

National Women's Council of Ireland

Pre-Budget 2000 Submission

October 1999

INTRODUCTION

The NWCi believes that Budget 2000 should seek to address the growing divisions in our society. It is unanimously accepted that Ireland is experiencing rapid economic growth which has resulted in an unprecedented budget surplus. In deciding on the composition of Budget 2000 the Government has a unique opportunity to address the existing structural inequalities which have been persistently reproduced and the inequalities which have increased as a consequence of this growth. Budget 2000 also provides a clear opportunity to bring together the objectives of sustaining economic growth and building an equitable society for all citizens.

Gender Mainstreaming

The Government is obliged under the EU regulations of the structural funds to mainstream gender equality. While some progress has been achieved to date it is neither sufficient nor desirable to adopt a mainstream strategy for EU measures and programmes alone as this will lead to a fragmented approach to policy development. Budget 2000 should incorporate a clear strategy to reflect a gender mainstreaming approach. This submission describes the measures required in Budget 2000 to ensure a gender mainstreaming approach is adopted.

Progressing the Beijing Platform for Action

Progress in the implementation in Ireland of the Beijing Platform for Action will be under scrutiny at a major international review in June 2000. The Beijing Platform for Action was agreed at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and the Irish Government signed up to its extensive commitments to progress women's human rights. Budget 2000 can bring in measures to meet some of these commitments before the review is completed. It can also show the government's commitment to take significant first steps to begin addressing the many gaps in current implementation.

In summary, **BUDGET 2000 must**

1. Incorporate a clear strategy for gender mainstreaming by addressing gender inequalities within all measures and through the development of specific initiatives to address the inequalities and effects of discrimination which women experience.

Positive Action through the following measures:

- **EMPLOYMENT:** A Women Returners' Initiative, an Upskilling Initiative and Equality Enterprise Advisors in County Enterprise Boards;
- **EDUCATION:** A Women's Education Programme and a Young Parents' Initiative.

Support the integration of gender equality into the mainstream through:

- Resourcing the Equality Infrastructure and the implementation of gender-proofing;
- Matching EU funds allocated through the new EU Community Initiative, EQUAL;
- Enabling the participation of women's groups and women from a range of social groupings in policy fora.

2. Implement a national childcare strategy which equally values all parents and children, ensures the support and provision of quality childcare services and prioritises the needs of children and families experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion.

- Measures to develop a sustainable national childcare framework;
- Measures to increase the regulation of childcare;
- Measures to create a quality childcare environment;
- Measures to make childcare affordable;
- Measures to invest in supply in disadvantaged areas.

3. Reduce the numbers of women living in poverty and at risk of poverty, through measures to raise their incomes and achieve economic independence.

- Measures to increase social welfare payments so as to improve the living standards of those reliant on social welfare;
- Measures to progress the individualisation of rights and entitlements within the social welfare system;
- Measures to ascertain a comprehensive picture of women's experience of poverty.

4. Improve the quality of life for women and men with family and caring responsibilities, and the quality of life of those they care for, through measures that support the valuing and sharing of unpaid work in the home.

- Introduction of a Parental Leave Payment;
- Introduction of a Family Leave Payment;
- Introduction of a Carer's Benefit.

5. Address other inequalities experienced by women in employment, including low pay and inflexible forms of work organisation.

1. MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY

1.1 POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES

1.1.1 WOMEN RETURNERS' INITIATIVE

Women's options for gaining economic independence can be strengthened by increasing their earning potential through access to paid employment. Under the Equal Opportunities Pillar of the Employment Action Plan, member states were requested to 'give specific attention to women and men considering a return to the paid workforce after a prolonged absence and to that end they will examine the means of gradually eliminating the obstacles in the way of such return'.

Budget 2000 must

Establish a new mainstream Initiative for Women Returners, providing 1,200 quality places per annum, within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, replacing the present Return to Work Scheme, and based on the model developed by the Access 2000 NOW Project in Waterford/Wexford.

Cost: £3 million in 2000
(approximately £1.4 million allocated in 1999 to

RTW)

1.1.2 WOMEN'S EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Present education and training provision does not meet all women's needs, and acts to reinforce existing patterns of educational disadvantage. The results of the pilot programmes, Women's Education Initiative and NOW, confirm that targeted education provision is necessary to reach women in a range of different social groupings. New structures and additional resources are needed to develop and deliver forms of provision that enable all women to benefit from education.

Budget 2000 must

Establish a Women's Education Programme with its own Budget line within the Further Education Section of the Department of Education.

This Programme would have three distinct components:

- Funding for projects addressing women's educational disadvantage (Cost £8 million over 5 years);
- Policy development (cost £200,000 in 2000);
- Information and outreach (cost £200,000 in 2000).

Cost: £2 million in 2000

1.1.3 UPSKILLING INITIATIVE

The percentage of women in low pay positions is between half and three-quarters times higher than that of men. Women, older people and part-time employees are the groups least likely to move out of the low pay bracket through pay rises or advancement.

Lifelong learning is a new essential in enabling people to fulfil their potential and providing the adaptability in skills and knowledge needed by employers. Women in low paid and / or part-time work must have access to lifelong learning that meets their needs for progression in paid employment.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate resources for the development of a new Up-Skilling Initiative aimed at employees in low paid positions, jointly managed by FAS and employers.

Cost: £1 million

1.1.4 EQUALITY ENTERPRISE ADVISORS IN COUNTY ENTERPRISE BOARDS

If the economy is to benefit fully from women's potential, every effort must be made to ensure a supportive framework for the development of women's businesses. There are no targeted initiatives to encourage women in self employment and enterprise creation other than the EU funded pilot programme NOW, which is about to end.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate resources for all County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) to employ a gender equality officer to ensure a positive environment and supports for women in business creation.

Cost: £1.3 million in

2000

1.1.5 YOUNG PARENTS' INITIATIVE

The total number of young parents aged under 20 in receipt of lone parents' allowance in 1995 was 2,410 mothers and 15 fathers. A supportive structure is needed to allow them to stay within, or enter, education and training that meets their needs. At present, there are few supports and evidence suggests that young parents are not accessing adult-oriented services, such as Community Information Centres.

Budget 2000 must

Meet the education and training needs of young parents by providing specific supports to enable participation.

Specific actions necessary include:

- the provision of childcare and accommodation subsidies and grants, as required in communities, schools, colleges and universities;
- structured funding of community-based, young mother support programmes, such as the Waterford Young Mothers' Group.

1.2 INTEGRATION OF GENDER EQUALITY INTO THE MAINSTREAM**1.2.1 EQUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

The further development of the quality infrastructure must enable a comprehensive equality agenda to be developed and implemented.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate adequate resources to the activities of the Equality Authority for the year 2000.

Cost: £3 million in 2000

Budget 2000 must

Allocate adequate resources to the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations for activities in the year 2000.

Cost: £1.5 million in

2000

1.2.2 MATCHING EU FUNDS FOR THE NEW EU COMMUNITY INITIATIVE, 'EQUAL'

With respect to EU Community Initiatives in Ireland, the burden of providing the co-finance currently resides with the promoting organisations. Other EU states, eg Sweden, the Netherlands, implement an approach where the government matches EU funds for Community Initiatives.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate Exchequer resources to co-finance activities supported through EQUAL, the EU Community Initiative.

1.2.3 GENDER PROOFING

The Government is required to implement a process of Gender Proofing within the Structural Funds process. In order to enhance and increase the effectiveness of policy development and implementation it is our view that this process should relate to all policy and not solely that which is financed through the Structural Funds.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate £1 million for the establishment of institutional mechanisms for the implementation of a Gender Proofing process including the establishment of an Equality Co-ordinating Committee, the appointment of Equality Officers at senior level within each Department and the development of gender and equality awareness training. This proposal is complementary to the recommendations of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in its Guidelines for Gender Proofing the Structural Funds.

Cost: £1 million

1.2.4 SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION:

IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Budget 2000 must

Make resources available to each Area Based Partnership, LEADER Board and County Enterprise Board to support the participation of locally-based women's groups in local development and local government fora in 2000.

Cost: £200,000

Budget 2000 must

Fund a special initiative to address the particular barriers faced by rural women to participation in decision-making and policy fora in local development / local government.

Cost: £50,000

IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Budget 2000 must

Provide funding for women's groups, community groups and development NGOs to participate and hold events in preparation and follow-up to the Beijing Plus 5 review to be held in June 2000.

Cost: £50,000

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Budget 2000 must

Provide resources to enable the participation and community organisation of asylum seeking and refugee interest groups. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to establish a fund of £500,000 to resource the following:

- Hire of meeting places; office expenses; payment of workers from refugee communities;
- Special supports to enable women asylum seekers and refugees to participate in activities such as training, education and community organisation, including childcare expenses, transport costs and subsistence allowance;
- The development and facilitation of self-support groups for women asylum seekers and refugees;
- Provision of gender-sensitive, outreach language training.

Cost: £500,000

1.2.5 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEES

The Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women is a comprehensive document outlining Government strategy in relation to violence against women with particular emphasis on the following critical areas: the provision of adequate and appropriate service for the diversity of women experiencing violence; safety and protection for women; accountability for men's violence; preventative work.

The allocation of additional resources to the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women to implement the Task Force recommendations would indicate the State's real commitment to its responsibility for an adequate response to the problem, and ultimately to the elimination of violence against women.

Budget 2000 must

Increase the amount allocated to the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women to £.5 million to progress the urgent implementation of recommendations of the Task Force on Violence against Women.

Cost: £0.5 million

1.2.6 REGIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Since the publication of the Women's Health Plan, Health Boards have been working with representatives of the National Women's Council to improve health services for women.

Budget 2000 must

Double the budgets for the Women's Health Advisory Committees in each of the eight health boards so that they can continue to develop innovative health strategies for delivery at local level.

1.2.7 TASK FORCE ON LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

Budget 2000 must

Release resources for the establishment of a Task Force on the Status of Lesbians and Gay Men, as recommended by the NESF in 1997.

Cost: £0.5 million in

2000

1.2.8 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST NATIONAL TIME USE SURVEY

Budget 2000 must

Allocate resources to initiate the first national Time Use Survey in 2000, to be completed by 2002 and established as a permanent component of national statistics.

Cost : £1.2 million over 2

years

1.2.9 INCREASES IN IRISH OVERSEAS AID BUDGET

Budget 2000 must

Increase the percentage of GDP spent on overseas aid to the UN target of .7% of GDP.

2. CHILDCARE

2.1 Regulation

Budget 2000 must

Allocate 3 million pounds to establish the planning and co-ordination of childcare, both at national and local levels.

At a national level:

A National Childcare Management Committee to oversee the development of the national childcare strategy.

At a local level:

County Childcare Management Committees and the development of county childcare plans.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform should be named as the lead department in the implementation of this process.

Cost £3 million

2.2 Creating a quality childcare environment

Budget 2000 must

2.2.1 Provide capital grants of 5 million pounds for the upgrading of premises to comply with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996. Such grants must be made retrospectively to the date of the introduction of the regulations, ie 1 January 1999.

Cost £5 million

2.2.2 Allocate 3.5 million pounds for the establishment of supports, including financial supports, to train those who notify and eventually register.

Cost £3.5 million

2.2.3 Establish a new scheme to assist self-employed childcare providers to come into the formal economy. This would be composed of a double tax relief on deductible expenses, to be phased out over a three year period.

2.2.4 Allocate £500,000 for the initiation of an extensive information campaign to ensure that providers receive support and advice regarding:

- requirements of the Childcare Act
- registering as self-employed and making tax returns
- income limits for adult dependants on social welfare payments
Cost: £500,000

2.2.5 Allocate 1 million pounds towards the development of afterschool childcare provision.

Cost: £1 million

2.3 Financial Payment for Parents

Budget 2000 must

2.3.1 introduce a **Parents' Childcare Payment (PCP)** to be paid to parents in respect of all children. This payment would be taxable. We recommend the following rates:

Children aged 0 – 5	£20 per child per week
Children aged 6 – 14	£10 per child per week

The existing Child Benefit mechanism should be used to administer this payment.

Net cost: £402 million

2.3.2 increase Child Benefit by £8 and thereafter it should be indexed to increases on average incomes.

Cost: £100 million

2.3.3 initiate a scheme to support the childcare costs of low income parents participating in all training or education programmes, including adult literacy and community education courses. The subsidy would be administered by the body or organisation delivering the course in conjunction with the Local Childcare Committees.

Cost: £18.7 million

2.4 Investment in Supply in Disadvantaged Areas

Budget 2000 must

2.4.1 invest 10 million pounds to support the supply of quality childcare in disadvantaged areas.

Cost: £10 million

3. WOMEN AND POVERTY

3.1 Poverty Research and Analysis

3.1.1 Budget 2000 must

Provide a research budget of £500,000 to the NAPS Unit in order to implement the following:

- a) Establish and resource alternative / additional methodologies of data collection on poverty in Ireland so as to recognise the extent and nature of gender difference and gender inequalities in the measurement of poverty in Ireland. This would include surveys using the 'individual' as the unit of analysis for measuring poverty.

- b) The development of a system for data collection and analysis of additional statistics and information relating to poverty experienced by the groups who are excluded from current household surveys, to be used as a supplement to current data. These groups are as follows:
 - All those living in hostels, refuges, B & Bs, institutions and residential homes
 - All people who are homeless
 - Travellers
 - Refugees and asylum seekers.

Cost: £50,000

3.2 Individualisation and Social Welfare

Budget 2000 must

3.2.1 make a commitment to and recognition of the principle of individualisation within the social welfare system as a prerequisite to the achievement of gender equality in Irish society.

- 3.2.2 introduce a new system so that all adult Social Welfare recipients receive their payments individually.
- 3.2.3 Introduce full social insurance credits for those engaged in caring (for children or adults), education, training, employment and voluntary work.

3.3 Income Adequacy

The treatment of women in the social welfare system is a key determinant of poverty for women. The results of the 'Women in Poverty in Ireland' study by the CPA (1999) demonstrated the importance of ensuring the levels of social welfare payments remain sufficient so as to enable those who are relying on those payments to participate in society. This emphasises the importance of maintaining social welfare payments in line with average increases in earnings so as to reduce overall inequality in Irish society.

Budget 2000 must

3.3.1 Increase all social welfare assistance and insurance payments at least in line with increases in average incomes (by £8 in 1999) and establish indexation to average earnings thereafter.

3.3.2 Increase the Contributory and Non Contributory Pension to £100 per week.

3.3.3 Increase the Carer's Allowance by £10.

3.3.4 Increase the current qualified adult payments to the equivalent rate of the main claimant for all social welfare payments.
Cost: £185 million

4. QUALITY OF LIFE

4.1 PARENTAL LEAVE PAYMENT

Unpaid Parental Leave, as adopted in December 1998, does not act as a measure to advance equality. The impact of designing leave arrangements without pay is to reinforce women's position in caring for children. Effectively Ireland's parental leave legislation encourages women, not men, to reconcile family and work responsibilities.

Budget 2000 must

Introduce a Parental Leave Payment, based on the current model of Maternity Benefit, to enable all parents to take up Parental Leave.

Cost: £43 million

4.2 FAMILY LEAVE PAYMENT

Budget 2000 must

Introduce a Family Leave Payment, base on the current model of Maternity Benefit, to enable family members to make arrangements for caring for elderly or incapacitated family members.

4.3 CARER'S BENEFIT

Budget 2000 must

Introduce a social-insurance based Carer's Benefit.

4.4 NATIONAL ELDERCARE STRATEGY

Budget 2000 must

Establish a Working Group on Elder Care to examine issues of finance, quality standards, carer support, care plans, cost of care and other issues. Composition of this body to include representation from both the statutory providers and voluntary organisations.

5. FURTHER EMPLOYMENT MEASURES

5.1 INTRODUCTION OF A NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

The NWCI welcomes the imminent introduction of a National Minimum Wage as one step towards eradicating low pay.

Budget 2000 must

Establish the rate of the National Minimum Wage of at least £5.00 per hour, as proposed by ICTU.

5.2 IMPLEMENTATION CAMPAIGN ON INTRODUCTION OF A NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

If a National Minimum Wage is to be effective at all, adequate resources need to be directed at ensuring its comprehensive implementation.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate resources for a comprehensive launch and ongoing campaign to inform people of their rights to a Minimum Wage and access to redress.

The campaign should include:

- a hotline number for provision of further information and advice, set up on a permanent basis;

- a major TV and Billboard campaign to herald the introduction of the Minimum Wage.

Cost: £500,000

5.3 MAINSTREAMING FLEXIBLE FORMS OF TRAINING

The location and timing of training courses should be constructed in such a way that they are appropriate to the needs of women. Substantial evidence has been demonstrated through NOW regarding the appropriate structures that facilitate women's participation and learning.

Budget 2000 must

Allocate resources necessary to introduce flexible time schedules, including part-time and modular options, within mainstream education and training.

Budget 2000 must

Increase the number of mainstream programmes delivered on an outreach basis, particularly in rural areas.