



National Women's
Council of Ireland

Comhairle Náisiúnta
na mBan in Éirinn

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INTRODUCTION

Women today are represented in unprecedented numbers in the labour market and contribute to household incomes to a far greater degree than during past periods of economic downturn. Their integration into the workplace means not only that the crisis is having a greater impact on women themselves, but also on their families. It is also the case that women “entered the recession on an unequal economic footing”¹. Women’s employment patterns are characterised by higher levels of part-time work and high concentration in the so called informal sector with lower earnings and less social protection. In short, women are in a less advantageous position to weather the crisis.

The European Commission asserted in its 2009 *Report on equality between men and women*: ‘the economic slowdown is likely to affect women more than men’.² Understanding and addressing the impact of the recession on women must be central to the decisions regarding Budget 2010. It is critical that Budget 2010 seek to alleviate the worst consequences of this, by protecting the most vulnerable women and ensuring that progress that has been made towards equality for women is not reversed.

The National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCi) has 160 member organisations representing around 500,000 women.

THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON WOMEN

- The recession is effecting both women and men, exposing all adults to unemployment. Recent trends have shown that while early 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, while the construction sector was the first to experience serious job losses (of 45,900), the retail and wholesale trade was the next sector, with 18,200 losses. The hotel and services sector experienced losses of 10,500³. Since the start of 2009 the rate of female unemployment has steadily increased peaking in July 2009, where the Live Register figures recorded a slightly higher proportion of women (5,500) signed on the live register in comparison to men (5,100)⁴.
- It must also be borne in mind that women have different work patterns to men, dominating in 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 therefore increasing risk of poverty.
- Companies seeking cost saving measures are increasingly targeting supports for women, e.g. supports to statutory maternity payments. 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.
- Women- headed households face the greatest risk of poverty. 37.6% of lone parents are at risk of poverty and the risk of poverty for older people living alone has risen from 19.3% in 2006 to 24.3% in 2007⁵.

THE MCCARTHY REPORT

Budget 2010 is clearly being established in the context of the proposals in the McCarthy Report. The proposals of the McCarthy Report if implemented would impact on women at three levels:

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

A general cutback in public spending will disproportionately effect women. Firstly, women are the primary recipients of public spending such as care provision and services, education, training and health including sexual and reproductive health. Secondly, women are the main providers of public services, making up to two thirds of the workforce in education, health and social care; it can therefore be expected that female unemployment will rise disproportionately as public sector cuts are made.⁶ The NWCI has produced a detailed analysis of the proposals which would significantly impact on women and has specifically called for a gender impact assessment of all proposals in the Report⁷.

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*. The Irish Government must follow that advice with regard to Budget 2010.

Equality between women and men cannot be a luxury to be addressed only in times of economic growth; it is a legal and moral obligation, a founding block of the EU. It is crucial that women's equality be a core guiding principle now and in the future to avoid a setback in terms of the gains women have made over the previous decades.

NWCI RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET 2010

PROTECTING ALL OUR CHILDREN

› Child Benefit

In the current recession, parents need Child Benefit more than ever. Government policy has established Child Benefit as the 'one size fits all payment'; Child benefit is now used by parents towards paying for all of the costs related to children, food, clothing, school activities and childcare. Support for parents to pay for childcare is critical for women to survive in the recession. The low level of Government investment in childcare has led to an increasing high level of childcare costs in Ireland. Net childcare costs are 45% of the average wage in Ireland, compared to 16-17% in EU and OECD countries. Calculated as a proportion of family income, the cost is just under 30% in Ireland (only the UK is higher at 33%), compared to an average of around 12.5% in the EU and OECD⁸.

The current NWCI survey into 'The importance of Child Benefit for parents' has shown that childcare costs have increased for 49.4% of parents. Only 3% of respondents to the survey stated that childcare costs had decreased. The NWCI have also issued a briefing Paper on Child Benefit, 'All our Children' www.nwci.ie/publications/published_reports/ detailing the reasons why Child Benefit should remain as a universal payment and maintained at current levels,

RECOMMENDATION 1

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

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE WOMEN

› Social Welfare Rates

There have been continuous commitments that the current recession should not hit the most vulnerable. Maintaining the social welfare rates at current levels is critical to ensuring that the recession does not increase the numbers of people living in poverty and negate the government's stated aim of reducing poverty.

- Women headed households face the greatest risk of poverty. 37.6% of lone parents are at risk of poverty and the risk of poverty for older people, mostly women, living alone has risen from 19.3% in 2006 to 24.3% in 2007.⁹

- 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 men.¹⁰

RECOMMENDATION 2

- All social welfare rates remain at current levels.
- The Christmas Payment is reinstated.
- Maintain earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and maintain its recognition for Community Employment.

› Qualified Adults

The vast majority of Qualified Adults are women (95%); this status is assigned to those who are not registered independently and are dependant on their partner for their income. This reinforces female dependency and makes women vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. 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. There have been numerous reports recommending an end to the status of qualified adults and In the National Women's Strategy the Government commits to "*Consider proposals for the abolition of qualified adult allowances in social assistance*"¹¹. This policy agenda cannot be sidelined in the current recession; the NWCI has put proposals on this matter before the Government for some time and calls for action in this regard in Budget 2010.

RECOMMENDATION 3

- An end to the limitation rule
- All qualified adults payments to be paid at same rate as main claimant and paid directly to the individual.

› Minimum Wage

Women are more likely to be in low paid employment. It is essential for women that the minimum wage maintains its current value. Ireland already has a high incidence of 'working poor' and 31.3% of those at risk of poverty are headed by a person in employment.

There has been, in the past, a commitment by Government to keep the minimum wage earners out of the tax net in order to maximise the earnings of the low paid and this commitment is particularly important in the current economic crisis.

RECOMMENDATION 4

- Maintain the minimum wage at €8.65 per hour and ensure the minimum wage is outside of the tax net.

› Adapting social welfare rules to address the impact of the recession

The current social welfare system is not equipped to address the unemployment and social crises.

The NWCi has been engaged in a long term campaign to reform the social welfare system into a modern system that meets the challenges and diversity of the current labour market, one that places care and equality at the centre.

One of the anomalies in the social welfare system is that a person must lose a full day of employment before being to claim unemployment benefit. The impact of the recession has meant reduced working hours for many women. Employers, particularly in the retail and services sector have compressed working hours to the busiest part of each day. The effect is more concentrated work and less pay. The social welfare system clearly needs to be reformed in this area, to recognise the changing circumstances of vulnerable workers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

- Recognition of atypical work in the social welfare system, through calculating unemployment on the basis of hours instead of days.
- Removal of the two year rule so that women have full access to entitlements on entering employment

› Pensions

Women significantly rely on the state pension system as a result of not being in a financial position to invest in a private pension. Unfortunately, for both men and women, the implications of the near collapse of the private pension system now means that there will be an increase in the reliance on the state pension for all people in their older years. This makes the need for reform of the state system more urgent.

While over 80% of male pensioners are entitled to a State Pension based on their social insurance entitlements, less than 60% of female pensioners qualify for this payment. Put another way, two thirds of those drawing a social insurance pension are men, while just under two-thirds of those who have to rely on a means tested pension are women. The 'pensions gap' means that women are more likely to live in income poverty in their old age than men – 18% of women over 65 live below the poverty line, compared to 15% of men.

The thrust of Government policy regarding pensions has been to encourage people to invest in private pensions and the state has supported people to take out pensions by providing tax reliefs of €2.9 billion per annum. Clearly a new direction is urgently required to ensure that all people have a decent standard of living in their older years. The ESRI in its work on pensions, showed that to reduce tax reliefs to the standard tax of 20% would provide an increase to the state pension of €50 per week. The NWCi has documented the discrimination against women in the state system and have developed a women's friendly model of pensions in *Pensions: What Women Want – a model of pensions that guarantees independence*, (NWCi 2008).

RECOMMENDATION 6

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

TAXATION REFORM

It is clear that the impact of narrowing the tax base in previous budgets has contributed significantly to the current fiscal crisis. The NWCi has consistently advocated for a wider tax base so that a high level of public services can be delivered and maintained. In reforming the taxation system, basic principles of redistribution must apply where those who have the most wealth and earnings contribute most to the state finances.

RECOMMENDATION 7

- The tax base is widened through the introduction of a third tax band for higher earners.
- Provision of all tax reliefs at the standard rate tax band.

PROTECTING WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT

In addressing the economic crisis and the alarming increases in our unemployment rates, this Budget must provide a clear strategy to sustain employment. Supporting women workers to remain in their jobs is central to this strategy.

Adopting innovative measures to move women from welfare back into employment is critical to ensure that our current employment crisis does not become a long term unemployment crisis. Currently it costs the state approx €20,000 euro (between welfare payments and revenue loss) when a person loses their job¹². In order to develop a new 'Smart Economy' therefore, it must specifically support women to access employment which matches their skills and working patterns.

Given the number of women who are now unemployed, there must be a specific strategy to target women to re-train and re-skill. Budget 2010 must be creative in identifying how to support people quickly back into employment.

RECOMMENDATION 8

- Adoption of a Sustainable Jobs Strategy that will;
 - Ring-fence resources to establish a specific labour market programme for women to re-skill.
 - Introduce support measures for the employer and employee for the maintenance of jobs.
 - Identify and support sectors for job creation.
 - Introduce innovative welfare to work strategies which have specific gender dimension and account for women's work patterns.

HEALTH SERVICE REFORM

Recent policy developments such as the establishment of an Expert Group on Resource Allocation and Financing the Health Sector have created opportunities to rethink the way Ireland finances healthcare. The NWCI believes that the means by which we raise public funds has a direct bearing on both the availability and access to quality healthcare for all citizens, regardless of income or status.

This position is supported by international “best practice” research into the financing of health systems in OECD countries, which demonstrates that taxes and citizen-centred social health insurance schemes provide the most sustainable and equitable basis for health financing.¹³

› **Primary Healthcare**

Women take the lion’s share of responsibility for the health care needs in families. Our members have consistently called for a re-balancing of health resources away from costly medicalised models, towards health promotion and prevention, including primary and community care, and mental health services. NWCI supports the introduction of universal access to Primary Healthcare in Ireland as the best method of reducing health inequalities and improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare in Ireland.

Recent studies indicate, that the way we finance primary care in Ireland influences how citizens access and utilize services. ESRI research (2004) confirms that upfront GP charges for health care and services, deter people from seeking services they need. Not only does this have an impact on the health of an individual or family, but it also costs the state a lot more to treat patients with chronic or acute illness at hospital level. An estimated €4 billion comes into the health system through private out of pocket fees for health services including GP consultation fees. Yet it has been estimated that only €1 billion is needed to introduce free primary care for all citizens not currently covered by the General Medical Services Card.¹⁴

RECOMMENDATION 9

- All financial and human resources required to fully implement the *Mental Health Strategy* and the *Primary Care Strategy* are made available in the 2010 budget
- The introduction of universal access to GP led primary care health care services by the end of 2013.

› **General Medical Services Card**

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. Anecdotally, NWCI members tell us that women with young families are afraid to take up the opportunity of part-time paid employment for fear of losing their medical card. At the very least this Budget must recognise the importance of the medical card to vulnerable groups and protect them in this current economic crisis.

Any further reduction in the eligibility rates will precipitate increased financial hardship and reduced economic and emotional independence for women with families; and older women living on a fixed income.

The proposed €5 prescription charge for all medical card holders will have a detrimental effect on the health of poor people and low income families. This charge should not be contemplated until an evidenced based, gender - proofed review of prescription usage and costs is carried out. This should include a cost benefit analysis of medication costs associated with the treatment of mental health conditions, particularly depression, compared to counselling and other therapeutic treatments.

RECOMMENDATION 10

- The Government does not reduce the income guidelines for medical cards any further and that it increases medical card eligibility in line with social welfare payments and lower income levels.
- The proposal to introduce a €5 prescription charge to all medical card holders should not proceed be dropped
- The Government reinstate the over-70's automatic entitlement to a medical card.
- The Introduction of a medical card to all children aged 5 years and under, by end of 2010 at cost of €57 million.

› Means test for Home Care Packages

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.

RECOMMENDATION 11

- Any reductions or adjustments to the Home Care scheme must be assessed for their impact on women giving and receiving care.

› Public Hospital Reform

NWCI is extremely concerned about the increased level of privatisation within the public health system.

We believe that recent policies concerning tax breaks for the building of private facilities, the co-location of private hospitals on public sites and the perverse incentives created by the National Treatment Purchase fund, will bring the Nation any closer to the vision expressed in the National Health Strategy- *Quality and Fairness a System for you (2003)*.

Improved delivery in public health services for all citizens will only be achieved through a re balancing of the health system towards an accessible primary care system and increasing the capacity of public hospitals to meet demand.

› **Barriers of Access to A&E**

NWCI would advise against any further increase in the costs of visiting A&E as it creates a serious barrier for access to health care for families and vulnerable groups. The stalled implementation of Government's Primary Care Strategy means that in many areas there is already a shortage of GP services, particularly "out-of-hours" services. The current practice of charging €250 to A&E patients, who cannot prove their residency status, even though they are PRSI workers is further exacerbating health inequalities for ethnic minority groups. The HSE has found that collection of patient charges is lengthy and often fruitless, thereby driving up administration costs for little return. A more efficient and equitable system for providing a public health service must be found.

RECOMMENDATION 12

- An end the two – tier health system and to remove all barriers of access. Government should introduce a fairer system of payment through a progressive Social health insurance scheme, similar to PRSI payments, for all citizens.
- The NTPF is scrapped and €90 million currently allocated to the scheme is channelled back into the public health system to build capacity in primary care and reduce patient lists and waiting times in public hospitals.
- There should be no co-location of private hospitals on public hand. Increase bed capacity through HR and performance management efficiencies and more appropriate and less costly community based beds for long stay patients.

› **Gender Specific Health Programmes**

NWCI have campaigned for a number of Health programmes for Government's prioritization, including the National Cancer Screening Programme and the Cardiovascular Strategy for Women. These have been included in the National Women's Strategy.

› **Breast Check**

The public has been assured that the full roll out to parts of the southern region or the North West Region will be available to all areas by the end of 2009.

We would urge government to implement the National Cancer Screening Services proposal to extend the age bracket for BreastCheck to 69 years in line with international best practice.

RECOMMENDATION 13

- The Government make provision in the budgets of 2010 and 2011 to extend the age range of National Breast Check for women up to 69 years.
- Supports for community based women's organisations who have been working to assist the National Cancer Screening Programme in improving access and uptake rates in disadvantaged or isolated areas should be acknowledged and maintained.

› **National Cancer Strategy**

NWCI support the principle behind the establishment of **8 specialist cancer centres** to ensure best practice triple assessment cancer screening. It was always envisaged that the success of the National Cancer Strategy was contingent on the placement of the appropriate after care, drug treatments and supports for women at primary and community level. These supports have not been fully realised.

Our members, from, Donegal, North Leitrim, and Sligo have raised very real concerns about barriers of access for women needing services in the North-west region. These include lengthy travel times, lack of public transportation, time constraints created by caring responsibilities and affordability, when seeking access to care. NWCI supports the view that health services have to be accessible, acceptable and of good quality for all. The geographical differentials that have presented in the course of implementing the Strategy must be fully addressed to protect the rights and the lives of rural women.

RECOMMENDATION 14

- The Government explores all available options to resolve this obvious gap in cancer service provision for the North-west region, swiftly and democratically.

› **Cervical Cancer Screening Programme**

The National Women's Council acknowledges the success of the free GP led cervical smear testing for women over 25 and supports the move to a call/recall approach based on an organised population based programme.

However it is essential that the existing system of self referral via their GP, without waiting for a letter of invitation, is retained in parallel with the new approach. This will ensure that women in the most-at-risk groups are fully supported to access the Cervical Check National Screening Service.

RECOMMENDATION 15

- In line with international best practice, government should direct the National Cancer Screening Service to protect women's right to self refer to their GP for their free cervical smear test under the current terms of the scheme.

› National Cervical Cancer Immunization programme

The NWCI deplors the Government's decision to shelve the roll out of this programme to **12 yr old girls**, to protect them against the HPV virus. It has sparked an outcry nationally amongst NWCI members and internationally from Health care professionals. The importance of this programme in terms of education and prevention of this fatal disease cannot be over-stated.

RECOMMENDATION 16

- The HSE sets aside a realistic, fully-costed budget for the full implementation of the immunization programme
- The HSE should support and encourage the current Well Women Centre pilot project and utilize its findings to inform the roll-out the scheme nationally.

› Gender Mainstreaming in Health Service policy and planning

NWCI welcomes the establishment of the HSE's twelve-month study to address gender mainstreaming in health service policy, planning and services. We note the amalgamation of the Women's Health Council with the Department of health, which should be in place by the end of 2009. We anticipate that the good research-based work of the Women's health Council will enhance the Department of Health's policy remit on the social determinants of health and health inequalities; social inclusion and women's health.

RECOMMENDATION 17

- A budget line to support the recommendations of the HSE study is included to ensure the incorporation of a gender- mainstreaming dimension into health policy planning.
- The government honours its commitment under the National Women's Strategy and establishes a Gender Mainstreaming Unit in the Department of Health and Children, incorporating the human and intellectual resources of the Women's Health Council Gender mainstreaming unit

PROTECTING SUPPORTS FOR DISABLED WOMEN

The McCarthy Report proposes further drastic cuts to disability specific funding, and to health, social, educational and other services on which people with disabilities are also reliant. The cumulative effect of these cuts will have a long lasting impact on the day to day lives of people with disabilities.'

Of particular concern are;

- A proposed cut of €50 million in funding to voluntary disability organisations providing disability and mental health services.
- A €60 million reduction to the funding of Special Needs Assistants
- Cut backs to a variety of programs in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
- The 5% reduction in the rate of Disability Allowance .
(Disability Federation of Ireland 2009)¹⁵

The current risk of poverty for people with disabilities is 37% (CSO 2007). 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 supports¹⁶ .

RECOMMENDATION 18

- All current social welfare payments to people with disabilities are maintained.
- That existing services and supports for people with disabilities be maintained at least at current levels.

PROTECTING LOCALLY BASED WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

Local women's organisations provide advice and counselling services, health information, access points for education and training, and childcare supports.

They enable women to organise together and speak out on the issues affecting their lives, highlighting gaps in service provision and identifying areas in need of reform. They help to hold families and communities together and 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.

RECOMMENDATION 19

- Maintain current levels of funding to the Community Development Programme and to Family Resource Centres.

SUPPORTING THE VOICE OF WOMEN NATIONALLY

The National Women's Council of Ireland, informed by its diverse membership of groups, speaks for the needs of women in every part of Irish society. It is vital, at this critical time for Irish society, that space is given nationally to our voice. Women's collective contribution to the debates surrounding the future of our society and our economy country must be heard. An examination of the composition of current key decision making bodies at national level can leave little doubt as to the need for Government to listen to the demands and contributions of women and respond accordingly.

The Special Group on Public Service Numbers & Expenditure, who produced the McCarthy Report, consisted of 5 men and one woman. The Commission on Taxation consisted of 13 men and 5 women. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance and Public Service consists of 16 men and just one woman. Women are 51% of the population, but make up just 13% of members of the Dail and the Seanad, and just 16% of local councils.

Strong national representation of women's concerns can and will, if listened to, lead to better policy development and implementation and enhanced outcomes for women, families and for all of society.

RECOMMENDATION 20

- The funding for the National Women's Council of Ireland be maintained at its 2009 level.

MIGRATION, ASYLUM and INTEGRATION

At present migrant workers in Ireland face a plethora of significant charges and levies in order to navigate their way through the migration process. These include amongst many others, the €1,000 charge for application for a work permit (€1,500 for renewal of a 3 year work permit) and the newly imposed €500 for application for long term residency. A recently published discussion document on the reform of the student immigration system proposes further restrictions on placement of non EEA children in Irish schools in receipt of state funding, possibly in the form of a Government levy.

The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) places an additional burden on migrants including returned Irish immigrants in accessing any form of social assistance. The HRC stipulates that in order to qualify for social assistance an individual must be *habitually resident* in Ireland or other parts of the Common Travel Area. Meeting the criteria for habitual residence can be extremely difficult for many vulnerable or exploited migrant workers (many of whom are women) and for returned Irish emigrants, leading to a danger of increased poverty and social exclusion amongst those groups.

Migrant women who are possible victims of trafficking for forced labour or have become homeless due to exploitation, experience particular hardship. NGOs, including members of the NWC working with migrant women, report increased rigidity in the system and increased difficulty for women in this situation in accessing discretionary one off transitional payments (e.g. for the payment of deposits for accommodation and for basic living). The result is destitution, fear and isolation. Such women face extreme difficulty in moving from danger and poverty to the security of decent accommodation, training, education and secure employment.

RECOMMENDATION 21

- The Government refrain from introducing any new levies or charges on immigrants to Ireland including any restrictions on children of students from non EEA countries.
- The €500 fee for application for long term residency be repealed.
- The Habitual Residence Condition be abolished.
- The system of transition payments be introduced to assist extremely vulnerable migrant women (in particular victims of trafficking and exploitation) access secure accommodation, education and training.

› **Direct Provision**

Asylum seekers in Ireland continue to be housed, many for over four years, in direct provision centres, with poor and inappropriate accommodation as they await the decision on their asylum application.

Their payment of €19.10 per week unchanged since 2000 remains an abomination which cannot be defended. Our members report that for asylum seeking women, the experience is one of isolation, violence, vulnerability, poverty, racism, abuse, exploitation, physical and psychological distress. In addition the extreme difficulties associated with childrearing and family care are consistently highlighted.

RECOMMENDATION 22

- The system of Direct Provision is abolished and asylum seeking women and families permitted to access accommodation in their own right.
- The weekly payment to asylum seekers be increased to a minimum of €60 per week.

› **Traveller Women**

The situation of the Traveller Community in Ireland remains characterised by extreme racism, educational disadvantage and poverty. Developments in recent years in the integration infrastructure have failed to include Travellers who are in danger of being left out of Government discussions on integration and anti-racism. The situation of Traveller women is well documented by Traveller organisations who highlight extremely low levels of educational attainment, high levels of long term unemployment, poor health status and shorter life expectancy (12 years less) than settled women.

RECOMMENDATION 23

- Any funding cutbacks to Traveller Training Centre's as proposed in the report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers & Expenditure be ring fenced for the promotion of Traveller education with a specific budget for training and education programmes for Traveller women.

PROTECTING THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S STRATEGY AND THE EQUALITY FOR WOMEN MEASURE

The funding under the Equality for Women Measure has been drastically cut. Since announcements were made in the April 2009 Supplementary Budget, funding available for gender equality initiatives amounted to €5.4 million. This represents an astonishing 46% cut in funding. Additionally, there is uncertainty in relation to existing funding for implementation of the *National Women's Strategy and government has expressed deep pessimism about its future.*

The McCarthy Report, in making its proposals to on women's equality 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 with no commitment given to use that fund for supporting women's employment.

In this period of economic downturn the provision of supports to women to access employment opportunities is needed more than ever. The barriers which women face in accessing employment (including discrimination, lack of choice due to lack of childcare and inflexible working conditions), make the prospect of this recession and the reality of poverty which many women face all the more immediate.

RECOMMENDATION 24

- The funding to implement the National Women's Strategy is continued and ring-fenced.
- The ESF funding in the Equality for Women Measure transferred to Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment be ring fenced for women's labour market measures.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Services for violence against women have been chronically under-funded for years and have been forced to cut positions, programme or hours of operation. Moreover, domestic violence frontline services have not been able to develop adequate initiatives to better respond to the needs of marginalised women such as migrant, refugee, asylum seeking, Traveller women and women with disabilities.

Funding for frontline services was not increased adequately even during the economic boom in Ireland. When funding was increased in 2007, after many years of funding freeze, it was not increased sufficiently to catch up with increased costs, demand and the need to make services more accessible to a diverse range of women.

In addition since the Ryan report was published there has been a significant escalation in calls to Rape Crisis Centres.

The current financial crisis and recession have already impacted negatively on NGOs working on responding to Domestic Violence, with services experiencing cuts in their funding and some at risk of becoming non-viable or having to reduce service delivery. There are grave concerns that funding to vital services may be further eroded in future Budgets.

In times of recession, options for women experiencing domestic violence dwindle, as their access to financial support may be further restricted by unemployment and increased poverty. It is essential that services that assist women in this situation are adequately funded to be able to respond appropriately.

Refuge provision also remains inadequate and many women and children are denied access to refuge each year. The experience of the Women's Aid National Helpline is that many women and children cannot access the emergency accommodation and support they need when they need it.

RECOMMENDATION 25

- Funding for existing specialist services working on violence against women must at a minimum be protected from further cuts and should as a matter of urgency be increased at the earliest opportunity.
- To ensure access to safe, emergency accommodation for women experiencing male violence a target of at least 1 refuge place (defined as number of rooms providing bed spaces for a woman and her children) per 10,000 of population should be agreed and a time-frame for achievement set.
- High Dependency Units for women who experience domestic violence and have alcohol and drug dependencies should be developed.
- Funding, announced by Minister Barry Andrews in response to Ryan Report be made available to Rape Crisis Centres to deliver the much needed services. This recommendation was made in recognition of the fact that funding for frontline services to protect women from domestic violence and rape should be increased to enable them to cope with rising levels of such violence.

The National Women's Council of Ireland is one of a number of charities, trade unions and community organisations which have joined forces to form the *Poor Can't Pay Campaign*. The Campaign is calling for;

- No Cuts to the basic social welfare payments for adults and children,
- No Cuts to the national minimum wage
- Reinstatement of the Christmas Payment

Go to www.thepoorcantpay.ie to sign up to the campaign.

References

- ¹ Katherine Rake (2009): *Are women bearing the burden of the recession?* A Fawcett Society report, available at:
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