



National Women's
Council of Ireland
Comhairle Náisiúnta
na mBan in Éirinn

national collective of
**community based
women's
networks**



PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: PUTTING WOMEN IN THE PICTURE

PROPOSAL TO ENSURE THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF
DISADVANTAGED WOMEN IN THE REFORM OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Submitted by
National Women's Council of Ireland & the
National Collective of Community-based
Women's Networks

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Section 1 Introduction

The National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks (NCCWN) and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) welcome the opportunity to set out their proposals in relation to the process of the alignment of community development and local development with local government.

The proposals are contained in this document. They are submitted in the context of persistent economic, social, political and cultural inequalities for women. They are submitted in a context of community development being the primary method of engaging with marginalised women that statutory and other agencies cannot reach¹. They are submitted in the context of a firm belief that in order for NCCWN Member Projects to continue their work, they need to be independent of, though closely aligned with, local authority structures.

This Proposal to Ensure the Social Inclusion of Disadvantaged Women in the Reform of Local Government, first sets out the proposals to ensure successful engagement of women in the new structures and to ensure that the proposed policy on Community and Local Development enables a focus on women, particularly marginalised and socially and economically disadvantaged women. It then explores the context in which the proposals are being made, including community development and local development in Ireland, gender equality in community development and local development and the recent context including the alignment process. Finally it presents some information on the persistent inequalities faced by women, as well as the international and national policy obligations that Ireland has in this area.

These proposals are submitted in the context of seeking to constructively engage with what is likely to result in significant changes for the way that marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women engage. The NCCWN and NWCI would be happy to meet with representatives of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to further discuss the proposals.

¹ All the 17 NCCWN Member Projects have reported an increase in women engaging with the projects, these women are marginalised on multiple fronts e.g. , early school leavers, lone parents, migrant women, unemployed women, woman who have sustained domestic violence, addictions and some with enduring mental health problems. Statutory agencies are referring more and more clients to the services; e.g. social workers, occupational therapists, Juvenile Liaison Officer / Community Gardaí, HSE drug service, GPs, Public Health nurse, Mental Health Organisations, school liaison officers.

Section 2 Proposal

The rationale for this proposal is submitted in the context of ongoing and persistent inequality for women in Irish society, and in particular for marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women. The proposal outlines the principles, structures and processes required to insure the social inclusion of women and, particularly in the context of the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP), marginalised women, and argues that programmes and funding to enable programmes should follow the proposals outlined. It is the consistent belief of the NCCWN and the NWCI that a focus on women's inequality is inconsistent with amalgamation into bigger entities. This was the case when the proposal was to merge with the LDCs and remains the case. It is therefore proposed that women's community-based projects currently operating within the context of the Local and Community Development Programme, continue to remain linked to but independent of the LDCs and the local authority structures. In practical terms, this means that women's community-based projects need to remain independent and autonomous of, but closely linked to, the alignment structures. In relation to the participation of disadvantaged women and their organisations, this would require recognition of the NCCWN as a significant and important partner both nationally and locally in order to ensure the voices of marginalised and isolated women are heard and represented. This would also require continued support and a focus on women's community development work into the future.

Principles

A number of principles inform this proposal:

- Women's equality, with a particular focus on marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women. This principle is based on a feminist class analysis
- Feminist community development

Women's equality – overarching and underpinning

A specific, explicit focus on women's social, economic, cultural and political equality and in particular on the equality of marginalised women, needs to be an *overarching and underpinning* principle of all the structures, functions and programmes associated with the alignment process.

This means that all of the structures, functions and programmes associated with alignment need to be informed by a gender and class analysis and have a specific focus on addressing the causes of women's economic, social and political inequality. It means that **programme outcomes** need to be measured in terms of outcomes for women, particularly marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women. In addition, the **impact** of programmes and actions on women, particularly marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women, need to be measured. Gender and class proofing will be key tools to be used in this.

Feminist Community Development

As outlined later in this proposal document, community development is an approach to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality that emphasises the participation and empowerment of those affected by those issues. It is a collective process that seeks to mobilise communities to challenge power and other forms of inequalities in society and to bring about social change. Ultimately it seeks the creation of a more just and equal society.

Within the new alignment structures and policies, community development needs to be explicitly named both as:

- an approach - the principles of community development, participation, empowerment and collective action (including policy work) need to embed the processes of all the structures, and programmes of alignment; and
- a strategy - to enable specific programme focus on social exclusion, poverty and inequality.

The NCCWN and the NWCI acknowledge the role that community development has played in enabling, supporting and facilitating the participation and empowerment of marginalised women, in a way that focuses on collective strategies for addressing social, economic, cultural and political inequalities.

In addition, accessibility to community education is a vital component of the empowerment of disadvantaged women in locally driven and accessible spaces. This is a practical and necessary principle which enables self-empowerment on a local level and gives great impetus to both the local program and the local women who would not be able to access alternate routes as a result of economic and multiple level disadvantage.

In practice

In practice the principles outlined above will have implications for the new structures and initiatives at national and local level. They implications at a general level, ensuring that women's equality is to the fore in the structures and policy and ensuring that there is a gender quota of at least 40% of either gender represented on all structures – national and local. They also have specific implications for the facilitation of independent, autonomous work with marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women and ensuring a specific and explicit focus on strategies to address the causes of women's social, economic, cultural and political disadvantage.

The principles have implications for the facilitation of women's participation and requires that facilitation of childcare and other caring responsibilities are embedded into the operation of all structures. Particular note should be taken of the fact that women may need to be reconnected with democratic processes and models developed such as the Women's Manifesto Project¹ (an innovative programme from Longford Women's Link) should be explored.

More detail is provided at each stage below.

Interdepartmental Group

The principles outlined above need to be reflected in the composition and operation of the Interdepartmental Group. The composition of the Interdepartmental Group must ensure that best practice in relation to gender quotas² is implemented, and a gender quota of at least 40% of women must be ensured on the IDG.

The IDG is tasked with the development of the National Local and Community Development Policy. In the interests of informed and constructive policy development, it is crucial that a representative of the national organisation that promotes and supports community development, the Community Workers' Co-operative, is assigned a place on the IDG. In addition, the concerns of marginalised women must be explicitly represented. In addition, it is proposed that the NCCWN and the NWCI be given the opportunity to present to the IDG on appropriate mechanisms and strategies for the inclusion of marginalised women in this process to:

- ensure successful engagement of women in the new structures
- focus on marginalised and socially and economically disadvantaged women

- discuss community development and local development in Ireland, gender equality in community development and local development and the recent context including the alignment process.
- ensure that the alignment process develop and incorporate strategies to address the persistent inequalities faced by women, as well as the international and national policy obligations that Ireland has in this area.

The NCCWN has a proven track record of reaching and supporting marginalised women's empowerment and have mechanisms in place to facilitate active representative participation.

National Policy on Local and Community Development

The proposed National Policy on Local and Community Development needs to acknowledge that women's equality is not a minority issue. There needs to be a specific focus on gender equality and the way that gender equality intersects and overlaps with other forms of inequality.

Community development, as a key strategy to facilitate marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women to address inequality, must be enabled by the national policy. The policy needs to be informed by the principles espoused by the community development sector in Ireland articulated in *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work*, principally participation, empowerment and a focus on collective action.

The national policy should seek to draw on the principles of the White Paper, principally those that assert the importance of autonomy and independence and acknowledge that work to achieve equality needs to be independent and autonomous of the structures in society that can perpetuate inequalities.

The NCCWN and the NWCI contend that the term *Local and Community Development* is misleading and does not reflect the significant differences between community development and local development. Community development is now structurally part of local development to a large extent making the need for a focus on community development to be more explicit. Therefore the NWCI and the NCCWN propose that the national policy should be named the National Policy on Community Development and Local Development.

Socio-economic Committees

Similar principles need to inform the composition, function, terms of reference and standing orders of the Socio-economic Committees. The NWCI and the NCCWN welcome the potential of the Socio-economic Committees to have a combined focus on social and economic equality, social cohesion and social inclusion.

The NWCI and the NCCWN contend that the model of economic development to be adopted needs to have a significant focus on women's social inclusion - economic and social development not just for the 'already-haves' but also for the 'have-nots'.

Informing this must be an analysis of who is being failed by current models of economic and social development. As outlined in the introduction to this proposal, women are being failed economically and socially as well as representationally.

The NWCI and the NCCWN proposes that the SECs could be a key mechanism to achieve the Government's goals in relation to representation of and by women. The SECs need to ensure a

gender quota of at least 40% of women. This representation needs to cross-sector. In addition, the NWCI and the NCCWN are calling for a specific place on the SEC to represent women's issues, particularly as they pertain to disadvantaged women.

In electing representatives, local authorities should ensure that where NCCWN networks under the current Local and Community Development Programme exist, they should be used as the primary mechanism for electing a member to represent the concerns and issues of marginalised women. Where they do not exist, other women's community groups should be facilitated to select a representative. Criteria for selection, planning, monitoring and reporting procedures should be applied equally to all member organisations of the SECs.

Community Plan

At local level, the Community Plan will have an important strategic function. It needs to be informed by a gender/class analysis of inequalities in Irish society and include a specific focus (including named goals, outcomes and actions) on achieving economic, social and political equality for women.

It needs to promote and facilitate community development with marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women. It needs to ensure that programme outcomes are measured in terms of outcomes for women, particularly marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women. In addition, the impact of programmes and actions on women, particularly marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women, needs to be measured. Gender and class proofing will be key tools to be used in this.

Section 3 Background

Community Development and Local Development

Community development is an approach to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality that emphasises the participation and empowerment of those affected by those issues. It is a collective process that seeks to mobilise communities to challenge power and other forms of inequalities in society and to bring about social change. Ultimately it seeks the creation of a more just and equal society.

Local Development is defined as *the collective effort of a community to improve local economic, social and environmental conditions*².

The (then) Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs refer to community development as follows:

*It is generally recognised that the benefits of social and economic development are not equally distributed. Some groups benefit less than others. CD is about promoting positive change in society in favour of those who usually benefit least.....not just about making concrete changes in the quality of people's lives. It is also about how this is done – i.e. both the task and the process are important*³.

Community Development:

- *Is collective. It is based on working with and supporting groups of people and communities, enabling individuals to develop knowledge, skills and confidence so that they may take part in collective action;*
- *Is participatory. It is about actively engaging the skills, knowledge and experience of people in both planning and taking initiatives to respond to socio-economic and political problems. In particular, it involves those who are currently most marginalised and excluded from the decision making processes who tend to benefit least from local economic and social development;*
- *Is empowering. It aims to effect a sharing of power to create structures which provide genuine participation and involvement.*
- *Is concerned with both the task and the process of development. Importance is attached to both the task of community development and the process by which it is achieved, promoting a collective process which is inclusive.*
- *Is committed to developing innovative and creative approaches to address the economic and social problems that arise from deprivation. It seeks, in a dynamic way to test new approaches which ensure the involvement of local communities;*
- *Is involved with devising strategies which confront prejudice or bias on the basis of gender, 'race', ethnicity, class, age, disability or sexual orientation.*

² Integrated Local Development Handbook

³ The National Community Development Programme Handbook

The fundamentally important role of Community Development as a strategy in integrated social and economic local development has been consistently recognised at national and European levels. Community development has proven its worth over the years, particularly in times of recession. The current situation that the country is facing is not without precedent. The downturn of the economy in the 1980s produced a similar crisis in the public finances, accompanied by depressed economic activity and considerable unemployment levels. This had a particularly devastating effect on vulnerable groups in society, with widespread poverty and intergenerational social deprivation becoming embedded in families and communities. This required the State to seek the partnership and assistance of those experiencing poverty and their representatives to assist in finding creative solutions to these grave problems. The important role of community development in supporting communities to define the needs of disadvantaged communities, both urban and rural, and in developing effective responses to these needs, was clearly illustrated and increasingly recognised by the state. As a result, a range of initiatives that used community work approaches were funded and supported because it was acknowledged that solutions to poverty, social exclusion and inequality are best and most appropriately designed with the participation and input of those affected.

A strong democracy enhances and protects the capacity of citizens to participate. In a strong democracy people regard the State, not as the answer to every problem, but as just one player among others
(White Paper, p9)

However, to be most effective community work needs to have a certain amount of independence and to be acknowledged as having legitimacy and purpose in its own right. Published in 2000, the ***White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector*** is still the official policy of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Development. It states, *inter alia*, that the Government recognises that the Community and Voluntary sector plays a crucial role in a mature democratic society, quite separate to and independent of the institutions of Government. The Community and Voluntary sector has a special role and potential to:

- ▶ Help create a vibrant civil and active society in which individuals are encouraged and enabled to participate fully. This is an essential component of a mature democracy;
- ▶ Respond to pressing social needs quickly, directly and effectively;
- ▶ Pioneer new approaches to service provision and local and community development;
- ▶ Improve the effectiveness of services through feed-back and monitoring of services by consumers and users;
- ▶ Provide opportunities for volunteers to participate and develop skills;
- ▶ Create employment opportunities through the provision of services and through the activities of community development projects, thus contributing to community infrastructure;
- ▶ Foster self-help and enable people to become active participants in shaping their future;

It would be wrong for Government to seek to control and be involved in every aspect of voluntary activity, but there is no doubt that it can provide an enabling framework to help this activity. Where this involves direct supports, a delicate balance must be struck between having a relatively light official involvement and maintaining proper accountability
(Foreword to the White Paper).

- ▶ Identify needs and appropriate responses tailored to the specific needs of local communities and neighbourhoods and specific communities of interests;
- ▶ Offer new solutions where conventional approaches have failed;
- ▶ Enable people who are excluded to become involved in the regeneration process in their own communities and at a wider societal level (p. 23).

The White Paper acknowledges the crucial role that is played by the Community and Voluntary sector as an 'essential requirement to the health of our society and our democracy'⁴. It acknowledges that independence and accountability are not mutually exclusive – an independent community sector can be (and has been for quite some time) accountable for State and other funding. It further acknowledges that, 'an active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all' (p 9-10). The Paper also states that 'we have moved far beyond the attitude that statutory agencies fund voluntary organisations merely for utilitarian reasons, i.e. to provide services that the State cannot or will not deliver directly itself because of resource constraints' to one that acknowledges the legitimacy of the community and voluntary sector.

Gender equality

Gender equality has historically been acknowledged as an integral part of community development and local development programmes. A number of projects that focused on working with marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged women were funded under the Community Development Programme. Seventeen of these projects now work under the umbrella of the NCCWN but independent of the Local Development Companies.

The inclusion of women was also seen as an integral part of local development programmes. *Towards Gender Equality in Integrated Local Development*⁵ underlined the importance of actions to promote the inclusion of women in all dimensions of the Integrated Local Development Programme. It stated that seeking women's inclusion ...means that equal opportunities is not limited to equal access issues but also focuses on equal opportunities for participation, equality of outcomes and procedures to monitor all of these (p. 1).

Recent context

In the context of the cohesion process that resulted in many of the projects formerly funded by the Community Development Programme merge with the Local Development Companies, in 2010, the NCCWN and seventeen of the projects formerly funded under the Community Development Programme submitted a proposal, supported by the NWCI to the then Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for an alternative model. That model was accepted and involved the seventeen projects either partially or fully transferring to the National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks, which became the single governance structure for the projects.

The rationale that was submitted and accepted at that time included:

- The conviction that the work with disadvantaged women could not be transferred and sustained within the amalgamated structures;

⁴ Foreword to the *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector*

⁵ Area Development Management Ltd 1996

- The conviction that women's participation in power and decision making, a key element of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), would not be well served in the amalgamated structures; and
- Equality between men and women has not yet been achieved in Ireland

In the new context of the alignment of local and community development with local government, the NCCWN and the NWCI believe that the above rationale still applies and that the community-based projects concerned with disadvantaged women's equality should remain outside but closely linked to the alignment structures.

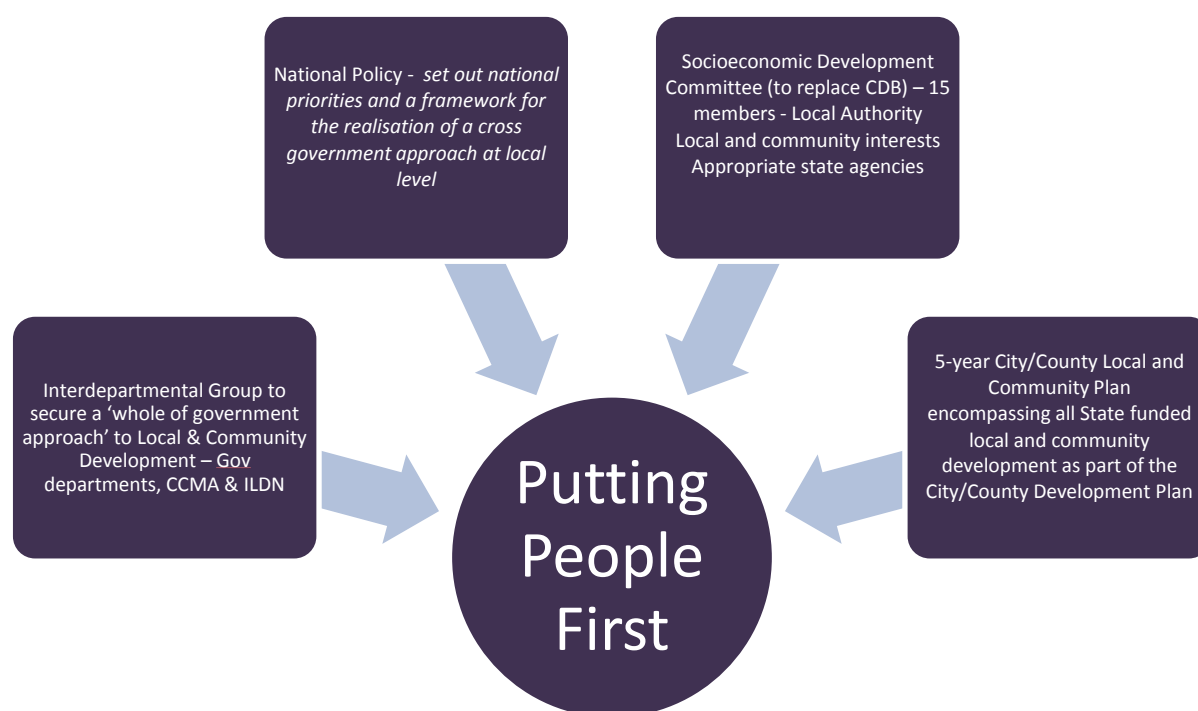
The projects associated with the NCCWN work from an approach that is informed by feminism and community development. Both approaches recognise that women experience oppression on the basis of their gender that is often compounded by other forms of oppression and discrimination on the basis of often systemic and systematic. They also facilitate work to empower marginalised women to fully participate economically, socially and culturally in society.

Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government

Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Development on October 16th this year (2012). The Programme sets out a vision for local government in Ireland stating that Local government will be the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level - leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably.

It is envisaged that local government will have a more central role in the oversight and planning of local and community development programming, while maintaining a key role for local development entities in frontline delivery.

From the perspectives of the community sector, a number of initiatives at national and local level are most pertinent.



National Level

Inter-Departmental Group

At national level, an Inter-Departmental Group to secure a 'whole-of-government approach' to local and community development programmes and interventions is to be established. The composition of the IDG is to be small, for 3 years with clear terms of reference. It is to be led by a senior DECLG official with representatives of other government department directly involved. There will also be representatives of the CCMA and ILDN

The IDG will be responsible for developing the **National Policy on Local and Community Development**. It will also be responsible for leading and overseeing the implementation of a

coherent whole-of-government approach to planning, management and delivery of local and community development programmes and intervention, as well as driving and overseeing change management processes.

The National Policy on Local and Community Development

A national policy on local and community development is to be developed ,to establish a framework for a cross-government approach at local level. The Policy will set out national priorities and a framework for the realisation of a cross government approach at local level.

Local Level

Socioeconomic Committees

At local level, Socioeconomic Committees will replace City/County Development Boards. There will be a Strategic Policy Committee for Economic Development in larger Local Authorities.

Local and Community Plan

The SEC will be responsible for developing a 5 Year Community Plan that will form part of the City/County Development Plan.

Section 4 Persistent inequality for women in Irish society

Despite some progress, full gender quality in Irish society has yet to be achieved. Irish women continue to work fewer hours, earn less and are under-represented in the Oireachtas and in local and regional authorities than men. Women are far less likely to be in the Labour Force and are almost 25 times more likely to looking after home/family than men. In 2009 women's income was around 73% of men's income and even after adjusting for the fact that men work longer hours, a woman's hourly earnings were around 94% of men's. Disposable income for households headed by a male continue to be significantly higher than those for households headed by a female. Deprivation rates are higher for women and households headed by a woman than men or households headed by a man.

Women & poverty

In general terms, poverty increased across all measurements between 2009 and 2010³. Households are finding it more and more difficult to manage finances and make ends meet. As the primary managers of households and household finances, women are disproportionately bearing the brunt of this responsibility.

At risk of poverty: The *at risk of poverty*⁴ rate increased from 14.1% to 15.8%. The rate for children was significantly higher than the average for the State at 20.5%. Households with one adult and children had the second highest rate amongst all household types at 20.5%.

Deprivation: Rates of deprivation continue to increase. Those reporting enforced deprivation of two or more items increased from 13.8% in 2008 to 17.1% in 2009 and 22.5% in 2010. The rates were higher for women (23.4%) than for men (21.6%) and significantly higher for households headed by a female (26.7%) and for lone parent households (49.8%).

Consistent poverty: The consistent poverty rate⁵ is also increasing. In 2008 the consistent poverty rate was 4.2%. It increased to 5.5% in 2009 and to 6.2% in 2010, a figure not seen since 2006. The figure is slightly higher for women than men but significantly higher for lone parent households (9.3%), children (8.1%) and households headed by a female (8.2%), which are significantly more likely to be in consistent poverty than households headed by a male (8 4.9%).

Debt: In 2010, over 22% of households were in arrears with at least one bill or loan⁶, similar to the figure for 2009 of 24.2% of households, and a significant increase on the figures for 2008 (10.2%). One third of households (33%) that were at risk of poverty in 2010 were in arrears with at least one loan or bill. Over 11% of households stated that they had to go into debt in the last 12 months to meet ordinary household expenses and over half (50.9%) of households stated that the household did not have the ability to pay an unexpected expense of about €1,100 without borrowing. In 2012, over 65% of households stated that they had some degree of difficulty in making ends meet.

Particularly vulnerable groups of women

Lone Parents: Lone parent households, 86.5% of which are headed by a woman, continue to be amongst the poorest households in the country. Though the lowering of the poverty threshold in 2010 combined with a slightly higher equivalised income shows a slight improvement in terms of at risk of poverty and consistent poverty rates amongst households with one adult and children. In 2010, almost 70% of lone parent households stated they had experienced deprivation compared to the State average of 36% and significantly higher than any other category⁷. In the same year, the *at risk of poverty rate* for households composed of one adult with children remained high at 20.5%.⁸ Research undertaken by TASC found that single parent households (the vast majority of which are

headed by a woman) lost proportionately more of their income compared to other households, as a result of the budgetary measures introduced in Budget 2011⁹.

Older Women: There are 115,120 women aged 75 years and over in Ireland¹⁰. There are 51,063 women aged 75 years and older living alone and 14,098 women aged 85 years and older living alone in the State. They account for almost 70% of all older people living alone. While the NWCI recognises that pension payments to older people have been largely protected in recent years, it is also important to note that the income of older people is amongst the lowest in the State and the income of households where the head of household was aged 65 years and over experienced a further decrease of €1,601 in income between 2009 and 2010, resulting in average income being reduced from €29,711 to €28,110 (from €30,137 in 2008)¹¹. The invisibility of the reality of older women's lives has increased as a result of the withdrawal of funding from the Older Women's Network, (OWN).

Women Headed Households: As can be seen from the information above, households headed by a female and households where there is a high likelihood that the head of household is a woman (such as lone parent households) experienced some of the worst levels of poverty and deprivation in the State.

Deprivation for households headed by a female increased from 17.7% in 2009 to 26.7% in 2012, the highest increase across all households and significantly higher than the increase for the State. Households headed by a female also saw one of the biggest increases in rates of consistent poverty (from 7.0% in 2009 to 8.2% in 2010).

Women Carers: Irish statistics show that nearly 70% of the 161,000 carers are women. Women are likely to be full-time carers and over 80% of those in receipt of Carers Allowance are women. The lack of major change in the area of unpaid caring work also contributes to women's economic disadvantage. In 2010, over half a million women were looking after home/family compared with just over seven thousand men.⁶ Of the 544,500 people whose principle activity is looking after family members, 99% are women. (CSO). As most care work is unpaid, women suffer a direct material loss both in the short term through lack of salary and long term through the lack of pension cover. As women tend to spend more time than men on caring for children, the lack of accessible and affordable childcare is considered one of the key factors which prevent women from accepting full time employment. The majority of women returnees (returning to work after a break in employment for child care or other reasons) take up part-timework. The fact that in 1999, only 1% of returnees said they were looking for full-time work indicates that the high numbers of women with children who work part-time is not due to choice alone⁷.

Rural Women: Many women who live in rural areas are excluded, marginalised and invisible. The White Paper on Rural Development committee stated that 'the problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas have a distinct impact on women. Economic dependency, isolation, unequal opportunity and participation are compounded by the problems of distance from services and amenities. The absence of an adequate transport service and affordable childcare services in many areas make it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter into or retain employment'.⁸

⁶ Women and Men in Ireland CSO 2010.

⁷ *Getting out of the House-Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training*, Russel et al 2002

⁸ White Paper on Rural Development 2009)

In rural areas, many farm women have an added disadvantage. Many farm women who work on the family farm are treated as 'relatives assisting'. Although working in the family business, they cannot make PRSI contributions, which would entitle them to old age contributory pension and maternity benefit. Therefore many women who are spouses of business owners, including farmers, are financially dependent on their husbands and rely on a qualified adult state pension that is approximately 70% of the full amount.

Women experiencing violence: Domestic violence continues to be a significant issue in Ireland. In 2010 more than 7,235 individual women and 2,850 individual children received support from domestic violence support services. Women's Aid report increases in demand for their services, with demand for helpline support increasing by 10% between 2010 and 2011 and demand for one to one support increasing by 5% in the same period. At the launch of their statistics for 2011, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre reported calls to the National 24 hour helpline operated by the centre increased by nearly 10% in 2011, an overall increase of 25% since 2008. This increase coincided with a further reduction in the statutory funding received from the HSE and a marked decline in proceeds received from fundraising initiatives. The Centre links the escalating violence to the recession and the increase in availability of pornography.

Women living in abusive situations report that their ability to escape domestic violence is being hampered by the recession. Women fear increased impoverishment, losing their home and the effect of poverty on their children. This barrier to leaving is exacerbated by the use of financial abuse by a controlling boyfriend, husband or partner.

Prostitution & Trafficking: Recent reports indicate that the sex trade in Ireland is flourishing. We cannot ignore the fact that over 90% of those engaged in sex work in Ireland are migrant women. In Ireland, the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) identified 66 potential cases of Human Trafficking in 2009. In recent years the level of violence within prostitution has increased enormously. Demand from Ruhamas services increased by 22% in 2011, with half of its cases involving sexual trafficking.

Women with disabilities: Women with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged: throughout their lifespan women with disabilities have lower incomes than both non-disabled women, and men with disabilities. Too often, their experience is one of poverty, isolation and lack of social supports.⁹

Traveller Women: The situation of the Traveller Community in Ireland remains characterised by profound disadvantage. The situation of the 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. Funding cuts further deepen this disadvantage.

Lesbian and Bisexual Women: The Equality Authority report *Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gay and Bisexuals* in 2002 examined a wide range of themes relevant to lesbian, gay and bisexual people including community development and empowerment. The report stated that many LGB people remain isolated, without access to knowledge of LGB community organizations, supports or social outlets for meeting other gay people.

Depending on their families and where they live, they may have to struggle against prejudice and misinformation about their sexual orientation and often fear being rejected by family and friends if they come out. This can be compounded by rural isolation for those living outside of urban areas.

⁹ Women's Education, Research & Resource Centre 2006

Migrant Women: Women from minority ethnic groups continue to suffer high levels of disadvantage and are particularly vulnerable during recession. The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) whereby an individual must be habitually resident in Ireland or other parts of the Common Travel Area to be considered eligible for social assistance, places an additional burden on migrants, including returned Irish immigrants, trying to access social welfare. Without access to social welfare and social services, those affected can face extreme poverty.

Women & employment

In the second quarter of 2012, the female labour force participation rate was 52.7% compared to a male labour force participation rate of 67.9%¹². Women represented 44.7% of the labour force in 2011. Half of the labour force in the age group 20-24 was female, the highest proportion across all age groups.

Latest figures¹³ indicate that the employment rate for men is now 62.9% and the employment rate for women is 55.4%, significantly lower than the EU 2020 targets, even allowing for the reduced Irish target. Women's employment rates continue to decline. The EU Lisbon target rate for women in employment was 60%, a target that was met by Ireland in 2007 and 2008, but not in 2009, 2010 or 2011, when the rate had fallen to 56%¹⁴. Information from the Quarterly National Household Survey¹⁵ indicates that women's employment rate is currently 54.9%, a rate not seen since 2001. The new employment target set by Europe 2020 is to raise the employment rate for men and women to 75%. Ireland has a reduced target as a result of being a Programme country of between 69-71%. Without a comprehensive strategy for employment, particularly women's employment, Ireland is at risk of failing to reach this target.

Women's employment is more likely to be part-time and lower paid than men's employment. The Mandate Trade Union report *Decent Work? The Impact of the Recession on Low Paid Workers* describes precarious work as "uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" and states that women are over-represented in the 'precariat', which has suffered an above average rate of job loss since the onset of the recession, with female employment being worst hit. The Behaviour and Attitudes survey carried out as part of the report reports on the fall in pay of approximately 40% of these workers over the last year and demonstrates what it describes as the "extraordinary level of working time flexibility demanded by retail employers" (p. 4). The report cites Turner & O'Sullivan's (2012) paper on employees working for pay rates determined by Joint Labour Committees (JLCs), finding that they are twice as likely to be women as men.

Companies seeking cost saving measures are increasingly targeting supports for women, such as supports to statutory maternity payments. The Unite Trade Union has stated that it is dealing with abuse of women's rights in the workplace more than ever during these difficult economic times¹⁶.

In its Annual Report for 2011¹⁷ the Equality Authority stated that gender continued to be the most frequent ground for employment related queries and the third most frequent ground under the Equal Status Acts to its Information Centre. Gender (along with disability) continued to account for the largest share of case files under the Employment Equality Act. This will put continued pressure on women to leave the workforce, with serious personal and social consequences.

Women are still earning substantially less than men in Ireland despite efforts to promote equality in the workplace. According to a study by the European Commission, women here earn on average 17.1 per cent less than men and twice as many men compared to women earn over €50,000 a year¹⁸. Discrimination against women, undervaluing of women's skills and the low number of women in senior and leadership positions, as well as women's continuing role as primary care givers were all suggested as reasons for this gender pay gap.

Women & unemployment

In the first quarter of 2012, there were 309,000 persons unemployed, an unemployment rate of 14.7%, the second highest ever recorded¹⁹. The unemployment rate for women, which stood at about 4% over the last few years, increased sharply in 2009 to 8.1% and has risen over the last two years to 10.4% in 2011²⁰. The recession is having increasingly harsh effects on women's employment. For example figures from the Quarterly National Household Survey show that while male unemployment increased by 1.8 per cent, female unemployment increased by 10.4 per cent in the year to the end of March 2012. Figures just released for Quarter 2 2012 show a continuation of this trend. In that period, that there was an increase of 4,000 unemployed people, 3,600 of whom were female – for every man newly unemployed there were nine women.

Though not designed to measure unemployment as it includes part-time, seasonal and casual workers who are entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance, the latest figures from the Live Register²¹ estimates that in the past year the number of men on the register fell by almost 9,500 but the amount of women claiming jumped by nearly 3,500.

Reductions in public sector jobs are disproportionately affecting women, as women are disproportionately represented in areas of work such as health and education, sectors that are experiencing severe cuts, redundancies and job losses.

Women & income

In general terms income inequality grew between 2010 and 2011 and the Gini coefficient²² now stands at 33.9% and the income distribution (quintile share ratio) at 5.5%. Women's income²³ continues to decrease both in real terms and when compared to men. In 2010, there was a difference of over €10,000 for households headed by a male in compared to households headed by a woman. In all cases the households headed by a male had disposable incomes above the average for the State and the households headed by a female had disposable incomes lower than the State average. Lone parents households (87% of which are headed by a female) had significantly lower levels of disposable incomes. Except for the first and last decile along the income distribution, women tend to be over-represented in the lower income deciles and men over-represented in the higher income deciles.

Recession, Austerity & Women

Evidence of the significant impact of the recession on women is now emerging. Women's unemployment is now growing at a far faster rate than men's²⁴. Evidence from the Trade Unions is showing that abuse of women's rights in the workplace has escalated in the recession. As primary care givers, women are struggling to manage the constantly reducing household budget and debts to provide for their families. To that end, the NWCI wish to restate the necessity for *gender proofing* all measures contained in Budget 2013, a measure reinforced by TASC²⁵ proposals that all budgetary measures under consideration be subjected to an equality audit, whereby a full distributional analysis is undertaken to identify how different groups in society are likely to be affected, to inform a process of gender-proofing the budget.

International and national policy obligations

Notwithstanding the economic difficulties that Ireland continues to face, the State has a number of national and international commitments that it is obliged to fulfil in this area²⁶ including:

- the provision of a legal framework that provides for equal treatment of women and men
- the National Women's Strategy 2007-2016, which is the Government's statement of priorities in relation to the advancement of women in Irish society

- a programme of positive action measures, including the Equality for Women Measure 2008-2013, to enhance women's skills and to foster their engagement in areas of Irish society and decision-making where they are under-represented.

EU Women's Charter: In an acknowledgement that gender inequalities have direct consequences on economic and social cohesion, on sustainable growth and competitiveness, as well as on demographic changes, the EU Commission adopted a Women's Charter in 2010 to strengthen the commitment of member states to equality between women and men. The Charter highlights the necessity to take gender equality into account in relation to five areas, including economic independence, equal pay, the representation of women in decision-making and positions of power, and respect for women's dignity and integrity and an end to gender-based violence

European Pact for Gender Equality: The European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020 reaffirms the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all policies and particularly urges member states to:

- eliminate gender stereotypes, ensure equal pay for equal work and promote the equal participation of women in decision-making;
- improve the supply of affordable and high-quality childcare services and promote flexible working arrangements;
- strengthen the prevention of violence against women and the protection of victims, and focus on the role of men and boys in order to eradicate violence.

EU Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015: Building on the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, as well as the European Pact for Gender Equality, this Strategy spells out actions under five priority areas defined in the Women's Charter, and one area addressing cross-cutting issues

National Reform Programme (Europe2020 Strategy): In order to achieve the targets established by the Europe 2020 Strategy, Ireland has committed itself to raising to 69-71% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64. Ireland has also revised its poverty target to reducing the number experiencing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2%, which will lift at least 200,000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion between 2012 and 2020.

EU Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men: the EU Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has acknowledged that women have been severely affected by the crisis, particularly in terms of their working conditions, their access to employment, their place in society as a whole and gender equality and have stressed the need for a targeted response addressing the real effects of the crisis on women. In their latest annual report on gender equality, the Committee has stated that improving equality between women and men is essential to the EU's response to the current economic crisis. The report, inter alia, emphasises the economic and business case for gender equality, the consequences of the crisis and recovery measures for women and gender equality, the advantage of tackling the gender pay gap at EU level, both for economic growth and meeting poverty targets, the economic case for promoting a balanced representation of women and men in economic decision-making, and the human and economic costs of violence. The Committee calls on EU countries, "to get more women into the labour market if they are to meet the EU's overall objective of 75% employment rate for all adults by 2020".

References

¹ The Women's Manifesto Project, an innovative programme from Longford Women's Link (LWL), is based on a model of positive engagement developed in Longford between Longford Women's Manifesto Group and local decision-makers. The project aims to reconnect women with the democratic process in their own communities and counties. The model brings women together, develops their political understanding by supporting them to engage with both the processes and with local government, and then encourages them to act in order to bring women's perspectives and voices to the decision-making table. By taking on board the perspectives and voices of women, those making decisions are better informed and more inclusive decisions can be made resulting in better outcomes for women, their families and by extension the entire community. For the last two years, the Women's Manifesto Project has been involved in a process of replicating this model of democratic engagement with a number of women's organisations throughout the country and individuals/groups who wish to establish their own Manifesto group can make direct contact with LWL in order to receive the necessary supports to do so.

² Electoral Amendment (Political Funding) Bill 2011

³ CSO, 2011. *Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2010*.

⁴ The *at risk of poverty rate* is largely a measurement of income.

⁵ The *consistent poverty rate* is a measurement of income and deprivation.

⁶ Rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, arrears on other bills.

⁷ CSO (2011). EU SILC 2010

⁸ Though this represented a decrease when compared with the 2009 rate of 35.5%, the CSO state: "As the equalised income of this group tends to fluctuate around the at risk of poverty threshold from year to year, changes in the threshold can have a disproportionate impact on the at risk of poverty rate of this group" (CSO (2011). EU SILC 2010, p. 28).⁸

⁹ [Winners and Losers? equality lessons for Budget 2012.](#)

¹⁰ Census 2011

¹¹ CSO EU SILC 2008, 2009 & 2010

¹² QNHS Q2 2012

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Women & Men in Ireland 2011

¹⁵ QNHS Q1 2012

¹⁶ Press Release available at

http://www.unitetheunion.org/regions/ireland/news_from_ireland/internation.asp

¹⁷ The Equality Authority (2012). *The Equality Authority Annual Report 2011*

¹⁸ EU Commission (2011). *Tackling the gender pay gap in the European Union*

¹⁹ QNHS Q1 2012

²⁰ CSO (2012). Women and Men in Ireland 2011

²¹ CSO July 2012, *Live Register June 2012*.

²² A Gini coefficient of 0% corresponds to perfect equality while higher Gini coefficients indicate a more unequal distribution

²³ Figures refer to annual average household disposable income

²⁴ CSO Quarterly National Household Surveys (various reports)

²⁵ TASC, (2011) *Winners and Losers?...equality lessons for Budget 2012*

²⁶ <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Gender%20Equality>