to oversee and implement the HSE Gender Mainstreaming Framework document
- 6.1.2 Provide a specific budget line to implement the HSE Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

## 6.2 BreastCheck

The NWCI welcomes the national roll-out of BreastCheck, and notes that the National Cancer Screening Service (NCSS) has committed to addressing anomalies in access to services. To bring the BreastCheck service into line with international best practice, the NCSS proposal to extend the age bracket to 69 years should be implemented as a matter of priority. Ireland has an aging female population and the over 64 age group has the second highest incidence rate of breast cancer in Ireland. The Government has also committed in its Programme to extend screening to women aged 69yrs.

Raising awareness among GPs and women of breast cancer risk for women up to age 50yrs is also an important part of encouraging early detection amongst younger women.

### Recommendations

- 6.2.1 Deliver on commitments in the Programme for Government and extend the eligible age bracket for Breastcheck to cover women aged 65-69
- 6.2.2 Awareness raising programmes amongst GPs and women for early detection of breast cancer particularly in the 40-49 age group
- 6.2.3 Maintain supports for community based women organisations that are assisting the National Cancer Support Service in improving uptake rates in disadvantaged or isolated areas.

## 6.3 Women and Smoking

Lung Cancer has now become the main cause of cancer death in women, outnumbering breast cancer deaths. Lung Cancer is the biggest cancer killer in Ireland for both men and women with 1,708 people dying in 2010 (1,006 men and 702 women). Breast cancer deaths for the same period amounted to 634. New cases of lung cancer in women have increased by 17.6 percent in 2010 whereas breast cancer cases are increasing at a much lower rate<sup>52</sup>.

Smoking is the principal cause of lung cancer with 9 in 10 lung cancer cases attributable to smoking. In Ireland, women in the lower socioeconomic groups have a higher rate of smoking than the rest of the population. Women aged 18-29 in this group have a rate of smoking which is twice that of women from more affluent groups in the same age group (56%). Women in the lower social groups are also less likely to quit smoking. More people in higher social groups reported attempting to quit in last 12 months compared with other social class groups (SC1-2:21%; SC3-4: 15%; SC 5-6:15%)<sup>53</sup>.

There is a strong relationship between levels of deprivation and incidence of lung cancer in women with women living in the most deprived circumstances having 1.7 times the rate of lung cancer incidence as women in least deprived areas (NCRI, Annual Report 2011). Graham et al, 2005 found that early motherhood, non-cohabitation, and lone motherhood increased the odds of smoking<sup>54</sup>. 87% of single parent families are headed by women<sup>55</sup>.

### Recommendation

- 6.3.1 Develop and resource community based smoking cessation services for women, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities. Services should be designed to meet the specific health needs of each target group and take into account health literacy levels and attitudes towards smoking.

## 7. Violence against Women

### 7.1 Domestic and sexual violence

Domestic and sexual violence remains prevalent in Irish society. Addressing domestic and sexual violence in terms of prevention and ensuring an appropriate response for survivors involves many different agencies, statutory and non-statutory, playing their part in a co-ordinated way to ensure effective responses to the complexity of issues involved. The NWCI acknowledges that COSC the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence has been in place since 2007 and a National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2010-2014 is being implemented. However progress is very slow. In the four years since the establishment of COSC, the effect on the ground for victims has been limited and the lack of a co-ordinated agency response to the issue of domestic and sexual violence is having a negative impact on women's and child's safety.

NGOs providing services to women experiencing domestic and sexual violence are witnessing an unprecedented growth in demand for their services. According to Rape Crisis Network Ireland, Rape Crisis Centres have seen a relentless year on year increase in demand on their services. In 2011 there was an 11% increase from 2010 in survivors and others seeking counselling and support from their specialist services. This is on top of a 9% increase from the previous year<sup>56</sup>. SAFE Ireland recorded that in 2010 more than 7,235 individual women and 2,850 individual children received support from domestic violence support services. This represents over 40% increase in demand for these support services over three years with some services experiencing up to 35% cut to their funding during this period<sup>57</sup>. At the launch of their statistics for 2011<sup>xviii</sup>, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre reported calls to the National 24 hour helpline operated by the centre increased by nearly 10% in 2011, an overall increase of 25% since 2008. This increase coincided with a further reduction in the statutory funding received from the HSE.

Services for violence against women have been chronically underfunded for years. This situation has reached crisis point as there have been additional cuts to funding in the last three years so more and more women are not being accommodated in refuges or are on waiting lists for support services. Services have been forced to cut positions, programmes or hours of operation.

It is essential that services that assist women in this situation are adequately funded to be able to respond appropriately. Refuge provision remains inadequate and many women and children are unable to access refuge accommodation each year. Safe Ireland report that on over 3,236 occasions in 2010 services were unable to accommodate women and their children because the refuge was full or there was no refuge in their area. The Council of Europe recommends that there should be a target by member states of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population and Ireland seriously lags behind this modest target.

The National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2010-2014 describes how the economic cost of domestic violence to the Irish economy is estimated to be in the region of 2.2 billion annually when based on studies in other countries. There has been no study into the extent of the costs of domestic violence across public services, opportunity costs and loss in productivity and longer term recurring impacts for children who are directly impacted by domestic violence. Taking the health impact of domestic violence alone it is critical that preventative and recovery programmes are resourced. It makes no economic sense to reduce funding to tackle domestic violence in Ireland. In fact it should be prioritised by the government to address the

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<sup>xviii</sup> September 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

extreme enormity of human rights violations experienced by thousands of women each year. Cuts to preventative and crisis support programmes, such as domestic violence support services, is a false economy.

The NWCI welcomes the recent public awareness campaigns on the issue of sexual and domestic violence. However the NWCI notes that the baseline prevalence study on sexual violence, the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) Report was published in 2002 and though has since acted as a key informant of Irish policy in relation to sexual violence, it is considerably out of date. The NWCI further notes that the National Strategy does not make a commitment to the publication of a SAVI II Report. In order to develop clear comparative analysis a SAVI II Report is required to evaluate changes over the past decade and provide an evidence base to inform responses to the issue of sexual violence. The NWCI calls for this research to be commissioned and resourced.

#### Recommendations

- 7.2.1 Increase funding to organisations providing front-line services and supports to survivors of violence against women by 10% to offset budgets cuts in recent years.
- 7.2.2 Increase funding to advocacy organisations working at a representative, policy and support level by 10% to offset budgets cuts in recent years.
- 7.2.3 To ensure access to safe, emergency accommodation for women experiencing male violence, a target of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population should be agreed and resources ring fenced to make progress towards that target
- 7.2.4 Allocate resources to fund a SAVI 2 Report in relation to the nature and extent of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland and research into the economic cost of domestic violence in Ireland

## 7.2 Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a harmful practice that violates the human rights of women and girls, in particular the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to be free from all forms of gender discrimination, the right to life, the right to bodily integrity and children's rights to special protections. The practice perpetuates negative gender based stereotypes and has serious social, health and psychological consequences. FGM continues to affect the lives of many women in Ireland. Research undertaken by AKIDWA in September 2010 found that the number of women that had been subjected to FGM had increased from 2,585 to 3,170 within four years.

The NWCI acknowledges and welcomes the recent passing of the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012 that explicitly prohibits the practice of FGM in Ireland and looks forward the Act's commencement. The NWCI, however, does not consider that legislation by itself is sufficient to prevent FGM. Immediate inter agency action is required in implementing this legislation, to take place as a matter of priority.

#### Recommendations

- 7.2.1 Allocate resources for the establishment of an inter-departmental committee on FGM who would be tasked with the role of drawing up a National Action Plan to Combat FGM. Provide resources for a nationwide information awareness campaign on the new legislation

## 8. Protecting the Voice of Women

*At the European and the national level, we witness how the crisis is used to cut funding for women's rights and gender equality-related activities and institutions and how these issues are losing visibility and focus. These cuts also threaten the very existence of women's organisations<sup>58</sup>.* In Ireland, cuts to the National Women's Strategy, cuts to the NWCI of Ireland of 35%, and cuts of up to 20% to grass roots women's groups working to provide education, training, childcare, a range of services and a voice to women who are most marginalised, all echo this European trend.

The economic crisis, and the severe impact of this crisis on women, is leading to increasing demands on women's organisations at grass roots and national levels to respond to the immediately pressing needs and concerns of women. At this time, in particular, it is crucial that the voice of women is represented and their experience reflected in the development of policies that affect their lives. Funding cuts serve to reduce the capacity of women's organisations to effectively represent the voice of women.

Women's NGOs are needed for the development of quality democracy, growth and welfare. This trend not only risks jeopardising recent progress; it also risks creating serious backlashes regarding for example the support and prevention of violence against women, the promotion of women's economic independence or fighting against negative gender stereotypes<sup>59</sup>.

As the Irish Presidency of the European Union draws near, we call on the Irish Government to show leadership and to act as a driving force for women's rights despite the economic and social crisis.

### Recommendations

- 8.1 Ensure that there is no further degradation of funding for women's rights and gender equality
- 8.2 Increase funding to the NWCI by 10% to offset recent budget cuts
- 8.3 Increase funding to the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks through the Local and Community Development Programme by 10% to offset recent budget cuts – to be distributed to the local women's' organisations

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thousands of the lowest paid workers in Ireland such as cleaners, hotel and restaurant workers, security guards, farm labourers and shop workers.

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