



Submission to the European Commission Consultation on the 2013 EU

Citizenship Report “EU citizens – Your Rights, Your Future

Introduction

The National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) is a feminist non-governmental organisation representing women’s groups in Ireland. The NWCI currently has 170 member organisations affiliated to it, representing an estimated 500,000 women. As the representative organisation of women in Ireland, our mission is to achieve women’s equality, empowering women to work together in order to remove structural political, economic, cultural and affective inequalities. The vision of the NWCI is of an Ireland where all women and men have equal power to shape society and their own lives. The NWCI is the Irish co-ordination for the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organisation of women’s associations in the European Union, working to promote equality between women and men.

The NWCI welcomes the European Commission proposal to designate 2013 as the European Year of Citizens as an important step towards building a European Union that promotes equality between women and men. However the NWCI shares the concerns of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) that the EC proposal lacks a gender perspective and shares the belief of the EWL that the European Year of Citizens should be broadened to promote participatory and democratic citizenship from a gender equality perspective.¹

The NWCI believes that a gender equality perspective should be mainstreamed when shaping the policy agenda of the European Year of Citizens 2013, guaranteeing the full involvement of civil society organisations, including women’s organisations, in the preparation and the implementation of the 2013 European Year and the equal representation of women among the speakers and participants in all activities related to the year.

Expanding the idea of citizenship

The proposed model of citizenship, while encompassing many useful aspects risks being too narrow as it focuses heavily on consumer and/or transactional rights. An excellent opportunity now exists to develop an EU model which is wide-ranging and rights-based. It would encompass consumption, political citizenship, knowledge/educational citizenship, sport & recreational citizenship, citizenship through voluntary activity and associational life,

¹ Reply from the European Women’s Lobby to the European Commission public consultation on the 2013 EU Citizenship Report “EU citizens – Your Rights, Your Future. 24 July 2012.

citizenship in the home/private sphere. This model should be developed and interpreted with a gender lens so that it accounts for the varied experiences and aspirations of women and men. As part of its rights-based understanding the EU should help people to reach their full-potential as humans, to operate in a society based on mutual respect, shared understanding and cooperation. This would include the duty to promote and protect the rights and well-being of other citizens, including the duties of men towards promoting and supporting the rights of women. It should also emphasise the fine EU tradition of social solidarity with both other EU citizens, but also those who live outside the EU.

Gender Equality and the Concept of Citizenship

There is a need to envisage the concept of citizenship for the European Year of Citizens 2013 which takes into account equality between women and men as fundamental to its achievement. As stated by the European Economic and Social Committee's Opinion on the European Year of Citizens "Total equality must be ensured between men and women"²

The European Commission proposal focuses on informing citizens on their right to free movement, but does not focus sufficiently on the obstacles that prevent them from using this right and does not acknowledge that women and men face different obstacles. Women and men use their right to free movement differently; as the impact assessment of the European Year on Citizens 2013 acknowledge women travel, study and work abroad less than men.

There are specific obstacles that prevent women from using their right to free movement. For example women shoulder the main part of care responsibilities. Therefore their mobility is limited by issues such as different provisions on maternity leave and other family related forms of leave, different access to childcare services between member states. These gendered obstacles have to be addressed in order to ensure that women benefit from their European citizenship as much as men. Improving the minimum European standards of social protection and social security rights is needed in order to ensure women are able to enjoy their rights to free movement. Moving forward with the Maternity Leave Directive is a key issue here as is the development of a common EU strategy in the fight against all forms of male violence against women.

Parity Democracy and Citizenship

Parity Democracy must be fully implemented as a central aspect of democratic citizenship. Equal representation of women and men in European decision making bodies and the active and equal participation of women and men in European elections as voters and candidates is a vital requirement for the full exercise of women's citizenship and for the functioning of a democratic society. Equal representation of women and men in political decision making is one of the priorities of the EU gender equality strategy and the Council enforced this priority in the pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020 adopted in March 2011.

CEDAW re-affirms the right of women to participate equally as citizens in the affairs of the States. Yet, across the EU, women remain significantly under-represented (with some honourable exceptions). Three areas of major concern exist:

- Women's under-representation in politics & decision-making;
- Women's representation at senior levels of private and public sector corporations;
- Women's under-representation & sexual stereotyping in the media.

² SOC/428 – CESE 822/2012, Para 3.9.

The EU should seek to undertake and promote initiatives which highlight women's proven leadership capacity in these spheres, particularly in areas of traditional male dominance such as politics and economics/finance. This would involve including this as a specific funding line in all areas of EU financial support to private, public and non-profit bodies/institutions.

Democratic Citizenship

Europe is a part of the daily life of its citizens but the rights and benefits from this citizenship is at present essentially limited to mobility so that your rights and benefits become effective when you move abroad. It is important that citizens who do not travel, study or work abroad can also access European citizenship that is relevant and meaningful. The concept of citizenship is a two way relationship between the community and its members. The Lisbon Treaty provides a broader framework for the development of a European Citizenship grounded in a 'community of values' and reinforces its social and political dimensions by giving to the Charter of Fundamental Rights the same legal value as the European Union treaties and by creating the conditions for citizens and civil society organisations to be fully involved in European processes.

For the NWCi European citizenship means a citizenship that includes all aspects of life in a democratic society including equality between women and men.; a democratic citizenship which guarantees that citizens and civil society organisations have a say in the EU policy shaping and decision making processes by electing their representatives to the European Parliament; a democratic citizenship that guarantees that all citizens can participate in the life of their communities and the shaping of public policies, including the most disadvantaged groups which are more often than not the most remote from the European Union. Last but not least European citizenship should be founded on the principle of residence and in the name of universality of rights all residents of the European Union should enjoy equality of treatment and the same right to participate in public life as EU citizens.

Resourcing Political and Civic Participation

Both at European and national level we are witnessing how the economic crisis is being used as a justification to cut funding for women's rights and gender equality related activities and institutions and how these issues are losing visibility and focus. These cuts also threaten the very existence of women's organisations. The community and voluntary sector plays a key role in the protection and promotion of human rights as well as the provision of services to women who are most marginalised, living in poverty, experience domestic and sexual violence, and whose voices are furthest away from the decision making structures of national parliaments and the EU. Budgetary cuts over the past few years have disproportionately impacted on the capacity of women's organisations to protect the rights of all women in particular vulnerable women through frontline services and advocacy work.

NWCI believe it is important that the EU allocate adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for activities on women's rights and gender equality, including combating violence against women.

The European Commission must involve civil society organisations including women's organisations in the preparation and the implementation of the 2013 European Year of Citizens. The current budget allocation of 1 million euro does not foresee co-financing for citizens and civil society organisations initiatives. It must be ensured that civil society activities be funded as part of the EU Year including gender equality activities. Special

attention must be paid to projects that involve the representative organisations of those EU citizens who are discriminated against and who therefore are not fully able to enjoy their rights as European citizens.

Our responsibilities as global citizens

EU citizens enjoy many fundamental rights and have recourse to legal accountability in comparatively well-developed legal systems. However, in many third-States the rule of law and fundamental rights are not as well supported. The EU should seek to:

Harmonise its dealings with third-States so that those States which stand in violation of fundamental rights do not benefit from contact with the EU (through access to markets, knowledge, resources) without improving the human rights situation, in particular the rights of women, in areas under control of these third States.

EU citizens should be made more aware of their responsibilities as wealthy and privileged citizens in relation to the conduct of third States and, most importantly, in relation to their own purchases from such States. For example citizens should be supported in making ethical purchases (i.e to avoid products which promote or cause climate change, or products rely on human rights violations for their production eg. Pakistani cotton produced by bonded labourers or Israeli fruit produced in illegal settlements.)

NWCI Vision of the European Union in 2020

The NWCI would share the vision of the EWL of a European Union built on a culture of respect for human rights, equality, peace and solidarity where women and men have full and equal enjoyment of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, an equal share of social, cultural and economic resources, caring and family roles and are equally represented in decision making.

Equality between women and men in all public and private spheres is a precondition for a fair and democratic European Union. To achieve democracy in Europe parity at all levels of political, economic and social decision making has to become a reality. Solidarity with all women and men experiencing exclusion, discrimination, oppression and violence is one pillar to live in a Europe free from discrimination. Respect for difference and diversity should be the basis for a Europe that is unified in its diversity. A European Union where there is freedom for women to choose themselves on all matters relating to their personal and physical integrity, a Europe that is free from violence against women.

The NWCI believe that to connect the meaning of being an EU citizen only to individual mobility rights is too limited and does not take into account the values set down in various EU Treaties of equality, solidarity, respect, freedom and empowerment. To achieve our vision of Europe as described above we would urge the EC to create the conditions for citizens and civil society organisations to be fully involved in the European processes and policies

**National Women's Council of Ireland
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