



National Women's  
Council of Ireland

Comhairle Náisiúnta  
na mBan in Éirinn

# PRE-BUDGET 2008 SUBMISSION

## INTRODUCTION

Budget 2008 is the first opportunity for the new Government to address the continuing inequalities for women in Ireland. In 2007, the Government launched their **National Women's Strategy** (NWS) and has made a clear commitment to **gender mainstreaming** in the **National Development Plan**. In the Programme for Government, they have also promised to explicitly address the inequalities for women in the Social Welfare System.

The National Women's Strategy, in its foreward, states *'there is still a need to ensure that all of our citizens feel a sense of true equality'*<sup>1</sup>. The measures introduced in this Budget are a critical part of the process to make this statement a reality for all women in Ireland. The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) is prioritising recommendations, under the following areas, where resources are urgently required to address the persistent inequalities and discrimination which women experience.

- **Social Welfare**
- **Women's Health**
- **Childcare**
- **Migration and Anti-Racism**
- **Violence Against Women**
- **Decision Making**

## SOCIAL WELFARE

The European Commission's Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities proposes the establishment of common principles for the creation of employment and social security which include *'flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, active labour market policies, comprehensive lifelong learning strategies and modern social protection systems providing adequate income support during periods of unemployment.'*<sup>2</sup> The necessity for flexible and realistic Government responses to a changing national and global economy must include acknowledgement of the presence and range of women's work (paid & unpaid) across the economy and address this by creating a flexible and fair Social Welfare System.

The provision of Social Welfare Support to women as individuals in their various roles as workers, entrepreneurs, household partners, unpaid carers and parents is a concern for society as a whole and requires a tailored response from Government.

## INCOME ADEQUACY

### Recommendations<sup>3</sup>:

- Increase Personal Social Welfare rates by €18.00, from €185.80 to €203.80. The cost of increasing all social welfare rates, apart from One Parent Family Payments, will be €901million.

<sup>1</sup> National Women's Strategy 2007-2016, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18th 2007.

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/emplweb/news/news\\_en.cfm?id=263](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/news/news_en.cfm?id=263) The European Commission, Office for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Brussels 27-06-2007.

<sup>3</sup> Costings Source: Dept. of Social & Family Affairs, Sept. 2007.

- Increase Child Benefit for the first and second child by €10 per month from €160.00 to €170.00 per month and by €15 for the third and subsequent child from €195.00 to €210.00 per month at a cost of €117 million in a full year.
- Increase One Parent Family Payment by €18.00 from €185.80 to €203.80 at a cost of €83million.
- Increase **all** Qualified Child Allowances by €8.00 from €22.00 per week to a standard rate of €30.00 per week at a cost of €128million.
- Increase the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) to Asylum Seekers under Direct Provision by €40.90 from €19.90 per week to €60.00 per week, with an additional allowance of €35.00 for each dependent Child, at a cost of €12million.

## Rationale

*Equalising (Women's) Socio-Economic Opportunity* is the first major theme set out in the National Women's Strategy. It argues for an "increase (in) the participation of women in the labour force", further stating that "actions to be undertaken proactively" should "ensure that the care infrastructure supports women's socio-economic engagement"<sup>4</sup>. Women require the establishment of a comprehensive care infrastructure in this country.

The NWS further aims to reduce the numbers of women experiencing poverty, particularly those in the following categories: part-time workers, widows, qualified adults, low-income families, lone parents, farm/family business workers, homemakers, pensioners.<sup>5</sup> The instance of poverty amongst older women in Ireland is unacceptably high at 45%<sup>6</sup>.

The provision of a minimum social welfare rate of €203.00 per week in Budget 2008 is an increase of 9.68%. This figure is below the poverty line of 60% of the median income, adopted in the EU-SILC survey. The relative poverty line for 2007 is €209.87.<sup>7</sup>

In order to support the care of children in Ireland, the Government needs to increase the Child Benefit rates by €10.00 (from €160.00 per week to €170.00) for the first and second child and by €15 (from €195.00 per week to €210.00) for the third and fourth child.

In an effort to increase child income support in low-income families and address child poverty, as a priority, **all** Qualified Child Allowances should be increased to a standard rate of €30 per child per week.

The current practice of Direct Provision, usually for prolonged periods for asylum seekers, is a gross indignity, is detrimental to their health and to their future integration into Irish society. Where applications are not processed within six months, the NWCI advocates the replacement of this form of support by a system of temporary work permits.

<sup>4</sup> Objective 1-A & 5-B, NWS, 2007-2016.

<sup>5</sup> Objective 6-A, B & C. NWS 2007-2016, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007. (p.iii-v) – inserts in italicised quotes, NWCI.

<sup>6</sup> Central Statistics Office (2005), *Women and Men in Ireland*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.corii.ie/justice/soc\\_issues/spec\\_issues/poverty.htm](http://www.corii.ie/justice/soc_issues/spec_issues/poverty.htm). "Using information gathered in the EU-SILC survey for 2005, the CSO established that the median income per adult in Ireland was €321.23 (2006:26). Consequently, the income poverty lines for a single adult derived from this average were: 50% line - €160.61 a week. 60% line - €192.74 a week. 70% line - €224.86 a week. Updating the 60% median income poverty line to 2007 levels, using predicted increases in average industrial earnings (ESRI Medium-Term Review 2005:66), produces a relative income poverty line of €209.87 for a single person"

In the meantime, however, the NWCI calls for an immediate increase in the Allowance from €19.10 to €60.00 per week, with an additional payment of €35.00 per week for each Child Dependent. To address the problems of Asylum Seekers' poverty, exclusion and well-being, urgent action is needed by the Government.

## ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

### Recommendations:

- Abolish the Limitation Rule for all Social Welfare Payments.
- Abolish the category of "Qualified Adult" within the Social Welfare System. Make all people so categorised independently eligible for Social Welfare payments. Pay those eligible directly.
- Credit the work of Homemakers within the Social Insurance system. Abolish the category "disregard" and replace this with a system of "credits" for this work. Make these credits retrospective.
- Introduce a means-tested Full-Time Parental Allowance for all low-income parents of children up to the age of 8 years.
- Introduce a means-tested Part-Time Parental Allowance for all low-income parents of children aged 8 to 14.

### Rationale

Available figures for 2007 show that there are 123,100 qualified adults in the Irish Social Welfare System<sup>8</sup>. The vast majority of qualified adults are women.

Under the current **Limitation Rule**, the Social Welfare System restricts the total amount allowable to a second eligible recipient to 66% of the Jobseekers Allowance. Consequently, because there is no economic benefit to the household if both adults register independently, many women who are eligible for social welfare payments are categorised as '**Qualified Adults**'. In addition, payments to Qualified Adults go directly to husbands unless the husband signs a form that allows the payment to be made directly his wife.

Such a position within the Social Welfare system creates households that undermine the economic independence of women and excludes them from receiving payments in their own right. This situation keeps Qualified Adults/women vulnerable to violence, aggression, control and poverty. It should be abolished.

The NWCI calls on the Government to abolish the Limitation Rule, in the 1st instance, to abolish the offensive category of "Qualified Adult" in the 2nd, and in the 3rd instance, to pay those eligible for such support directly. Independent, direct and full payment to both adults in a household will address women's poverty, support their economic independence and increase their personal autonomy. In the NWS the Government commits to "*Consider proposals for the abolition of qualified adult allowances in social assistance*"<sup>9</sup>. The NWCI has put proposals on this matter before the Government for some time and calls for action in this regard in Budget 2008.

<sup>8</sup> DSFA, Sept. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Objective 6-A, Action 51, *NWS 2007-2016*, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007. (p v)

Similarly, abolishing the category of ‘disregards’ in the **Homemakers Scheme** and replacing this with a system of ‘credits’ will begin to change the position of women from a derivative status to one of autonomous citizens, whose unpaid care work in the home is concretely valued. The NWS supports such a change and proposes a “*Review (of) the issues and costs associated with a switch to a system of credited contributions and review the backdating of the Homemakers Scheme*”<sup>10</sup>. By providing such credits up to a maximum of 20 years, and by extending cover to maternity benefit, the Government will acknowledge care work as a crucial contribution to our society.

Additionally, in its concluding comments (July 2005), the *Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* recommended that the ‘*State party consider allowing for the Homemakers Scheme (1994) to be applied retroactively so as to benefit older women*’<sup>11</sup>. If the Government implements its own recommendations in the NWS and those of CEDAW, women who spent a large part of their lives parenting and caring, who are now living in poverty, will be eligible for a full and independent contributory pension.

The NWCI proposes a **Parental Allowance** payment that will assist parents of young children living on low income with their choices in combining parenting and paid employment, regardless of family status. The Government, through the NWS, commits to “*Bring forward proposals aimed at supporting lone parents, and other parents on low income, into employment, with a view to ending welfare dependency and achieving a higher*

*standard of living for themselves and their children*”<sup>12</sup>

As with the Limitation Rule and the Homemakers Scheme, the NWCI supports Budgetary Reforms that provide independent social welfare payment to women, thereby decreasing their risk of poverty. A Part-Time means tested Parental Allowance will allow parents of older children the opportunity to parent part-time while accessing part-time employment. This will acknowledge parents’ choice around caring for their children at home while facilitating them to seek employment part-time.

## WOMEN’S HEALTH

### Recommendations

- Allocate the necessary resources to ensure the immediate full national rollout of the Irish Cervical Screening Programme (ICSP).
- Allocate the necessary resources to ensure full national rollout of Breast Check, to all areas without further delay.
- Provide medical cards to all children under 18.
- Allocate €16.5 million to resource women’s community-based organisations to develop work in health promotion and the provision of services otherwise unavailable.
- Allocate €1 million for the development of gender proofing and gender mainstreaming strategies in Irish health policy.

<sup>10</sup> Objective 6-C, Action 60. Objective 6-B Action 54. *NWS 2007-2016*, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007. (pV)

<sup>11</sup> United Nations (2005), *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, Concluding Comments: Ireland, United Nations, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> *NWS 2007-2016*, *ibid.*

- Allocate a specific budget line in consultation with national Traveller organisations for the implementation of the outstanding recommended actions within the National Traveller Health Strategy in 2008.
- Introduce a cost of disability payment for disabled people.

### Rationale

Ireland has one of the highest rates of invasive cervical cancer in Western Europe and the majority of deaths from cervical cancer in Ireland could be prevented through an effective screening programme. The NWCI calls for the immediate roll out of the ICSP in line with existing Government commitments.

Despite many assurances by the Government, the actual rollout of BreastCheck has continued at a very slow pace. This is having a critical effect on the health and well-being of women in a situation where all the evidence demonstrates that early detection is known to both improve the outcome for women and save women's lives.

It is well recognised that poverty has a particular effect on the long-term health of children and there is evidence to suggest that mothers in Ireland neglect their own health to ensure that their children receive health care. Extending the medical card to children up to eighteen would provide particular support especially for women and their families who are just above the medical card threshold.

Despite a clear demand from women and women's groups throughout the country for access to locally-based, women-centred community health services, the availability of such services is extremely

limited. Models of centres, which provide an alternative health service to women who may, for a range of reasons, feel alienated by the prevailing medical system, have been developed in some parts of the country. These centres seek more effective ways of meeting women's health needs while developing constructive and positive relationships with medical, nursing, social work and voluntary services and engaging in health promotion.

The development of cross-border linkages and the provision of support by organisations such as the Derry Well Woman Centre for the establishment of such a network would be a huge and invaluable resource in pursuing such a goal.

The National Traveller Health Strategy represents the Irish Government's commitment to tackling the serious disparities between the health of Travellers and that of the settled community in Ireland. The strategy recognises the particular health concerns of Traveller women. Over the past number of years, there has been a significant shortfall in the allocation of committed resources to implement the strategy. The shortfall has been compounded by current embargoes on employment within the HSE. This situation must be addressed as a matter of priority if the appalling health status of Traveller women is to be addressed.

Given the significant costs associated with living with a disability, those in this position and in particular women are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The call for a cost of disability payment is supported by disability organisations throughout Ireland and by the National Disability Authority.



## MIGRATION AND ANTI-RACISM

### Recommendations

- Allocate €10million per annum for the development of the Fund for Initiatives to Support the Integration of Legally Resident Immigrants, to promote community development and social inclusion work with migrants with a particular focus on migrant women in Ireland.
- Allocate €3million for the implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) in 2008 with a particular focus on actions addressing the needs of minority ethnic women.

### Rationale

The Fund for Initiatives to Support the Integration of Legally Resident Immigrants seeks to build on the work and expertise already developed in the area of integration. At present this fund, although an extremely valuable and useful resource, is on a once-off basis with funding of €5million allocated. This figure needs to be significantly increased particularly given new developments in the area of integration including the appointment of a new Minister for Integration and the proposed Task Force on Integration. A multi-annual fund is required to allow for long term strategic planning and the development of meaningful actions to promote integration. *“Community groups should be encouraged to continue to reach out specifically to migrant women to enable them to ...integrate well into their new community.”*<sup>13</sup> The integration of immigrants including migrant women into Irish society is recognised by Government

and Non-Governmental organisations alike as being of critical importance in ensuring the building of a cohesive and equal society into the future.

2008 is the final year of the implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR). Whilst the NAPAR is an important initiative in terms of addressing and challenging racism in Ireland, there has not been a specific focus on addressing the particular concerns of women from minority ethnic groups in Ireland. It is important that the legacy of the NAPAR is one which acknowledges the specific forms of racism experienced by women from minority ethnic groups and which sets in train strategic and effective approaches to addressing the concerns of minority ethnic women in Ireland.

## CHILDCARE

### Recommendations

- Introduce 4 weeks paid parental leave (€35m).
- Introduce 5 days paternity leave.
- Initiate Universal early education for three and four year olds on a phased implementation over three years (2006-2008) (€178m).
- Initiate subsidised extended care for three and four year olds on a phased implementation over three years (2006-2008) (€46m).

### Rationale

The introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement in Budget 2006 has not met the needs of children and parents. It is not targeted at the use of childcare services and has not assisted mothers and fathers to

<sup>13</sup> National Women’s Strategy 2007-2016, *ibid.*

make choices regarding reconciling work and family life. The costs of childcare in Ireland (€150-€180 per week) are placing an unsustainable burden on families, particularly mothers, in Ireland. The NWCI has recommended the development of a publicly subsidised model of Early Childhood Care and Education in its publication 'An Accessible Childcare Model' (NWCI 2005)<sup>14</sup> which would be introduced incrementally over a 15-year time frame. The model is child-centred and prioritises the development of a quality and affordable childcare infrastructure for all children.

For Budget 2008, the NWCI are prioritising the introduction of paid paternity and parental leave so that parents can choose to be at home with their child for the first year of their child's life. The benefits to children from being with their parents in their first year has been consistently recommended by the OECD and the NESF in their research on childcare.

The introduction of a free universal place for children aged three and four before they enter primary school is critical for the development of children and is a fundamental component of a quality childcare infrastructure.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### Recommendations:

- A national funding framework for NGOs working on violence against women must be developed through

the COSC Office for the administration of funds from the six relevant Government departments to the violence against women sector

- The 6 Government departments<sup>15</sup> which have a role in responding to, and preventing violence against women, should develop dedicated budget lines by 2008
- An immediate distribution of the €4.5m announced in budget 2007 to dedicated frontline responses to VAW, which should be in addition to allocations for 2008. (This allocation should be clearly ring-fenced for frontline service responses).

### Rationale

Violence against women remains a significant problem in Irish society. Research has shown that 15% of women experience severe domestic abuse<sup>16</sup> and that 20.4% of adult women have experienced sexual violence<sup>17</sup>. Despite yearly increased running costs, funding for these services has not increased since 2002 and is insufficient. In 2005, there was a 30% increase in calls made to the Women's Aid National Helpline. Almost 1 in 3 calls went unanswered and 40% of women seeking refuge were refused accommodation<sup>18</sup>.

In 2006 over 1200 genuine counseling calls were made to the DRCC National Telephone Helpline; 76% from the Dublin and Greater Dublin area and 24% from the rest of the country. There was an 11%

<sup>14</sup> NWCI, *An Accessible Childcare Model*, Dublin, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Health and Children, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of the Environment, Department of Education and Science, Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs and Department of Community, Rural and Gaelic Affairs.

<sup>16</sup> National Crime Council and ESRI, *Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland: Report on the National Study on Domestic Abuse*, Dublin, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> McGee et al, *The Savi Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland; A National Study of Irish Experiences, Beliefs and Attitudes Concerning Sexual Violence*, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2002

<sup>18</sup> NCC, 2005, op cit.

increase in first time callers to the centre. There was also increase of 2% in the number of men using the centre.

Despite the announcement in Budget 2007 of €4.5m to support frontline services, this money has not been distributed. Service providers fear that this money may not be allocated in 2007, despite the serious financial plight of dedicated front line service providers.

## WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

### Recommendations

- Ring fence €4 million per annum to support the development of community based women's organisations and networks.
- Allocate €2.5 million for the establishment of supports to promote the participation of women in political life at local, national and international levels.

### Rationale

Building women's participation in decision-making at any level and within any sector involves the provision of supports for the development of women's organisations at local and national levels. These organisations, many of which are

struggling to survive, form the primary level at which women first become involved as active citizens in society. There is a clear need for multi-annual funding to support organisations of this kind in bringing women in from the margins and providing an important space for women to raise their concerns and in many instances for the first time, to make their voices heard. The Irish Government must illustrate their commitment to facilitating and listening to the voices of Irish women by funding and supporting community based women's organisations.

Despite great hopes for positive change in women's political representation, Election 2007 represented a decrease in the already extremely low numbers of women in Dáil Éireann. The National Women's Strategy recognises that '*While the number of women holding elected political office in Ireland is low, it is understood that Irish political parties have a significant proportion of female members. This level of female participation belies the suggestion that women are not interested....positive action has an important role to play in improving the position of women in decision – making.*' Targeted and well-resourced measures including research, data collection, information and training are key requisites towards the promotion of a more equal and democratic Irish political system.