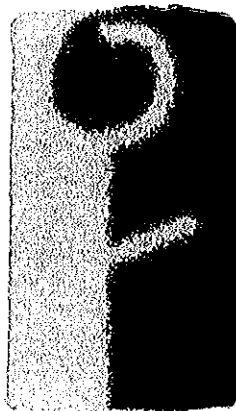


'The Impact on Women'

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)
responds to the Report of the Special Group on Public
Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes

SEPTEMBER 2009



National Women's
Council of Ireland

Comhairle Náisiúnta
na mBan in Éirinn

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)

The Impact on Women - The National Women's Council of Ireland responds to the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes

INTRODUCTION

“the real challenge now is to reconcile accounting with social justice (Louisburgh Community Project)

It is women who will be hardest hit by the €5.3 billion worth of cuts proposed in what has become known as the McCarthy Report, and who will bear the brunt of the enormous social cost in terms of marginalisation, poverty and hardship. The NWCi has 160 member organisations representing around 500,000 women, and our analysis of the McCarthy Report is based on our consultations with them.

The government must now, as a matter of urgency, assess the potential impact on women of the actions recommended in this report. After all, as it has acknowledged: “Promoting gender equality is about helping women to realise their human rights. These human rights are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments...There is no valid exemption....[National Women's Strategy, 2007-2016, p105]

The NWCi clearly recognises that the current economic reality necessitates a thorough investigation into public expenditure and investment, and that ineffective spending must be stopped. We are equally aware that what is also required is a rigorous examination of wealth in Ireland and of the potential to raised increased revenues through the taxation system.

The Government gave the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes responsibility for examining *‘current expenditure programmes in each Government Department’* and instructed it *“to make recommendations...to ensure a return to sustainable public finances’*.

The examination which resulted was a simplistic short term accounting exercise. It is telling that the terms of reference instructed the group to have regard to the “consumers’ interest, hardly the appropriate term in relation to public services and those who avail of them.

The crude measures of value for money used by the McCarthy group are incapable of measuring the contribution women make to Irish society through work within communities. In many cases, their projects were founded by women who set out to fill gaps left by inadequately funded social services.

A requirement of good policy making is that it is evidence based – the Report shows a lack of understanding or knowledge of the ways in which women’s organizations work. Many of our member organizations deliver vital services through the combined efforts of a small number of paid staff, part or full time, and a larger number of volunteers, who are co-ordinated by the staff. Networks of support have been developed over years – the approach taken by the McCarthy Report takes no cognizance of this and would destroy carefully plotted paths which have brought many women from the marginal to the mainstream.

The McCarthy Report if implemented would completely abandon the Government strategy for gender equality, would substantially increase women’s poverty and would reverse the gains that have been made to increase women’s participation in Irish society. In proposing the cuts, the Group claims it is taking into account “significant expenditure in recent years”. In reality, international evaluations show that Ireland has been far from generous in its support for women’s organisations and for equality measures. The Concluding Comments of the CEDAW UN Committee in 2005 emphasis the need for the Government to further invest in equality for women measures and specifically recommend ‘that a gender impact analysis of all social and economic policies be conducted regularly’ (CEDAW 2005)¹.

The cuts proposed in the Mc Carthy Report would impact on women at 3 levels:

1. There will be increasing numbers of women unemployed, dependent on social welfare and living in poverty.
2. There will be fewer supports for women and families.
3. At national level, there will be no strategy or infrastructure to address women’s inequality.

¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW) (2005) Concluding Comments: Ireland, UN.

Where is the Gender Assessment?

The government has a stated policy of ensuring that all boards are made up of at least 40% of men and women. Yet the group which wrote this report consisted of five men and one woman. The Joint Oireachtas on Finance and Public Service Committee to which it will now be given for consideration consists of 16 men and one woman.

The recommendations of the EU Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, with regard to the current economic and social crisis, specifically advise all member states to;

- *shape their responses to the economic and financial crisis in a way which is sensitive to its differential impact on women and men and demonstrates commitment to gender equality, including a gender dimension in national recovery plans*
- *ensure that all proposed policies are subject routinely to gender impact assessment, as a matter of good policy making, and undertake gender impact assessment of the measures currently being taken at national level*

(Appendix A lists the full set of recommendations)

The McCarthy Report flies in the face of this, recommending that the government phase out all gender mainstreaming and equality proofing by 2013.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT INEQUALITY

Ireland's unprecedented economic growth during the boom years was built on the labour of women, but fundamental inequalities between women and men persist.

- women are 51% of the population, but make up just 13% of TD's and senators in the Houses of the Oireachtas, and 16% in local councils. Without measures to escalate change, the NWCI has estimated that it will take 370 years for women to reach 50% representation.
- just 4% of chief executive positions in Irish business are women.
- women earn an average of 14% less than men, and women graduates earn 11% less².
- 23% of women have incomes that put them at risk of poverty³
- 29% of families net earnings is spent on childcare⁴

² Central Statistics Office, (2009) Women and Men in Ireland 2008, CSO Dublin

³ *ibid*

⁴ www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

- 99% of those doing family and other home related work full time are women, and women who work outside of the home still do the bulk of care work and house work⁵.

Many women have no entitlement to pensions due to time spent outside of paid work for care responsibilities within families and due to the marriage bar, while in lower paid sectors women's pension coverage is just 10%, and overall 50% of women have private pension coverage compared to 58% of men⁶.

- 43% of women have experienced gender based violence, and one in ten women is raped
- The recession is clearly having a significant impact on women. Since the start of 2009 the areas of employment in which women predominate have been severely affected. Whereas at the beginning of the recession job losses were overwhelmingly male, since 2009 the rate of female unemployment has increased in comparison to men and in the July 2009 Live Register figures a higher proportion of women (5,500) signed on the live register in comparison to men (5,100)⁷.

[See Appendix B for more statistics and information on the impact of the recession on women.]

Local women's organisations provide advice and counselling services, health information, access points for education and training, and childcare supports. They enable women to participate, and help to hold families and communities together. They also help women marginalised by violence to gain the confidence to leave situations that are dangerous and unhealthy for them and for their children. Much of this work is of necessity slow, careful and even hidden. It is difficult to measure its impact – but it is essential to the well being of society.

The implementation of the McCarthy Report, combined with other cuts already made or proposed, will remove any opportunity to address these inequalities. Without positive actions, women will remain second class citizens in this country.

⁵ Lynch, Kathleen (2007) 'The Gendered Order of Caring' in 'Where are we Now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland' ed Ursula Barry, TASC Dublin

⁶ Murphy, M & Mc Cashin, T. (2008), 'Pensions What Women Want, a model of pensions that guarantees independence for all' National Women's Council of Ireland, Dublin.

⁷ www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/labour_market/current/lreg.pdf

THE CUTS

The following is a brief summary of the main recommendations which will have a significant impact on women. We do not have the resources to carry out a full assessment of the report in this regard, and this, in the NWCI's view, is a task which the government must undertake.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

Under the programmed headline, 'The promotion of a tolerant and equitable society', the report notes that "*Gender mainstreaming aims, inter alia, to improve equality between men and women, to tackle educational and social barriers to women entering and progressing within the workforce and to support the advancement of women to decision-making levels in employment and in civil society*".

Despite the clear need for such measures, revealed by the statistics quoted above, the report then proposes that "*expenditure in this area be reduced by €1m i.e to the level of EU co-funding*."

The report proposes that "*given their strong labour market emphasis*" gender mainstreaming functions should be moved to the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment. Our members are concerned that in addition to cutting back on an already small financial commitment, there is a lack of understanding of women's equality and gender mainstreaming. The inequalities that women experience are not confined to the labour market e.g. the impact on women's equality of the unequal distribution of care work between men and women, the low levels of women in senior decision making positions particularly in political life and the importance of care work and voluntary work carried out by women in addition to paid work.

The NWS was set up to meet the government's commitments after it signed up to the Beijing platform for action in 1995. The government has also made commitments to the EU under its Roadmap for Gender Equality. It is answerable to UN under the Convention on Ending Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Packing together into a list an extraordinarily wide range of work currently being conducted, the report notes that "*the DJELR provides funding for a variety of organisations and projects in particular national women's organisations, equality proofing, COSC – Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and equality monitoring and associated consultative committees*." It further notes that the 2009 allocation in this area is €4.7 million, and goes on: "*Given the significant resources that have been devoted to equality issues over recent years.... expenditure should be reduced to yield savings of 1m per year*."

This conveniently ignores the fact that whatever has been spent on “equality issues” – and the NWCI would argue that a great deal more should have been spent – women’s equality is very far from having been achieved. It is clearly not for the Mc Carthy Group to decide that that women’s equality is an optional extra which can be sacrificed in response to recession. However the McCarthy report goes on: *“Furthermore the Group recommends that as the Equality Proofing and Gender Mainstreaming Positive Action for Women subheads are European Social Fund co-funded until 2013 funding should be phased out by the end of 2013.”*

As the umbrella group for Irish women’s groups and organisations, the NWCI receives the greater part of its funds from the DJELR. It has already taken a significant budgetary cut in 2008, and another in its funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs in 2009. This has resulted in job losses and reduced hours within our already small staff. At a time when our member organisations are facing potentially disastrous cuts, it would be disgraceful for the government to make cuts which would have the effect of incapacitating the organisation which supports our members’ work and fights for their rights.

COSC was set up by the government under the NWS primarily to deal with Ireland’s high level of violence against women. This work has largely been carried out by feminist organisations, with inadequate state support. The budget for COSC has already been cut by 20%.

Similarly there have already been cuts to frontline services in the area of violence against women. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre has told us that there is “no way” it can sustain further cuts and continue to deliver its services. It has already taken a 2.5% cut this year on top of a freeze on its HSE grant for the past 3 years. Demand for its 24 hour services has continued to rise.

The concluding comments of the CEDAW report in 2005 express concern regarding the ‘prevalence of violence against women and girls in Ireland’ and specifically criticise the ‘inadequate funding for organisations that provide support and services to victims’ (CEDAW 2005).

The McCarthy team appear unaware that budgets for the Equality for Women Measure (EWM) and the National Women’s Strategy have already been dramatically reduced in order to re allocate funds to other areas in the DJELR and in other government departments. Almost 90% of money allocated for EWM projects in 2008 was instead used for Garda overtime, and in 2009 75% of funds allocated in the April budget had been reallocated by July. The €10 million which was provided from European Social Funds for equality measures has been re allocated to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Cuts to DJELR impacting on migrant women

Transfer responsibility of immigration control at entry point to INIS

The McCarthy Report considers that the manning of passport control points is an inappropriate use of Garda operational resources. They recommend that overall efficiencies would be achieved by transferring responsibility for this function to the *Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service* (INIS), who would manage the outsourcing arrangements of this work. Recommendations in the report in relation to 'outsourcing' the manning of passport control points could be interpreted as the privatisation of border control which in itself would be highly problematic. The sub contraction of immigration control at entry points would ensure a private sector approach which could potentially result in quotas, an increase in ethnic profiling and limited accountability in situations of mismanagement. It could also lead to an even greater lack of transparency and accountability about immigration decisions at entry points to Ireland. Privatisation in such a manner could in effect put migrant women at further risk of non identification of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour.

Reduce the number of staff in INIS

Reducing the numbers of core staff in INIS as recommended in the Report would result in cuts in immigration services which will ultimately lead to more migrant women becoming undocumented in the long term. Administrative delays in immigration for non EU migrant women have particular consequences because of the link between immigration and work permit requirements. The report also underestimates the current queues within the department for long term residency and citizenship due to the stage of inwards migration we are at to Ireland. Additionally recent announcements by Department of Justice in relation to long term residency and citizenship applications will put further pressure on clearing the backlog of applications (this application process has gone from one month to two years in recent times) and is currently at crisis point. Many migrant women are on the long term residency and citizenship waiting list experiencing insecurity in terms of life planning and family stability.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

- Cut to Social Welfare rates by 5% and maintain the abolition of Christmas payment (850m)
- Cut Child Benefit by €30 per month for first and second child and €67 per month for subsequent children (€513m)
- Abolition of eligibility to claim two social welfare payments e.g. half rate Carers Payments
- 5% reduction in the rate of Disability Allowance

The cuts proposed to Social Welfare will undoubtedly increase women's poverty, reduce women's economic independence and create new barriers for women attempting to move from welfare to work. The proposals to reduce welfare and cut Child Benefit, will particularly impact on women and are not based on the reality of the cost of living in Ireland today. While the overall cost of living is falling, the cost of many items which women on low incomes spend a high proportion of their income is in fact rising; Childcare has increased by 6.4%, with average prices for one childcare place in Dublin between €800-1000 per month. Similar increases are seen in Electricity (4.7%), Public transport (11%), Hospital fees (9.1%). Women rely on social welfare to a greater extent than men and face an increased risk of poverty.

- More than half (55.9%) those at risk poverty live in households headed by a person who is outside of the labour force (older people, those in caring role, those with a serious disability)
- 37.6% of Lone parents are at risk of poverty
- Women aged 65 and older have 17.6% risk of poverty in comparison to 15.4% of men⁸

As well as the fact that many more women are becoming unemployed, many others are having their working hours reduced as the recession continues. The previous two Budgets have already introduced measures which have made it even more difficult to survive on welfare or low pay in this country than before - further cuts will lead to increased consistent poverty and deprivation for women.

The cuts proposed will also significantly reduce the income for children which will have a disproportionate impact on women since women take primary responsibility for the care of children in families.

The proposed cuts to social welfare will have an impact on migrant women most at risk of social exclusion and poverty. In Ireland there are many migrant women who find themselves in situations of extreme exploitation and forced labour who are clearly in highly vulnerable situations. Many in this situation are undocumented and are not covered by the social welfare code. Cuts added to the already restrictive conditions (Habitual Residence Condition) will undermine their capabilities to recover, regain confidence and ensure quality of life. Many of these women cannot travel home again due to stigmatisation, forced migration and are for a time dependant on the social welfare system. An increase in cuts will only add to their vulnerability.

⁸ Central Statistics Office, (2009) Women and Men in Ireland 2008, CSO Dublin.

The current risk of poverty for people with disabilities is 37% (CSO 2007)⁹ There is a clear link between women with disabilities and poverty. Throughout their lifespan women with disabilities have lower incomes than non-disabled women and men with disabilities and their status is often one of poverty, isolation and lack of social supports¹⁰ Any cuts to disability allowance will have a detrimental impact on the lives of disabled women who face on-going increasing costs of living with a disability.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

- Abolition of the Department of CRGA
- Cuts to community and voluntary sector supports (10.0m)
- Cuts to Community Services Programmes (10.0m)
- Cuts for Local and Community Development programmes (44.0m)
- Cuts to Drugs Task Forces (2m)
- Discontinuation of Dormant Accounts fund Board (1.7m)
- Discontinuation of Rapid Scheme (1.4m)

Disturbingly, the report does not specify that funds currently provided by this department should be disbursed elsewhere within government. The impact at a local level of the loss of these funds will be to destroy the current support structure which is there for women in their local communities. The NWCI also receives 14% of its funds from the CRGA and would have serious difficulty in fulfilling its current level of support to local groups if this were removed. Local groups would, in fact, need significantly more support in attempting to cope with cuts to their own budgets.

'We have 23 women's networks and they have been dealing with constant cuts since before Budget 2008. The financial impact is severe mostly in cases where they are losing staff and some of our networks feel it will be impossible to survive' (National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks).

⁹ Central Statistics Office (2007) EU Survey on Living Conditions, CSO

¹⁰ (NDA Exploring the Research and Policy Gaps – a review of literature on women and disability 2006).

The impact of the closure and reduced services being provided at local level has not been considered in the Report. This will come at a high cost to the Government and at a higher cost to those who are living in communities who are already experiencing high unemployment and the impact of social exclusion.

The cuts will threaten the viability of our organisation because we already have a staffing cost shortfall and without adequate staffing resources we cannot provide a service to women in North Leitrim. Effects would be: those women who are in need of employment, training and supports would not get them; the drop-in facility would be limited; our work on domestic violence would be impaired; and women experiencing social isolation would lose the only women's specialist support in the North Leitrim area. The cuts to child benefits and welfare benefits in general will make women in rural areas even more isolated.' (North Leitrim Women's Centre CDP).

The McCarthy Report Group arrogantly declares that "there is little evidence of positive outcomes" for initiatives in the community sector. Local women's organisations provide advice and counselling services, health information, access points for education and training, and childcare supports.

They enable women to participate, and help to hold families and communities together. They also help women marginalised by violence to gain the confidence to leave situations that are dangerous and unhealthy for them and for their children. Much of this work is of necessity slow, careful and even hidden. It is difficult to measure its impact – but it is essential to the well being of society.

The cuts to programmes and activities such as the Community Development Programme, the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, RAPID and the Family Support Agency will, if implemented, devastate communities and will delay the potential for economic recovery.

'The Core principle of community development is about enabling the most marginalised in society to develop their capacity and actively works to fundamentally reduce inequality. The cuts mentioned are an accounting exercise which has value, but the real challenge now is to reconcile accounting with social justice' (Louisburgh Community Project).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

- Cuts to Special Needs Assistants (60.0m)
- Cuts to English Language support teachers (21.0m)

Women comprise almost 80% of employees in both the health and the education sectors. More than 85% of primary school teachers are women, and the vast majority of Special Needs Assistants are women. The numbers of Special Needs Assistants and English language support teachers have already been reduced in Budget 2009. The lack of support services for children to participate in education places increased pressure on parents as they attempt to compensate for those services, and it is primarily mothers who fulfil this role in families. There is also no evidence provided in the Report to justify a reduction in these services.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

- Cut the Skillsnet Programme (27.0m)
- Closure of Jobs Initiative Scheme (10.0m)

The Skillsnet Programme was introduced in 1999 and has provided valuable upskilling opportunities for women in low paid employment. In 2007, women made up 80.9 per cent of part-time workers. Women are more likely to be in low paid and low skilled employment, programmes like Skillsnet are critical for women to move into higher paid and higher skilled employment. Such programmes need to be scaled up rather than cut in the interests of national economic recovery.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN

- Cuts to National Childcare Investment Programme (10m) including cuts to community childcare subsidy to parents in low paid employment –Band C (5m)
- Abolish County Childcare Committees(3m)
- Collapse The Office of the Children’s Ombudsman, into ‘Ombudsman Commission (.3m)
- Reduce HSE staff in by 6,000 (€300 million) plus additional efficiencies in the HSE (€90 million)
- Opening up contracts with GPs, opticians, pharmacists and dentists to tender for those covered by medical cards (€370 million)
- Increase payment for A&E to €125 without GP referral letter.
- Reduce eligibility for medical card (100m)
- Introduce a co-payment of €5 for each prescription under the GMS and long-term illness scheme (70m)
- Increase the contribution level by the individual availing of care to the Fair Deal scheme (50.0m)
- Introduce a means test for Home Care Packages (24m)

- Restrict the NTPF to private facilities in Ireland and abroad (7.5m)
- Remove the exchequer co-funding to voluntary organisations involved in delivering personal and social services-
- Cut of €50 million in funding to voluntary disability organisations providing disability and mental health services

Health and the impact of the proposals on women

NWCI is focusing its response on those proposed health saving measures that will directly impact on the health and entitlements of women service users and other vulnerable groups. The McCarthy report estimates these savings at €211 million. These proposals are inequitable and if implemented will hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. Cutting essential health and social care services now will cost the tax payer more, both socially and economically, in the long run.

Access to health care, based on financial means, is both a gender equality issue and an anti-poverty issue. The medical card is a necessity for women on low incomes and is a critical support for families with varying health needs. Reducing eligibility to the medical cards will particularly impact on vulnerable, women, children and families. Eligibility for a medical card based on income (€184 for a single person under 66 years and €201.50 for those aged 66-69 years) is already too low. Medical card holders are already living on or below the poverty line of €229 (*2007 figures*). The NWCI is calling for a new system of universal access to primary care for all citizens. This would put an end to the concerns outlined in the McCarthy report over the granting of discretionary medical cards on medical grounds. An estimated €4 billion is spent by tax payers on out of pocket health expenses. Based on financial modeling carried out by the Adelaide Hospital Trust, the introduction of universal access to primary care would cost €1 billion more than our current expenditure on medical card services set at €2.1 billion.

In simple economic terms the proposal to introduce a €5.00 co-payment charge for each prescription received by a medical card holder, may seem attractive; in the hope that it generates income and provides a disincentive to the over-subscription and waste of prescribed medicines. However in other countries, specifically the UK and New Zealand similar measures have failed in both social and economic terms. Current medical card eligibility levels mean that holders are already living on or below the poverty line. A €5.00 charge could be a disincentive for some to follow their GP's instruction. Apart from the obvious waste of a professional's time, this could lead to a more serious illness developing and potentially hospitalization, which would be more expensive to the State in the long run.

The McCarthy report falls short in not highlighting the need for Government to address the inflated use and cost of expensive branded drugs, which leads to the rising cost of health care. One of the underlying problems of the Irish health system is the over reliance of the medical model, to improve the population's health.

The treatment of women displaying signs of depression with anti-depressant tablets for prolonged periods is a prime example of a health service that treat the symptoms but not the root cause of ill health. Government should address these issues in an evidence-based and strategic way, which takes account of gender differentials.

Women specifically depend on the availability of Home Care Packages to enable them to live independently in their older years and to assist women who provide unpaid care for parents and relatives. Any reductions or adjustments to the scheme must be assessed for their impact on women giving and receiving care.

Increasing the costs of visiting A&E from a costly €100 to €125 will directly impact on women who bear most responsibility for the health care needs of families. Many families cannot afford the costs of a GP and in many areas there is already a shortage of GP services, particularly out-of-hours services. The effect of increasing A&E fees will ensure that people in need of emergency services will be prohibited from accessing the service. It will mean that some people will hold off until they have no option but to attend A&E, risking their health as a result of economic hardship. HSE has reported that hospital administration is finding it increasingly difficult to collect charges from patients, thereby driving up administration costs for little return. A more efficient and equitable system could be found in the form of social health insurance, based on ability to pay and collected through the PRSI system.

The McCarthy report highlighted the findings of the report by the Controller and Auditor General (C&AG) in 2005 which found that 36% of The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) treatments occur in the same hospital where the patient was previously a public patient. Public patients who undergo NTPF-funded procedures in private hospitals may be denied free follow up care such as physiotherapy, which they would have got if treated in a public hospital.

McCarthy proposes that Government restricts the National Treatment Purchase Fund to private facilities, saving 7.2 million. Whilst this is a step in the right direction it does not go far enough in achieving efficiencies. €4.2 million is spent in staffing the NTPF scheme. The NTPF is not the best use of public money to address the length of waiting times and quality of care for public patients. The Government should scrap the NTPF and reallocate €90 million back into rebalancing the health system towards an accessible primary care system and increasing the capacity of public hospitals to meet demand.

In conclusion, the NWCI were hopeful about the establishment of the Expert Group into Resource Allocation in the Irish Health Service. It is important for Government and stakeholders to await the findings of the expert group before any cuts aimed directly at low paid service users are contemplated.

Childcare Proposals

The absence of affordable, flexible childcare in Ireland remains one of the most significant barriers to women's participation in society. The employment rate of women with no children is almost equal to that of men (61%) with no children but drops by approximately 20 percentage points when young children are present in the household. There is no statistical drop in male employment.

Any reductions to the National Childcare Investment Programme will disproportionately impact on women. Dismantling the recently developed infrastructure for Childcare at County level would reduce the effectiveness of the National Childcare Programme, lead to a decrease in quality of Childcare and would leave parents and childcare services with no dedicated support. The Community Childcare Subvention is specifically targeted at women in low paid employment who wish to remain in employment but are paying a significant portion of their income on childcare. Cutting this subvention as proposed would force low paid women out of jobs and back into welfare dependency.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The NWCII and several of our member organizations have a global dimension to our work. We are extremely concerned about the serious rowing back which the McCarthy Report proposes from Ireland's ambitions regarding the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is, of course, the achievement of Gender Equality. At a time when the world recession is causing unprecedented hardship for women in the southern hemisphere, it is entirely inappropriate to propose such cuts. Fragile achievements must be protected – this will not be possible if the cuts proceed.

CONCLUSION

As part of our consultation with our members, the NWCI asked members to comment on their overall reaction to the McCarthy report. The Leitrim Women's Centre community development project responded in the following terms: "We are disgusted at the way in which this government are hitting services in our area which have been created by the hard work, vision, commitment and voluntary time of members of our community, who have found ways to bring in services and supports and allow our community to grow and prosper."

The NWCI understands and shares this anger.

As the national body with responsibility for protecting the interests of women in this country the NWCI refuses to accept that the inevitable outcome of the recession in Ireland will be the disempowerment of women and the dismantling of rights for which the women's movement has struggled for generations. [ENDS]

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Appendix A

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

OPINION ON THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON THE RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS¹¹

10 June 2009

Recommendations for Member States

Member States should:

- shape their responses to the economic and financial crisis in a way which is sensitive to its differential impact on women and men and demonstrates commitment to gender equality, including a gender dimension in national recovery plans.
- ensure that all proposed policies are subject routinely to gender impact assessment, as a matter of good policy making, and undertake gender impact assessment of the measures currently being taken at national level.
- disaggregate key employment data by gender to improve monitoring and analysis of the gender impact of the economic and financial crisis, and to facilitate the identification of measures at national level to ameliorate adverse impacts.
- recognise that women may be exposed to financial insecurity as a result of lower pay, broken employment histories and limited financial reserves and target policies in a gender-sensitive way and be sensitive to the possible gender impacts of public investments decisions, including on infrastructure, and on the differential impacts of social security and tax systems on women.
- consider whether a gender budget mechanism might increase gender equality by correcting negative consequences of revenues and expenditures and improve governance and accountability, in particular in respect of national budgets.
- make efforts to improve women's participation at all levels of decision-making, especially in the areas of budgets and in respect of governance arrangements for financial systems at national level.

¹¹ The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States.

- pay attention to the first report of the EU Network of women in decision making in politics and the economy launched in June 2008, aiming to provide a platform at EU level for successful strategies to improve gender-balance in decision making positions. This is due in 2009 and will highlight examples of best practice and summarise the exchanges and debates between the Network members¹²
- encourage appropriate accessibility to and provision for the release of loans by financial institutions to support for women's entrepreneurship.
- work to combat stereotyping, including addressing outmoded assumptions about men being 'family breadwinners' which may impact on women's experience of the crisis; considering the fact that more and more women are main breadwinners, there should be a focus on encouraging greater sharing of domestic labour so that women do not continue to carry the majority of domestic tasks.
- continue a focus on reconciliation measures and take steps to promote these as good practice for both men and women including improving the status of part-time work. There are real opportunities at national level to look at maternity leave, paternity leave, parental and childcare provision – not just automatically encouraging women to take longer leave.
- recognise the impact of multiple disadvantage in the context of addressing the economic crisis, and ensure that measures pay attention to women in particularly vulnerable positions – for example, older women workers, single parents, disabled women, migrant workers. This will involve consideration of a range of statistics broken down by sex and other factors such as age, disability, race, ethnic origin¹³.
- ensure full implementation at national level of European Structural Funds to address the effects of recession through retraining and up-skilling initiatives. On the basis of article 14¹⁴ of the General Regulation, article 6¹⁵ of both Regulations of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, set up a financial reserve within each fund for equal opportunity activities with additional support for cross programmes and other special initiatives being funded separately under technical assistance.

¹² EU press release, European Network set to boost women in power; See also EAC Opinion on women and decision making,

¹³ See EAC Opinion on the gender dimension of the inclusion of ethnic minorities, November 2007

¹⁴ Confirms the gender equality principle

¹⁵ Article 6 of the European Social Fund : Member States shall ensure that Operational Programmes include a description explaining how gender equality and equal opportunities policies are pursued in their programming, implementing, monitoring and evaluating phases. This should also be applied to the European Policy of rural development in relation to the target "improvement of life quality in rural areas and diversification of rural economy".

Article 6 of the European Regional Development Fund, refers to the financing of initiatives addressed to promote gender equality and equal opportunities – with reference to the Cooperation objective

Develop mechanisms for equality governance to include gender expertise within Governmental Departments and other agencies that implement measures within cohesion and structural funds and promote women's organisations and networks.

- ensure that the body designated for the promotion of equal treatment at national level is sufficiently resourced and supported to act independently and effectively to provide independent assistance and advice to individuals with potential complaints under equality laws and to provide advice to employers and others on the requirements of these equality laws.
- ensure that the gender dimension is effectively mainstreamed in the work of national administrations and, in particular, ensure that those with responsibilities for gender equality in national administrations are effectively supported and resourced.
- encourage research institutes to analyse the gender impacts of the economic and financial crisis on an ongoing basis to document and monitor they short, medium and long term impacts.
- recognise and provide support for the contribution that civil society can play in addressing the financial/economic crisis, particularly in the light of the European Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Appendix B

Impact of the Economic Recession on Women

In addition to the unequal position of women in Ireland, the current economic crisis is specifically impacting on women and this has been largely ignored from the majority of commentary on the crisis.¹⁶ A full consideration of the impact of the recession on women needs to be taken into account when making decisions to reduce public finances.

- The recession is affecting both women and men, exposing all adults to unemployment. Recent trends have shown that while job losses were in sectors with a greater concentration of male workers (construction and manufacturing), areas with a higher concentration of female workers (retail and services) are now making increasing redundancies and these areas are expected to contract further in a deepening recession. In 2008, the retail and wholesale trade was the next sector to experience significant employment losses of 18,200 with the construction sector experiencing losses of 45,900. The hotel and services sector experienced losses of 10,500¹⁷.
- July 2009 Live Register figures show that a higher proportion of women (5,500) signed on the live register in comparison to men (5,100).
- Women dominate in the lower paid, atypical, part-time, flexi and contract work. They work in smaller places, in the private sector, in domestic work. Consequently they are often “invisible” in national economic assessments.
- Women are experiencing reduced working hours and the structure of the social welfare system makes it very difficult to compensate the loss earnings with social welfare payments.
- Women are less likely than men to have savings and face increasing risk of poverty.
- Companies cutting back are targeting supports for women, e.g. supports to statutory maternity payments, as part of cost-saving measures. This will put pressure on women to leave the workforce, with serious personal and social consequences.
- Women’s higher educational achievement has not translated into higher employment positions and power. In addition, women face particular barriers in finding new employment. When women lose jobs, it is difficult for them to find new work which enables them to meet the commitments which continue, unjustly, to fall on them alone; Childcare, Caring and Household labour.

¹⁶ Notes from Women and the Recession Workshop, in the NWC International Women’s Day event 2009

¹⁷ CSO (2009) Quarterly Household Survey 2009