

**National Women's Council of Ireland
E-newsletter**

**Comhairle Naisiunta na mBan in Eirinn
Nuachtlitir Leichtreonach**

May 2007

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NWCI POLICY NEWS

The National Women’s Strategy

The National Women’s Strategy (NWS), published on the 18th May 2007, has its origins in a women’s human rights context. In 1995, at the 4th UN Conference on Women, the Irish government made a commitment to develop a national plan for women when it signed up to the Beijing Platform for Action (BpfA). This UN Strategy intended the removal of all obstacles preventing women's active participation in public and private life

In 2005, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), at its examination of the Irish government’s Combined Reports, recommended that the NWS ‘take a comprehensive and integrated approach to women’s human rights’, recommending ‘that the national machinery for gender equality be fully empowered, staffed and funded to effectively pursue co-ordination and monitoring of the NWS, while promoting gender mainstreaming into all areas and sectors of governance and maintaining at the same time women-targeted projects aiming at

gender equality'.¹ Recommendation 19 specifically urged measures that prevent violence against women, punish offenders and provide services for victims; and adopt without delay its strategic plan and strongly recommended the implementation of a comprehensive NWS to combat trafficking in women and girls.

The vision of the NWS is 'an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life'. The objectives and actions in the NWS fall under three themes:

- Equalising socio and economic opportunity for women
- Ensuring the well being of women; and
- Engaging as equal and active citizens

The NWS is wide ranging, and the breadth of women's inequalities acknowledged. However, the strategy lacks an analysis of structural causes of women's inequality in Irish society. The Strategy continually refers to the 'outstanding gaps' for women and fails to recognise or acknowledge the structures and systems embedded in society that inevitably prevent women from reaching the vision the Strategy aspires to.

On the positive side, the Strategy includes a wide range of welcome objectives to address women's inequality, for example to reduce the gender pay gap, to reduce the numbers of women in poverty, to enhance work life balance, to address the issue of trafficking of women and children. However, one of the weaknesses of the Strategy is the lack of concrete actions and mechanisms to address these objectives. The NWS also does not contain measurable targets, or timescales. For example, there are no defined targets on how to make childcare more affordable for women in Ireland, nor are there targets for increasing the numbers of women in decision making. This will pose a challenge to women's organisations and organisations working for equality for women in utilising the NWS to further women's equality.

Nevertheless, there is a commitment to positive action measures that will play an important part in ensuring implementation of the NWS. The Equality for Women Measure is a good example of such measures. Projects throughout the country have been making an impact by providing supports aimed at improving the economic, social, cultural and political lives of women. However, a weakness with such measures is their short-term nature; to truly impact on persistent inequalities in

¹ Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Thirty-third session. 5-22 July 2005; Concluding Comments: Ireland

our society much more sustained long-term measures are required. This is acknowledged in the NWS:

‘While much has been achieved under the Equality for Women Measure, there is still a need for a further programme of positive action measures at the level of the community, in addition to actions by Government Departments, State Agencies and social partners ... These positive actions should be distinguished from State support for those organisations that provide support to women in their own right. This support which is indispensable to the sector should be coherent and co-ordinated to avoid duplication and overlap’.

Funding runs in the first instance to 2013 and it complements the very significantly increased package of €68 million for positive actions under the Equality for Women Measure (up from €37 million in 2000 – 2006). This increase from €37 million to €127 million is significant.

The National Women’s Council of Ireland will undertake a detailed analysis of the NWS and will be circulating this in the coming months; and also will aim to produce an information tool to assist women’s organisations to maximise the potential of the NWS.

WOMEN’S ACTIONS FOR ELECTION 2007

NWCI launch Election Manifesto – ‘What Women Want From the Next Irish Government’ –

On March 7th the National Women’s Council of Ireland launched our Women’s Manifesto for Election 2007 ‘What Women Want From the Next Irish Government’. The Manifesto sets out a range of key demands which if implemented, could bring about substantial change and improvement in the lives of women and children to the benefit of all society. The demands are the result of wide-ranging consultation with NWCI members and women’s groups throughout Ireland. They are grouped under 5 headings;

More women in positions of decision making – The NWCI is calling for legislation and measures to ensure at least 40% of women in both houses of the Oireachtas, in political parties, in public appointments, at senior levels of the civil service, and on social partnership structures.

Zero tolerance of violence against women – We are seeking stronger legislation to protect victims of violence and trafficking and adequate

funding for survivors of violence.

Sharing of care and household work – This we believe can be achieved through the provision of one years paid parental leave, one year's free early education and childcare place for every child before they attend primary school, publicly subsidised childcare full credits in the social welfare system for care work and parenting.

Economic equality between women and men – We are calling for the elimination of the gender pay gap, a full contributory pension for all women who spent time out of paid work to care for their children, flexible, part-time education and training opportunities a wage for carers, a cost of disability payment and the payment of social welfare to women in their own right.

Equal respect and autonomy for all women, irrespective of diversity and difference – our demands in relation to this theme include the immediate roll out of free breast and cervical screening for all women in the country, equitable access to health services, increased protections and rights for migrant workers and Travellers, Legislation to ensure women's full reproductive rights and positive public messages that affirm in women and girls the value of self worth and achievement, and that celebrate diversity.

All election candidates have received a copy of the Manifesto which has been launched regionally in Donegal, Galway, Killarney, Cork, Leitrim and Kilkenny.

We are urging women's groups to use the Manifesto by holding meetings with candidates to answer key questions based on the Manifesto, by using local and community radio to discuss the Manifesto and its issues, and by disseminating the Manifesto as widely as possible to ensure that the demands of women become a priority for the next Irish Government.

If you wish to receive copies of the Manifesto and back up information please contact Michelle in the NWCI office (01 – 8898479) or download it from our website www.nwci.ie.

Women's Aid Election 2007 Web Resource

Election 2007 is an important opportunity to secure real change for women experiencing physical, sexual and emotional abuse within intimate relationships. The Women's Aid Election 2007 Web Resource

is designed to provide lobbying tools and relevant information for local groups and frontline domestic violence services to use to raise the issues of protection, provision and prevention with their local election candidates. Women's Aid will post regular updates on our noticeboard section running up to, during and following the election. Go to www.womensaidelection2007.blogspot.com

NWCI AGM 2007

NWCI AGM 2007 June 15th – Hon. Justice Catherine McGuinness to address the meeting

The 2007 AGM of the NWCI will take place at the Ashling Hotel in Dublin on Friday June 15th. The AGM is a very important and participatory event for Members as it is their opportunity to exercise their vote, be updated on the activities of the NWCI and the sector over the past year and network with other Member organisations. This year we have invited the Hon Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness, President of the Law Reform Commission to be the keynote speaker at the event. Mrs Justice McGuinness was called to the Irish bar in 1997 and has had a long and distinguished judicial career. In addition she has also served on a number of Statutory Boards and served on the Second Commission on the Status of Women. The focus of her speech will be on how to use the law to advance women's rights.

Other important items on the agenda will be adoption of the 2006 accounts, the election of the Deputy Chairperson and the discussion on the Motions submitted by Members. This year we have received thirteen Motions on a range of topical issues and look forward to a lively and interesting debate

The official notification of the AGM will be sent out to Members on the 24th of May and there will also be details of the event posted on our website. We would encourage all our Members to attend and actively engage in the event.

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

EWL publication on Migrant Women in the EU now available

The EWL publication "Equal Rights, Equal Voices – Migrant women in the European Union" is now available. This publication is the result of a three-day event organised by EWL in January 2007 in Brussels.

The publication includes the presentations made during the public seminar of the 19th of January 2007 gathering the migrant women participants and other actors active in the field of immigration, the conclusions of the workshops in closed sessions which followed on 20–21 January, as well as the list of participants. The report is available to download by clicking on the link below from the EWL website.

<http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/Publications/1817%20BR%20en%20MP01LR.pdf>

PROSTITUTION

Sweden's Solution to Prostitution

Sweden Treating Prostitution as Violence Against Women

Marie De Santis

Sweden's Prostitution Solution : Why Hasn't Anyone Tried This Before ?

In a centuries deep sea of clichés despairing that 'prostitution will always be with us', one country's success stands out as a solitary beacon lighting the way. In just five years Sweden has dramatically reduced the number of its women in prostitution. In the capital city of Stockholm the number of women in street prostitution has been reduced by two thirds, and the number of johns has been reduced by

80%. There are other major Swedish cities where street prostitution has all but disappeared. Gone too, for the most part, are the renowned Swedish brothels and massage parlors which proliferated during the last three decades of the twentieth century when prostitution in Sweden was legal.

In addition, the number of foreign women now being trafficked into Sweden for sex is nil. The Swedish government estimates that in the last few years only 200 to 400 women and girls have been annually sex trafficked into Sweden, a figure that's negligible compared to the 15,000 to 17,000 females yearly sex trafficked into neighboring Finland. No other country, nor any other social experiment, has come anywhere near Sweden's promising results.

By what complex formula has Sweden managed this feat? Amazingly, Sweden's strategy isn't complex at all. Its tenets, in fact, seem so simple and so firmly anchored in common sense as to immediately spark the question, "Why hasn't anyone tried this before?"

Sweden's Groundbreaking 1999 Legislation

In 1999, after years of research and study, Sweden passed legislation that a) criminalizes the buying of sex, and b) decriminalizes the selling of sex. The novel rationale behind this legislation is clearly stated in the government's literature on the law :

"In Sweden prostitution is regarded as an aspect of male violence against women and children. It is officially acknowledged as a form of exploitation of women and children and constitutes a significant social problem... gender equality will remain unattainable so long as men buy, sell and exploit women and children by prostituting them."

In addition to the two-pronged legal strategy, a third and essential element of Sweden's prostitution legislation provides for ample and comprehensive social service funds aimed

at helping any prostitute who wants to get out, and additional funds to educate the public. As such, Sweden's unique strategy treats prostitution as a form of violence against women in which the men who exploit by buying sex are criminalized, the mostly female prostitutes are treated as victims who need help, and the public is educated in order to counteract the historical male bias that has long stultified thinking on prostitution. To securely anchor their view in firm legal ground, Sweden's prostitution legislation was passed as part and parcel of the country's 1999 omnibus violence against women legislation.

An Early Obstacle in the Path

Interestingly, despite the country's extensive planning prior to passing the legislation, the first couple years into this novel project nothing much happened at all. Police made very few arrests of johns and prostitution in Sweden, which had previously been legalized, went on pretty much as it had gone on before. Naysayers the world over responded to the much publicized failure with raucous heckling, "See ? Prostitution always has been, and it always will be."

But eminently secure in the thinking behind their plan, the Swedes paid no heed. They quickly identified, then solved the problem. The hang-up, the place where their best efforts had snagged, was that law enforcement wasn't doing it's part. The police themselves, it was determined, needed in-depth training and orientation to what the Swedish public and legislature already understood profoundly. Prostitution is a form of male violence against women. The exploiter/buyers need to be punished, and the victim/prostitutes need to be helped. The Swedish government put up extensive funds and the country's police and prosecutors, from the top ranks down to the officer on the beat, were given intensive training and a clear message that the country meant business. It

was then that the country quickly began to see the unequal results.

Today, not only do the Swedish people continue to overwhelmingly support their country's approach to prostitution (80% of people in favor according to national opinion polls), but the country's police and prosecutors have also come around to be among the legislation's staunchest supporters. Sweden's law enforcement has found that the prostitution legislation benefits them in dealing with all sex crimes, particularly in enabling them to virtually wipe out the organized crime element that plagues other countries where prostitution has been legalized or regulated.

The Failure of Legalization and/or Regulation Strategies

This Swedish experiment is the single, solitary example in a significant sized population of a prostitution policy that works. In 2003, the Scottish government in looking to revamp its own approach to prostitution enlisted the University of London to do a comprehensive analysis of outcomes of prostitution policies in other countries. In addition to reviewing Sweden's program, the researchers chose Australia, Ireland, and the Netherlands to represent various strategies of legalizing and/or regulating prostitution. The researchers did not review the situation where prostitution is criminalized across the board as it is in the US. The outcome of that approach is already well known. The failures and futility of the revolving door of arresting and rearresting prostitutes is all too familiar the world over.

But the outcomes, as revealed in the Univ. of London study, in the states under review that had legalized or regulated prostitution were found to be just as discouraging or even more discouraging than the traditional all round criminalization. In each case the results were dramatic in the negative.

Legalization and/or regulation of prostitution, according to the study, led to :

- ▶ A dramatic increase in all facets of the sex industry,
- ▶ A dramatic increase in the involvement of organized crime in the sex industry,
- ▶ A dramatic increase in child prostitution,
- ▶ An explosion in the number of foreign women and girls trafficked into the region, and
- ▶ Indications of an increase in violence against women.

In the state of Victoria, Australia, where a system of legalized, regulated brothels was established, there was such an explosion in the number of brothels that it immediately overwhelmed the system's ability to regulate them, and just as quickly these brothels became a mire of organized crime, corruption, and related crimes. In addition, surveys of the prostitutes working under systems of legalization and regulation find that the prostitutes themselves continue to feel coerced, forced, and unsafe in the business.

A survey of legal prostitutes under the showcase Netherlands legalization policy finds that 79% say they want to get out of the sex business. And though each of the legalization/regulation programs promised help for prostitutes who want to leave prostitution, that help never materialized to any meaningful degree. In contrast, in Sweden the government followed through with ample social services funds to help those prostitutes who wanted to get out. 60% of the prostitutes in Sweden took advantage of the well funded programs and succeeded in exiting prostitution.*

So Why Hasn't Anyone Tried This Before ?

Why, then, with Sweden's success so clearly lighting the way, aren't others quickly adopting the plan ? Well, some are. Both Finland and Norway are on the verge of

making the move. And if Scotland takes the advise of its own study, it will go in that direction too. But, the answer to the question of why other countries aren't jumping to adopt Sweden's plan is probably the same as the answer to the question of why governments haven't tried Sweden's solution before.

In order to see prostitutes as victims of male coercion and violence it requires that a government first switch from seeing prostitution from the male point of view to the female point of view. And most, if not virtually all, countries of the world still see prostitution and every other issue from a predominantly male point of view.

Sweden, in contrast, has led the way in promoting equality for women for a very long time. In 1965, for example, Sweden criminalized rape in marriage. Even by the 1980's there were states in the United States that still hadn't made that fundamental recognition of women's rights to control her own body. The Swedish government also stands out in having the highest proportion of women at all levels of government. In 1999, when Sweden passed its groundbreaking prostitution legislation, the Swedish Parliament was composed of nearly 50% women.

Sweden's prostitution policy was first designed and lobbied for by Sweden's organization of women's shelters and was then fostered and fought for by a bipartisan effort of Sweden's uniquely powerful and numerous female parliamentarians. Nor has Sweden stopped there. In 2002, Sweden passed additional legislation bolstering the original prostitution legislation. The 2002 Act Prohibiting Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation closed some of the loopholes in the earlier legislation and further strengthened the government's ability to go after the network of persons that surround

and support prostitution, such as the recruiters, the transporters, and the hosts.

And Why Can't We Copy Sweden's Success Here ?

While it's probably true that we and other countries are still much more steeped in patriarchal darkness than Sweden, there's no reason we can't push now for the policy changes that Sweden has made. The beauty of it is that once the ground has been broken and the proof of success has been established, it should be ever much easier to convince others to go down that path.

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About the Author

Marie De Santis is the founder and current Director of the Women's Justice Centre in Santa Rosa, California. The Centre provides advocacy, free of charge, for all victims of rape, domestic violence and child abuse particularly in the Latina Community.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

*** The INVOLVE Project**

INVOLVE, is a project promoting women's participation in decision-making in Blanchardstown. Blanchardstown, North West Dublin has seen phenomenal growth in recent years. Dublin 15 has experienced some of the most remarkable social and demographic change in Ireland, and Blanchardstown today includes men, women and children from almost 100 nationalities. One of the main reasons for this rapid change in population diversity is the availability of good quality rented accommodation within access of the city centre. Blanchardstown is part of Co Fingal which the 2006 census revealed to be Ireland's fastest growing county - population up 22% from the 2002 census. This very recent change in the population of the area presents a

number of challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and services, – poor public transport, congested roads lack of childcare facilities etc

Funded under the Equality for Women Measure (EWM), which is a positive action programme for women, through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform INVOLVE project actions got properly underway in January 2006.

Project actions are:

- A creative leadership training programme for women from RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) areas

Research which mapped women's participation in local development and statutory organizations in Blanchardstown.

- Organisational training for key organizations in Blanchardstown on gender equality

Expected project outputs were:

- Research report with recommendations.
- New avenues in key agencies for women to join decision making processes.
- More women from willing to take up positions.
- Greater public awareness of gender equality issues.

The most innovative aspect of the project has been the leadership training programme, which used creative arts methodologies – art, drama, voice, percussion, movement and dance to provide personal development and to strengthen the voices of women in Blanchardstown. Participants were diverse, with about a third coming Dublin's new communities including a range of African and East European countries. Using different media women identified the key issues impacting on their lives, such as lack of GPs and health centres, and the key organisations which they considered it important to influence i.e. HSE in this example. This information fed into a research report, published last November "Pathways to Power: Women in Decision-making in Blanchardstown" by Maureen Bassett and Mary Quinlan. The report showed that

- women were involved in organisations but not at a more senior or

influential level.

- there is a need for an infrastructure for women's groups to be in place.
- a gender analysis approach is still required to understand and react effectively to social exclusion.
- there is a strong need for capacity building for women and organisations

Ongoing barriers to women's participation include a lack of childcare to facilitate both short and long term training and employment initiatives, a low level of engagement by statutory agencies in looking at the issue of women's participation and the need for ongoing and targeted initiatives to develop the potential of women to engage fully in decision making structures.

The launch of "Pathways to Power" was attended by 100 people and brought together the different elements of the project. It was a conference with a difference –as well as conventional presentations and speeches, the women doing the leadership training performed a creative input on the day and there were also creative workshops using art, drama and movement and voice etc explore the issues raised in the research. We have photos to prove that most men ran for the doors at this point. We also have photos to show that the women who participated in the workshops greatly enjoyed themselves. Each workshop reported back with their creative product.

This event was the first public performance of Vocal Women as they named themselves. It was an effective way to make an impact. Requests to sit on boards and to join lobby groups quickly followed, accompanied by requests for creative inputs into events, for example at the recent launch of the research carried out by the Corduff Health Action Group.

The organisational training on Gender Equality and Women's Participation in Decision-Making proved to be the most difficult part of the project. The aim was to assist key organisations with the opening up of avenues for women from RAPID areas so more women would be part of decision making processes. Despite trojan efforts, only half of the training was delivered. The biggest problem was lack of engagement by senior management in some organisations. Realistically this kind of work requires a sustained building up of relationship with the targeted organisations and the identification of key internal champions in senior management.

As the project nears close, Vocal Women are attending conferences, taking part in presentations to Boards, taking up positions on boards

- including the drugs taskforce, Safer Blanchardstown Forum and joining health lobby groups. The final INVOLVE event took place on May 11th at the Draiocht Theatre. The event included:

- the launch of The Vocal Women's Manifesto for Dublin 15 with
- guest speaker Joanna McMinn Director, National Women's Council of Ireland
- the launch of the Involve Final Report.
- Creative Presentation by the Vocal Women's Group Dublin 15

Vocal Women Dublin 15 will present themselves as a women's group in its own right and as a catalyst for a women's network in Blanchardstown. Good luck to Vocal Women, long may they chant dance and lobby!

Involve is match funded by Blanchardstown Area Partnership, Fingal County Council, County Dublin VEC Adult Education Service Dublin 15, IBM, LES (Local Employment Service), Blakestown Community Development Project, Corduff Community Development Project, Greater Blanchardstown Development Project, and Mountview Family Resource Centre.

More information available on the Involve project available from Co-ordinator Iris Lyle, telephone 01 824 7843 or email to irisinvolve@bap.ie www.involve.ie

* **Step Forward Group – Position Paper**

Position Paper on the misuse of Public Footpaths

We are a local Disability Group called "Step Forward". Our entire group is involved with disability. The group is made up of people who have a disability, have family with disability or are interested in disability. We as a group have found that there is a lack of structured support, information and guidance in our own localities. We want to create a greater awareness of the needs of those with a disability living within our community. We also want to change attitudes to disability and to raise accessibility to an acceptable standard for all.

As part of an audit which the group undertook across some of the towns in our county it has being highlighted that a full review of the miss use of our public footpaths needs to be debated county wide by all concerned.

There are many obstacles on our local footpaths that interfere with the daily safety of those who need to use them. Examples of these are

- Information signs for both the co-council and business.
- Bins, beer barrels and other deliveries to shops
- Bollards left in the middle of footpaths
- Lack of highlighting on steps, footpaths and on steps into shops and local businesses.
- Cars Parked on Footpaths.
- Scaffolding, exposed cables, bricks and other rubble etc.

We as a group are not against the development of our local towns, but we do have a concern about the disregard of the general public in the communities where this work is taking place. Those who are elderly, parents with buggies and those with visual and physical disabilities are the most effected. We as a group are writing to all parties concerned to raise awareness of this issue. We would like you to work with other partners within the community to come up with a solution to this problem to ensure that our communities are accessible to all.

For further information contact;

**The Step Forward Group
Hospital Family Resource Centre
Knockainey Rd.,
Hospital Co. Limerick
061 383884 or hospitalfrc@eircom.net**

* **WITS Discussion Forum**

Tuesday, May 22, 2007 6:45 pm – 9 pm

Location: Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street – (Close to the Bishop Street entrance)
The Signpost Room – ground floor

Members of WITS, WISER DIT, and National Women's Council Ireland (NWCI) are very welcome.

6.45pm–7pm Registration
7pm– 8pm Presentation by **Joanna McMinn**, Director of the NWCI:
The role/structure & sphere of influence of the NWCI
Presentation by **Margaret Finlay**, Chairperson of WITS:
The Challenges of the SET sector –
The history and achievements of WITS – current and future initiatives
Discussion /Q & A about possible areas of mutual interest – Facilitated by Frances Buggy, WITS delegate to NWCI, and Mary McDermott– Policy officer of the NWCI
8pm – 8.15pm: Break
8.15pm–9pm: Dedicated Strategic policy session for WITS members/new members only.

Please join us for this important event where WITS will look at its role as the engine for policy change in science, engineering and technology and our role within the NWCI will be explored.

For Queries, please contact: Frances M Buggy, WITS Executive Committee

Tel: 01 4027637 / 087 2549590

Gayle Baird, WITS Manager – 087 769-0319 or email: bairdgayle@eircom.net

* **Run for the Earth and support Voice in the Flora Women's Mini-Marathon 2007**

We are calling on all female members or friends of VOICE to join us for a very special event – the Flora Women’s Mini-Marathon 2007. Established in 1997, VOICE is a registered environmental Charity supported by public membership, donations and bequests.

Its main aims are to promote the protection and preservation of nature and the environment and to increase public awareness and understanding of environmental issues. We specifically campaign on water quality, water fluoridation, combating climate change and waste management issues. We are a member of the civil society alliance, Stop Climate Chaos.

The race is on Monday, 4th June 2007 and we are hoping to get as many of our members to participate in aid of VOICE.

As the largest women’s sporting occasion in Europe, the Flora Women’s Mini Marathon is a unique event. The emphasis is on having a good time and the race is split into runners and walkers so you don’t have to be a gym bunny or super-fit to participate.

So if you feel like having a bit of craic, meeting other members of VOICE, having a thoroughly enjoyable day AND raising some money at the same time, please join us for a fun 10km. Every Euro raised by our runners or walkers will go towards ensuring that VOICE can continue its environmental campaigning work.

Please note that you have to register through the official entry process. For details contact the Flora Women’s Mini-Marathon office at 01 2930984, email womensminimarathon@eircom.net or check online at www.floraminimarathon.ie.

For a T-shirt and sponsorship card, please contact the VOICE office at 01 6425741. Further information on the organisation can be found on www.voiceireland.org