



National Women's Council

Our Lives. Our Rights. Our Voice.

National Women's Council
Annual Report 2020

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Message from the Chairperson

2020 has been a challenging year for all of us on many levels. The Covid-19 crisis turned our world upside down and had a profound impact not only on our personal lives but also the way we do our work as civil society organisations.

As Chairperson of the National Women's Council I am very aware of the enormous contributions from this organisation and all of our members in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. This included advocating for the needs of those most impacted by Covid-19 restrictions, providing essential services and supports and continuing the important campaigning work that we do.

And I am proud of the way the National Women's Council was able to quickly adapt to the new context, changing our ways of working to facilitate working from home and remote meetings and events. We successfully held our first remote Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meeting, welcoming our new Executive Board and voting on a range of motions.

With the easing of the crisis, we can anticipate some level of austerity. And just as we observed how the pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on women's incomes, access to childcare, employment opportunities and health, we can expect Ireland's recovery to also be slower in these areas. This is why NWC, our members and allies must continue to hold the Government to account. We must campaign for the current level of Government investment not to be rolled back but built on.

We saw how Departments could cut through red tape and how solutions to issues that NWC and many of our members have been advocating towards for years were almost seamlessly fast tracked and implemented. The requirement to see a GP in person twice when seeking an abortion was waived. We witnessed a growing awareness of the issue of domestic violence and the delivery of more practical supports to victims and their support agencies. Equally, the introduction of a wage subsidy for Early Years Professionals is something we were constantly being told could not be done. The challenge for NWC will be to lobby strongly to hold onto these advances post crisis.

During 2020 we were delighted to finalise our new Membership Strategy, based on the extensive feedback that we received from our members. We also commenced work on NWC's new Strategic Plan 2021 -2024. The plan will be launched in mid-2021 and will allow us to build a truly inclusive movement to drive forward the much-needed agenda for change for women and girls.

In 2020 the Government created a new Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, transferring responsibilities for Equality from the Department of Justice, including the core funding of NWC. We have developed a strong relationship with this Department and were delighted to receive additional funding to support the implementation of our 2021 work plan.

I want to extend a warm welcome to the new members who joined NWC during 2020 and to thank our existing members for their significant engagement and support for all our activities during 2020. I encourage you to continue engage in our work as we strive towards a society where equality is enjoyed by everyone.

I would like to acknowledge the support of our funders and to sincerely thank the outgoing and current Board members, the Director Orla O'Connor and the NWC staff team for their commitment and support for the work of NWC over the last year and going forward.

**Louise Lovett,
Chairperson**



Message from the Director

The Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing lockdown restrictions have had a devastating impact on women's and girls' lives. Highlighting this impact, and ensuring women's voices and experiences were central to our response to the pandemic, were key elements of NWC's advocacy and campaigning work in 2020.

Before the pandemic hit Ireland, we started the year with an ambitious and successful General Election campaign. We outlined 10 key asks for women's equality in our Feminist Ireland Manifesto and invited candidates to pledge their support for the policies if elected. Over 130 candidates signed the manifesto which also received widespread media coverage. This was followed by our last in-person event – Celebrate the Changemakers – with women politicians to mark International Women's Day.

When the Covid-19 crisis started to unfold, it became clear that women and their experiences were absent from many of the debates and decision-making tables. We therefore adapted our workplan for the year to ensure women's voices were central to our response to the pandemic. We organised our popular #FeministAgenda webinar series, discussing issues such as economic equality, violence against women and the need for a public healthcare system in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, we shared resources and information on available supports to women and girls on our dedicated Women and Covid-19 webpage.

Thanks to the huge support from women directly affected and our supporters, we successfully changed the rules of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme to ensure women returning from maternity leave would be included in the scheme. We also supported the call from women on maternity leave to extend paid Parent's Leave. To address the impact of restrictions on women accessing abortion services, we successfully campaigned for the introduction of remote access to abortion care. With our Caring during Covid-19 survey, we highlighted the enormous pressure women, in particular lone parents, were facing, with many trying to combine working from home with increased care responsibilities.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 has also been used as an opportunity for the far right in Ireland to promote their hateful agenda. NWC was proud to join Le Chéile, the new alliance working together to promote diversity in Irish society and challenge the growth and narrative of the far-right. All this work would not be possible without our members and our very dedicated staff and board. I sincerely thank the membership, the NWCI team and our voluntary Board members for all their commitment, dedication and passion throughout the year.

Orla O'Connor, Director

Who We Are

The ambition of the National Women's Council is an Ireland where every woman enjoys true equality and no woman is left behind. This ambition shapes and informs our work, and, with our living values, how we work.

We are a movement-building organisation, rooted in our membership, working on the whole island of Ireland. We are also part of the international movement to protect and advance women's and girls' rights.

Our purpose is to lead action for the achievement of women's and girls' equality through mobilising, influencing, and building solidarity.

Our living values guide us. They are given expression in our work, and in how we work, as an organisation.

We are committed to these living values:

Feminist

Feminism is a core and essential value of our organisation. This means we consistently act to achieve true equality for all women and girls.

Inclusive

We are active in ensuring that no woman is left behind in our journey to achieve true equality.

Fearless

Our ambition and purpose mean that we are fearless leaders for all women, actively challenging that which is in the way of the achievement of true equality.

Caring

We value care, including its full expression in how we act as an organisation.

Strategic

Being effective and successful in advancing our purpose requires us to be strategic; Showing leadership and strength in collaborations with partners, prioritising our work and making choices that are achievable and future-oriented.

Diverse

The women of Ireland are a diverse group, and we are their voice, therefore we bring diversity to everything we do and how we operate as an organisation.



Celebrating International Women's Day

Celebrate the Changemakers – International Women's Day Event

NWC held our International Women's Day event to celebrate with newly elected TDs and Senators on 4th March 2020.

Following our #FemGen general election campaign, the event 'Celebrate the Changemakers' asked women candidates and elected representatives to reflect on their experiences on the campaign trail, any barriers they saw to women getting elected, and their priorities for women's equality.

The event included speakers from the main political parties including Claire Kerrane TD, Sinn Féin, Jennifer Carroll Mac Neill TD, Fine Gael, Ivana Bacik, Labour Party, Bríd Smith TD, People Before Profit, Holly Cairns TD, Social Democrats, Catherine Martin TD, Green Party, Eileen Flynn, Independent and Deirdre Conroy, Fianna Fail. The event was chaired by broadcast journalist, Katie Hannon.



Women and Covid-19

When the Covid-19 crisis hit Ireland in early 2020, it quickly became clear that the pandemic would have an immense impact on the lives and wellbeing of women and girls, further increasing existing gender inequalities.

In light of this new reality, NWC adjusted our work to ensure women's voices and experiences were central to our response to the emerging health crisis. We used our reach through our website and social media to facilitate information sharing and access to available supports for women.




Covid-19 Information Hub

NWC developed a comprehensive Women and Covid-19 website hub that provides a list of resources and supports in relation to the following needs of women: Minding your health, minding your mental health, minding your sexual health and wellbeing, securing your income, knowing your rights, support for women experiencing violence and supporting communities.

NWC received lots of positive feedback for this website resource, including from the HSE. The webpages were widely shared on social media over the course of the year and continue to be some of the most visited pages on NWC's website.

Feminist Agenda Online Series



NWC organised a series of online webinars looking at the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on women. We discussed critical issues affecting women with key stakeholder and highlighted important learnings from the pandemic for a feminist recovery.

The first webinar looked at the broader picture of setting a #FeministAgenda during the Covid-19 crisis and featured contributions from Stella Creasy, MP, Ailbhe Smyth, Feminist Campaigner and Eileen Flynn, Traveller Rights and Social Justice Campaigner. This was followed by thematic webinars discussing the economy, violence against women, universal healthcare and the role of civil society during the pandemic through a feminist lens.

Following the webinar series, the Covid-19 crisis and its impact on women and girls and learnings for the future remained a central element of our advocacy and campaigning work during 2020.

Key Campaigns in 2020

FemGen 2020 – Our General Election Campaign

NWC ran a significant General Election campaign highlighting key issues and feminist policies. NWCI's 'Feminist Ireland Manifesto' highlighted 10 key areas to bring about much needed change for women in Ireland.

We then asked candidates across the political spectrum to sign up to the manifesto on our website. In total 139 candidates committed to supporting these policies if elected to Dáil Éireann. Our manifesto received much public attention from the political parties and was cited in the RTE leaders' debate.

In addition, we asked each leader of the main political parties to outline their commitment to women's equality in a short blog post. These were published on our website and in the Sunday Independent on 26th January 2020.

In the run up to and on election day, we encouraged all voters to check which candidates in their constituency supported our asks and to vote for these 'feminist' candidates.

Following the General Election, we engaged with political parties and were pleased to see some of our asks in the Programme for Government. The number of women TDs elected only increased marginally from 35 to 36, representing only 22.5%. There are twelve constituencies with no women TDs.



#NoDiscrimination Campaign

NWC successfully led the #NoDiscrimination campaign to ensure women returning from maternity leave during the pandemic would have access to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. In April 2020, NWC, SIPTU and ICTU wrote to Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe to highlight the exclusion of women returning from maternity leave from the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) that was set up to support workers and employers during Covid-19.

This discrepancy impacted most acutely on low paid women workers whose employers do not top up Maternity Benefit, and who had been reliant on statutory Maternity Benefit for the duration of their maternity leave, expecting to return to work on full pay.

Following correspondence from the Minister that this approach would not be changing, NWC referred the matter to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Authority.

We launched the #NoDiscrimination campaign, calling on the public to contact their TDs to urge Minister Paschal Donohoe to ensure women returning from maternity leave can access the TWSS. Over 2,000 emails were sent. We also supported women to speak to the media about their experiences.

IHREC supported NWC's arguments on this issue, stating that, in their view, excluding women returning to work after maternity leave from the TWSS is contrary to the State's obligations under EU law.

As a result of our campaign, the Government acted to resolve the discrimination in the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme for those returning from maternity leave.



Women's Experiences of Caring during Covid-19 report

Online Survey

To understand how the pandemic is impacting women's caring responsibilities and their own mental health and wellbeing, NWC launched the Women's Experiences of Caring during Covid-19 survey.

We were delighted with the response, with more than 1,400 women taking part in our online survey between 15th – 22nd May 2020. Respondents included women who were working from home, women working on the frontline, women engaged in full-time care, and women caring for older adults. Early results from the survey found that 85% of women said their caring responsibilities had increased during Covid-19 and 55% of women had less time for their mental health.





When you care for others it can be harder to mind yourself – Online campaign

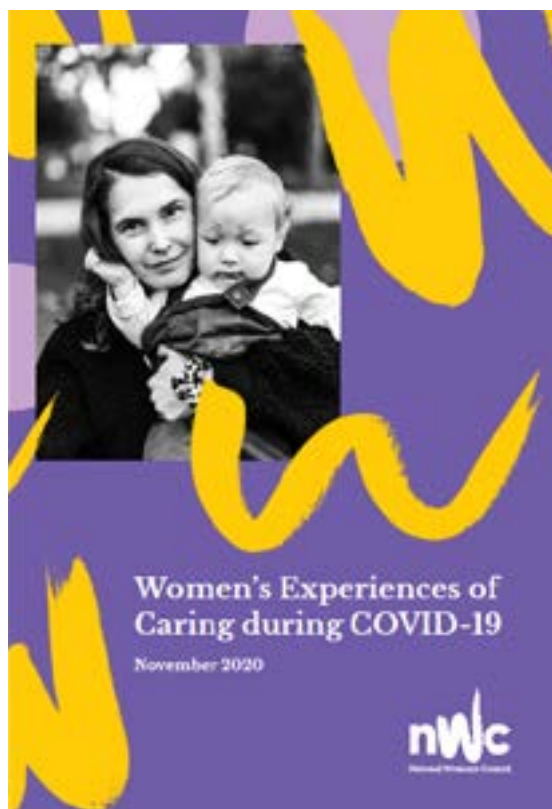
From these results, a number of quotes from the survey, and our 2018 'Out of Silence – Women's Mental Health in their Own Words', we developed our #WomensMentalHealth digital campaign which ran from 23rd-25th June.

The campaign focused on the impact that caring for others can have on women's mental health, including during the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen many women's caring responsibilities increase. In this campaign we wanted to draw attention to issues impacting women's wellbeing, to affirm women's experiences and to signpost women to supports.

The key message of the campaign 'When you care for others it can be harder to mind yourself' was reflected through five key themes; Overwhelming sense of responsibility / Feeling unsupported / Different women experience caring differently / Joy of care when undertaken in a supportive way / Impact of Covid-19 on women's caring responsibilities.

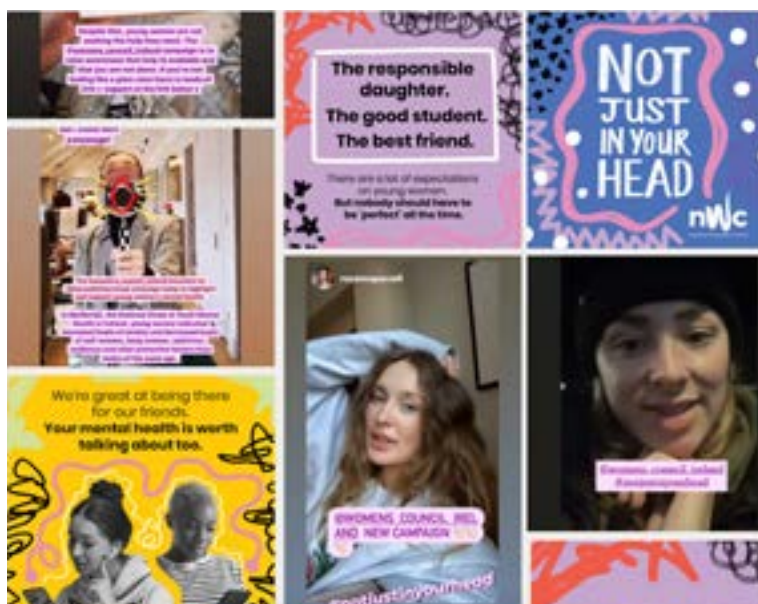
To develop messaging and appropriate sign-posting to supports, we engaged with HSE Mental Health campaigns communications, the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and HSE Connecting for Life. The campaign included information on women's mental health on the NWC website and signposting to support services.

The campaign was a huge success, reaching over a quarter of a million people and received support from stakeholder organisations, and external stakeholders like HSE Health and Wellbeing, HSE NOSP, Healthy Ireland, Irish College of General Practitioners, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, Care Alliance Ireland, Samaritans, SPARK Ireland, and The Alzheimer Society of Ireland. It also received press coverage online and on national and local radio.



Women's Experiences of Caring during Covid-19 report

We developed the findings from the online survey in May 2020 into our 'Women's Experiences of Caring during Covid-19' report, which provides a snapshot of women's experiences of providing informal, unpaid care during the initial Covid-19 lockdown. It shows how women's caring responsibilities had significantly increased during the pandemic and that the majority of women had less time to look after their own mental health and wellbeing as a result. The survey also found that a significant number of women were caring for both people in their own home and in another's home, and large proportion of women were managing their own paid work, care for children and/or care for other adults. We launched this report with a press release in November, calling on the Government to urgently tackle Ireland's care crisis. The report was widely quoted across traditional media throughout the last quarter of 2020 and into 2021, with NWC's Women's Health Coordinator, Dr Cliona Loughnane's interview on 2FM with Louise McSharry interview a definite highlight.

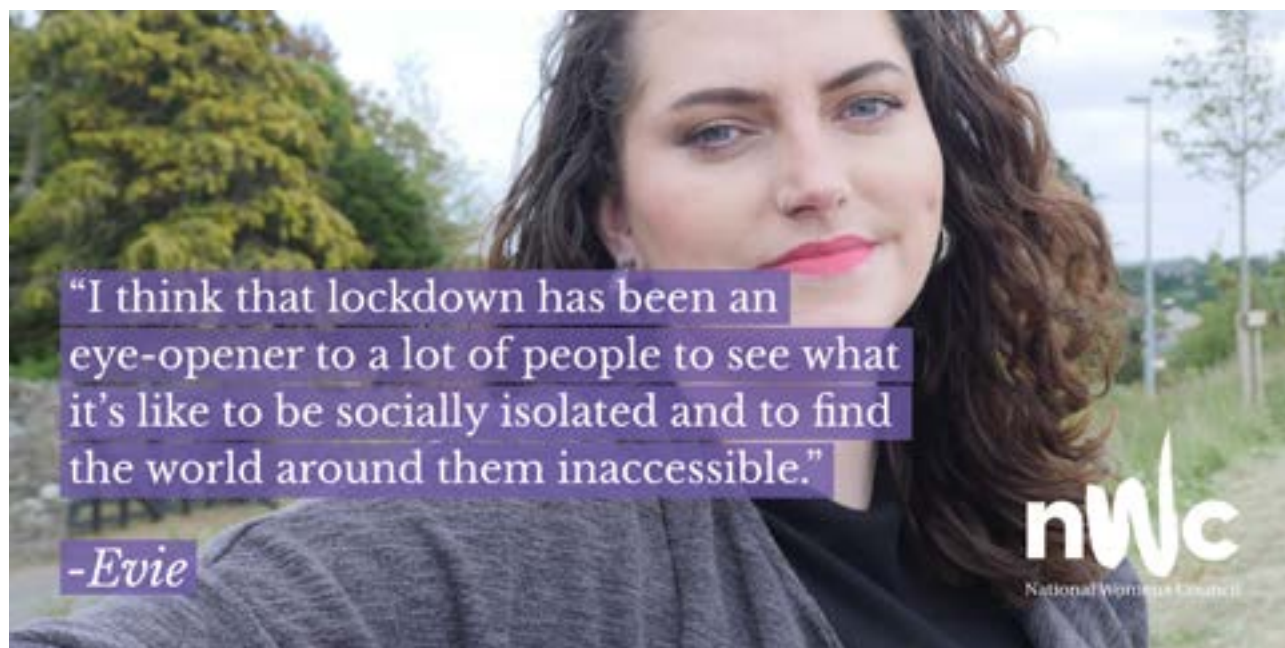


#NotJustInYourHead - Young Women's Mental Health Campaign

Research on young women's mental health indicates that while young women are experiencing the highest levels of depression and anxiety, they are not seeking help when they need it most. In response to these findings, we launched #NotJustInYourHead – a social media campaign to highlight the significant mental health needs of young women in Ireland. The campaign was aimed at letting young women know that their mental health is important, that it's 'Not Just In Your Head', and to encourage them to seek support when they need it.

Key to the success of this campaign was the feedback we received on initial campaign ideas during a consultation with a number of young women, many from our group members including BelongTo, Irish Girl Guides, The Shona Project, Irish Second Level Student's Union and the Union Students of Ireland. Their responses significantly impacted the campaign messaging and design. The campaign ran from 7-9 December and aimed to show young women that their mental health is important and encourage them to reach out for support when they need it. Signposting to HSE YourMentalHealth and Jigsaw support services was embedded in the campaign.

We were delighted with the success of this campaign with an estimated reach of 315k across our social media channels. The campaign gained significant attention on social media increasing our campaign reach with our target audience, with some influencers sharing content on TikTok, Instagram and Twitter. Key influencers including Rozanna Purcell, Nia Gallagher, Holly Carpenter, Dr Doireann O'Leary, Sene Naoupu, Ellen Keane, Louise O'Neill and Alison Spittle supported the campaign online. The campaign was also shared by NWC member groups and stakeholders and NWC Health Policy Officer Mary Hayes was interviewed on Highland Radio and CRY104FM Radio about the campaign.



#AllWomen Campaign and Project

NWC is committed to working towards greater equality for all disabled women, increased participation and representation of disabled women at all levels of Irish society, and to the full realisation of the rights of disabled women, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We have supported disabled women to come together online. The group is a space for disabled women to share information and ideas, to help shape the women's equality movement in Ireland and to support disabled women's leadership. Disabled women experience the same inequalities as non-disabled women. However, their situations can be exacerbated by social and cultural attitudes to disability as well as environmental barriers. We know that women with disabilities have a lower uptake of health screening, are more likely to experience sexual violence, experience barriers to parenting and that older disabled women are disproportionately affected by the extra costs that people with disabilities face.

To mark International Day for Persons with Disabilities, 3rd December, NWC launched a new social media campaign #AllWomen – Disabled women in their own words. The campaign provided a space for disabled women to speak about their lives, their experiences and highlight what they would like to see happen for the inclusion of all disabled women. The campaign included videos featuring interviews with five disabled women, as well as social media posts. We were delighted with the feedback for the campaign and will continue our work with the group of women.



#ExtendMaternityLeave2020 Campaign

NWC supported the Extend Maternity Leave 2020 campaign – a group of mothers who came together to call for a once off extension to Maternity Leave and Benefit in light of Covid-19. We engaged with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, as well as other elected representatives and the media to highlight the women's concerns.

On 7th July, we held a socially distanced photo call outside the Dáil, highlighting the lack of an adequate response from government since the Extend Maternity Leave group had handed over a petition with almost 30,000 signatures in June. Disappointingly, the Government did not offer more than what had already been committed to – an additional three weeks of Parent's Leave – to be delivered after Budget 2021 negotiations. NWC continued to advocate for better and more comprehensive paid parental leave throughout 2020, in our budget work and in our engagements with Government Departments.

Realising Women's Right to Health

Women's Health Taskforce

NWC continued to work in partnership with the Department of Health to progress the work of the Women's Health Taskforce in bringing a women centred approach to healthcare policy, planning and services. NWC contributed to the work of the Taskforce through bringing our analysis and feedback from members on the impact of Covid-19 on women.

NWC health team, Head of Policy and Director participated in Taskforce meetings and regular work-stream engagements throughout 2020, and continued to input into current Taskforce workstreams on women's mental health, menopause, gynaecological health and physical health. We highlighted the disproportionate impact Covid-19 restrictions were having on women and their significant negative impact on women's health, particularly mental health and women experiencing violence.

NWC supported the Radical Listening to Women workstream of the Taskforce in organising and running a Women's Health Taskforce Stakeholder Engagement Forum and invited NWC member groups, the Observatory on Violence Against Women, the Women's Mental Health Network and the Abortion Working Group to attend and ensure a diversity of experiences were represented. Over 60 NWC members attended, along with members of the Women's Health Taskforce and other staff from various units within the Department of Health. Orla O'Connor opened the event and NWC's Health Coordinator Cliona Loughnane presented on the evidence base on women's health and later presented on the output from the consultation to the 5th meeting of the Taskforce.

Throughout the year the Taskforce engaged in a 'Radical Listening Exercise' to engage with women regarding their health concerns that could inform the ongoing work of the Taskforce. NWC facilitated marginalised women to participate and contribute to the radical listening exercise. This work continues in 2021.

A positive outcome from the work of the Taskforce was the increased investment in women's health in Budget 2021, particularly with regard to the implementation of the National Maternity Strategy.



Women's Mental Health Network

In partnership with St Patrick's Mental Health Services, NWC continued to develop the Women's Mental Health Network, a network for those with a committed interest in women's mental health issues. By the end of 2020, the network had 296 members, primarily practitioners from across the mental health and voluntary sector.

Due to Covid-19, all Network events were moved online. We organised two Network webinars in 2020. Both events sold out with over 100 attendees.

The first webinar, 'Unpacking the Impacts: Covid-19 and Women's Mental Health', took place on 12th June and explored the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women's mental health in Ireland, from different perspectives. This event featured a welcome address from NWC Health Policy Officer Mary Hayes and involved a panel discussion, chaired by Louise O'Leary, Advocacy Manager with St Patrick's Mental Health Services and Women's Mental Health Network Coordinator. Panelists included Lisa Marmion from Safe Ireland, Zoe Hughes from Care Alliance Ireland, Niamh Grennan from the Dublin Lesbian Line, and Liliana Morales, Psychologist with the HSE Psychology Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

The second webinar entitled 'Exploring Compassion and Restoration' featured Dr Katie Baird who presented on Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) and Compassionate Mind Training (CMT).

NWC circulated four eNewsletters to the Network including a specific Covid-19 resource for women, an eNewsletter in support of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, mental health supports for frontline workers, resources and organisations on black women's and women of colour's mental health, HRB and MAMMI study ON-TRACK self-help videos on maternal postpartum anxiety, Trauma Informed Care in a Maternity Setting Training and information on the National Traveller Mental Health Network.

Mental Health Advocacy Work

In 2020 NWC's health team continued to work with the HSE National Connecting for Life Lead to discuss opportunities for NWC to promote women's mental health within HSE structures. We also met with new Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, to discuss priorities for women's mental health and wellbeing.

Statement with Mental Health Reform

For many women the pandemic has meant an increase in stress and anxiety and has adversely affected their mental health and wellbeing.

Highlighting the need to put women's experiences and mental health needs at the centre of our Covid-19 response, NWC and Mental Health Reform launched a joint statement calling on the Government to ensure women's experiences and mental health needs are at the centre of our response to the pandemic; to provide easy access to mental health services and supports; to improve measures to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of women; and to measure, monitor and report on the mental health impact of the pandemic in a way that includes data on women.

The statement also considered the newly published national mental health policy, 'Sharing the Vision', which includes a commitment to women's mental health. The statement was launched with a press release and was covered on IrishHealth.com. Towards the end of 2020, the statement was reissued with a short social media campaign and sent to Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, and to the Joint Oireachtas Health Committee.

Sharing the Vision – A Briefing on Women's Mental Health in Ireland

With the HSE and Department of Health we published 'A Briefing on Women's Mental Health in Ireland' which was published alongside the new national mental health policy 'Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone'. Sharing the Vision includes a commitment to gender sensitive services to be achieved through the Women's Health Taskforce.

Cervical Check

Following the indefinite pause of screening services due to Covid-19, we worked with NWC member groups 221+, Marie Keating Foundation and the Irish Cancer Society in seeking clarification of timeline for resumption of screening services from National Screening Services and Secretariat Women's Health Taskforce. We also wrote to the Minister for Health calling for the resumption of services as soon as safely possible, and sought a timeline for reopening and supports to address the back-log as a result of service being paused.

Following these activities, the National Screening Service began a phased reopening of cancer screening services with a focus on addressing the 3-month backlog and women outside normal screening intervals. NWC welcomed these developments and shared information on reopening of cancer screening services and how screening services have adapted to operate safely under Covid-19 as part of NWC's Women and Covid-19 website resource hub and on social media.

NWC highlighted the failure of the State to provide an acceptable, non-adversarial mechanism to seek justice for women affected by the CervicalCheck scandal in a press release.

NWC and TENI also jointly engaged with HSE National Screening Services in relation to language changes the NSS had made to their online and hard copy public engagement materials. Neither NWC nor TENI had been consulted on those changes and whilst we recognised that they had been made to try and ensure inclusive language was being used in health materials, the screening service had not been successful in that aim. We proposed that they amend their language using to the more inclusive phrase 'women, transgender men, intersex, and non-binary people with a cervix'.

Women's Health in Budget 2021

NWC welcomed the sizeable, dedicated funding for women's health in Budget 2021 which will be vital to implement the actions of the Women's Health Taskforce and help to create a more women centred health service, including mental health. Funding included €5m for women's health, €12m funding for maternity, gynaecology and fertility services, and €10m investment into screening services, including BreastCheck and CervicalCheck.

As part of NWC's pre-budget submission A Feminist Recovery Plan, NWC called for increased funding for mental health, including perinatal services and gender sensitive community-based services.

Women's Health in the Programme for Government

Following advocacy for women's health as part of our Programme for Government document 'A Feminist Future Programme for Government 2020 proposals', we welcomed a focus by Government on women's health and the need to deliver a healthcare system that puts women's needs and experiences at its centre.

The Government's 'Our Shared Future' Programme for Government includes commitments to: provide free contraception over a phased period; support the work of the Women's Health Taskforce; fully implement the recommendations contained in Dr Scally's Report of the Scoping Inquiry; support the CervicalCheck Screening Programme and promote the uptake of the HPV vaccine; implement the National Maternity Strategy; progress the planning, tender and design stages for the relocation of maternity hospitals; establish exclusion zones around medical facilities; and noted the review of the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act 2018, which will take place in 2021.

Implementation of Sláintecare

NWC sent a letter, co-signed by 29 stakeholder organisations, to political leaders and to newspapers as a letter to editor in reaction to the FF FG framework document for recovery after Covid-19 which welcomed the inclusion of Sláintecare and highlighted the lack of gender focus particularly in terms of sexual and domestic violence.

We also called for the number one commitment in the Programme for Government to be the delivery of SláinteCare and highlighted how its implementation must prioritise low-income and marginalised women including Traveller and migrant women and women living in homelessness.

This was covered in the Irish Times in April. We worked with Health Reform Alliance Executive colleagues to develop the Programme for Government briefing 'Implementing Universal Healthcare in a crisis' which was circulated to political parties.

Universal Healthcare and Women - #FeministAgenda Webinar

As a part of our #Feminist Agenda series, we held a webinar in June on 'Universal Healthcare and Women'. We explored how Universal Healthcare is crucial for women's health outcomes and experiences. We also looked at how health systems can be gender responsive in the Covid-19 recovery.

We had a lively discussion looking at the ways in which the pandemic has highlighted the inequalities and challenges for our current health systems for women as service users and healthcare providers, and how a feminist recovery must include a dedicated and reimagined response to healthcare provision.

NWC Director, Orla O'Connor chaired the event and was joined by a number of guest speakers, including Sarah Hillware, Deputy Director, Women in Global Health, Professor Sarah Hawkes, Director, Centre for Gender and Global Health, Laura Magahy, Executive Director, Sláintecare and Dr Cliona Loughnane, NWC's Women's Health Coordinator. Over 100 people attended the webinar. The webinar was also live streamed on Facebook and the webinar recording received over 1,600 views.



Maternity Strategy and Maternal Healthcare

As part of our Programme for Government submission we advocated for the full funding of the National Maternity Strategy and delivery of the national maternity hospital under public ownership. We also circulated a press release calling for full funding of the maternity strategy to be a red line programme for government negotiations. The Government announced €12m funding for maternity, gynaecology and fertility services.

In March, following restrictions being placed on women's birth partner being present during labour, we worked with member groups to engage with the HSE National Women and Infants Health Programme to seek communications to be issued to reassure pregnant women. Throughout 2020, we continued to highlight the impact of ongoing maternity service restrictions on women and their mental health.

NWC's Abortion Working Group

We continued to coordinate the Abortion Working Group which is composed of civil society organisations and healthcare providers. The purpose of the Abortion Working Group is to provide a space for collective advocacy and information sharing on access to abortion in Ireland. The Group is monitoring the implementation of the legislation and provision of abortion services for their impact on women and access to abortion services. The Group is also working closely with abortion rights groups in the North of Ireland to act in solidarity with women in the North and to ensure that women across the island have access to abortion care.

In 2020 the focus of the Abortion Working Group was placed on monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on women's access to abortion care. It became clear the importance of providing remote consultation for women accessing abortion services through GPs and healthcare providers. This service has proved to support women to access the services and the feedback from women and providers was very positive. The Group welcomed the remote services and is now campaigning for remote consultations to remain in place when the pandemic is over.

In addition, the Abortion Working Group, through monitoring the implementation of the legislation, has identified clear barriers to women accessing abortion services as women and couples are continuing to travel due to a range of barriers e.g restrictions due to the 12-week limitations, rigid definitions of fatal foetal anomaly and limited access under the health ground of the legislation. We also began the development of the Safe Access Watch system to track anti-abortion activity at healthcare facilities. Evidence gathered will be used to advocate for Safety Zone legislation and to feed into the review of the legislation.

All of these issues will be considered in the advocacy work of the Working Group regarding the review of the legislation.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

As a member of the National Strategy for Women and Girls Department of Health led sub-committee on Period Poverty, NWC's Health Coordinator Dr Cliona Loughnane submitted comments on their report to be submitted to the NSWG steering group and then Government.

Following correspondence with a number of women impacted by the indefinite closure of fertility clinics during Covid-19 we sought guidance from NWC member group National Infertility Support and Information Group and raised the issue with Department of Health's Women's Health Taskforce and HSE teams.



Women's Economic Equality

Pre-Budget Campaign and Submission

Our 2021 pre-budget submission 'A Feminist Recovery Plan' made the case for a feminist economic recovery to build a post Covid-19 society that is better for both women and men; a plan that is based on public services, fair taxation, valuing the care economy, equality and sustainability.

We developed 10 Principles for a Feminist Economic Recovery to guide our work in this area. We proposed solutions on investment and revenue raising, gender and equality budgeting, work and welfare, pensions, universal basic services, violence against women, access to justice, participation and decision making and a feminist, green new deal.

Our Budget 2021 campaign was covered in the media and we also launched a social media campaign giving a platform to our members and supporters. Our social media campaign highlighted issues for lone parents, migrant care workers, childcare workers, women in direct provision, Traveller women, survivors of violence against women, disabled women and grassroots women's groups.

After Budget day in October, we continued our feminist economic work with participation in a government dialogue on proposals for a National Economic Plan. Our submission on the National Economic Plan highlighted some of the gaps in Budget 2021, in particular the lack of investment in the care economy.

Setting the #FeministAgenda for the Economy – Webinar

On 28th May, we hosted a webinar, 'Setting the Feminist Agenda for the Economy', looking at how Covid-19 was impacting women and how we can imagine and push for a model of feminist recovery that benefits all.

Over 200 people heard from Diane Elson, Emeritus Professor, University of Essex and Chair of the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy, Ebun Joseph, Race Relations Consultant, lecturer and activist and Mary Murphy, Associate Professor, Maynooth University.

Speakers called out austerity as a political choice and posed an alternative solution – raising taxes on the wealthy and improving the way we tax wealthy people. The need for the feminist agenda to be an anti-racist agenda was highlighted along with the need for an economic model that values the millions of hours of unpaid work carried out by women and can eradicate inequality and environmental destruction.

A comprehensive article on the webinar and the key issues under discussion featured in the Irish Times.





National One Parent Family Alliance and Campaign

From the onset of the pandemic, NWC worked with lone parent advocacy groups to identify and address issues for lone parents. Early on in the pandemic, we worked to draw attention to the effect on lone parent families of excluding children from retail outlets. Our joint letter to the Irish Times on 17th April highlighted service providers obligations not to discriminate on the grounds of family status in Ireland's Equal Status laws.

We highlighted issues of childcare, income adequacy, social welfare and child maintenance in the media and in engagements with Government departments, Ministers and other elected representatives. In September, we made a joint submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 response on supporting lone parents during and after the pandemic.

At the end of 2020, we agreed to form a new National One Parent Family Alliance with the aim of continuing to advocate for equality for lone parents throughout 2021.



4 Day Week Campaign

Since the launch of the Four Day Week campaign in September 2019, we have been making the case for a gradual, steady and managed transition to a shorter working week in all sectors of the economy.

Our work in 2020 focused on building awareness of and support for the campaign. With our planned series of public meetings having to be postponed due to Covid-19, we shifted our activities online.

The campaign launched its own Twitter page during the summer. NWC guest-curated the page for a time, highlighting the benefits of the Four Day Week for women.

In September 2020, we conducted a public opinion poll which revealed a very enthusiastic response to the prospect of a four-day week in Ireland.

We launched the findings of the poll at a successful cross-party briefing event in September with productive engagement with representatives from all major political parties in Ireland.

Stop 67 Campaign

With partners in SIPTU, Age Action and Active Retirement Ireland, we launched the Stop 67 campaign in January. The campaign called for a halt to legislation which planned to raise the pension age to 67 in January 2021.

The Stop 67 campaign made pensions a major issue in the General Election campaign, gaining support from all political parties, apart from Fine Gael. The campaign played a key role in the Government decision to defer the planned increase in the pension age, with the legislation to enact this coming into place in December 2020.

With one of the Stop 67 campaigns key asks being the establishment of a stakeholders' forum to discuss all issues relating to retirement and pensions, the campaign also influenced the development of the Commission on Pensions.

However, despite securing support for NWC's membership on the Commission from Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman, NWC was disappointed the Commission was established without any civil society women's organisation as a member.



Valuing Care and Care Work

Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

The newly established Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality held its opening session in Dublin Castle in January 2020 and its first full session in Malahide the following month.

To inform our submission to the Citizens' Assembly, NWC hosted a members and friends meeting in IHREC in February where around 50 individual and group members provided their input.

In our comprehensive written submission to the Assembly, NWC called for action on care, women's economic equality, leadership and violence against women. In addition, to our own submission, we also supported our members to make their own submissions.

After a delay in proceedings due to the pandemic, the Citizens' Assembly shifted to an online format. NWC presented to the Citizens on work in November, calling for pay transparency legislation, support for collective bargaining and a four-day week.

In our presentation on social welfare, we called for a social welfare system that works for women, a universal pension and improvements to paid parental leave.

We also supported our diverse membership, including migrant women, disabled women, lone parents and older women, to directly address the Citizens' Assembly.

We were pleased to see support for our recommendations expressed in the Citizens' discussions.





Campaigning for a Public Childcare Model

The pandemic clearly exposed how crucial childcare is for the functioning of our society and economy and reinforced the need for a public model of early years and school aged childcare. We also saw that the current market approach to childcare is unsustainable.

Throughout the year, NWC worked to highlight the need for a public model, through our engagement with the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality, with partners in Trade Unions and service providers and through our engagement with government.

On 5th February, we joined tens of thousands of early years workers on the streets of Dublin city centre to support their calls for better pay and working conditions.

Together with partners in trade unions, and childcare providers, we published A New Framework for Early Years and School Age Services in May.

In September, we made submissions on a future funding model and workforce development plan for the sector and took part in further consultations with the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth. Our submissions called for a public model of childcare to deliver affordability for parents and decent pay and conditions for workers.

In October, we highlighted the extraordinary decision to make no additional investment in Budget 2021 into Early Years Education and Afterschool Care when the costs of childcare are amongst the highest in the EU and investment is at such a low level. We called on Government to use the National Economic Plan for significant investment into public childcare provision.



Workplace Equality, Economic Security and Decent Work for All Women

During 2020 NWC continued to hold free employment law advice clinics for women in partnership with Community Law and Mediation Centre (CLM). Together with CLM we had established a clinic aimed at ensuring that every woman has the right to economic fairness, equal opportunity, and dignity in the workplace. The project was funded through the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Human Rights & Equality Grant Scheme 2019.

The 10 clinics were launched in October 2019 and were held monthly ending in July 2020. The free employment law advice clinics were established to assist individual women, and to gather information about the application of our current laws, and the barriers that women encounter when they attempt to vindicate their rights as workers. During 2020, through our research as well as through monitoring of issues from the clinics, NWC compiled a list of problems as well as possible solutions which informed our advocacy work during the year.

The clinics also formed the basis of the legal research paper 'Women, Employment Law and Access to Justice' which was

carried out by Katherine McVeigh BL and supported by Claire Bruton BL. The research covers the law governing: Equal Pay; Pay Transparency Measures; Pregnancy and Maternity Related Discrimination; Harassment including Sexual Harassment; Gender Based Bias and Discrimination; Intersectional discrimination; Positive Action and Gender Equality Law, and Collective Action. This research has made practical and strategic recommendations concerning the law as it affects women. Dr Lucy Anne Buckley, NUIG undertook an independent evaluation of the legal clinics and was the external reviewer of the research project. Both of these reports will be launched and disseminated in 2021 as part of a public engagement process on the work placed the work placed discriminations women are continuing to face in Ireland and the measures that must be undertaken to challenge them.



Promoting Women's Leadership



Working with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus

NWC continued to provide secretarial and administrative support for the Oireachtas Women's Parliamentary Caucus. The Caucus was founded during the last Dáil and Seanad as a forum for women Oireachtas Members to constructively debate and organise around issues that affect women in the Oireachtas and in society.

The Caucus held its first, virtual, meeting for the Caucus of the 33rd Dáil/26th Seanad in November 2020. The chairperson Catherine Martin stepped down from her position. Senator Fiona O'Loughlin was elected as the new Chairperson of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. Deputy Marian Harkin was elected as the Deputy Chairperson. Chair and Deputy Chair, along with a Working Group to assist them, will be working to set out a workplan and priorities for the future.

Women in Politics Online Harassment webinar with European Parliament

NWC and the European Parliament jointly organised a webinar to consider the extent of online abuse against women politicians and women with a public profile in Ireland and internationally. Speakers discussed the responses policymakers should pursue

to ensure that this is not a barrier for women entering and remaining in public and political life. At the event, we called on social media companies to proactively tackle online abuse of women in politics so that women are safe on their platforms.

Speakers at the event included Gina Miller, Transparency Campaigner and Businesswoman, Maria Walsh, MEP, Hazel Chu, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Colm O'Gorman, Amnesty International Ireland and Tom Felle, Head of Journalism and Communications, NUIG & former journalist. The event was chaired by Orla O'Connor, Director, NWC.



Women's Community Sector working group

NWC invited our members and friends working with women in local communities to come together in a working group to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the sector. The purpose of the working group is to provide a collective space for member organisations and relevant stakeholders to support the sustainability of Women's Community Development Organisations and organisations working with women to advance marginalised women's equality.

We conducted a survey of our members and friends in the women's community sector and received 42 responses detailing the impact the pandemic has had. Many of our member organisations have responded in innovative ways to a multitude of complex and increasing needs including the welfare of staff. Their work during Covid-19 has included reaching out to combat social isolation and mental health distress, moving programmes and supports online, organising and delivering vital supplies to many families across the country and providing emotional support to women. They have contributed to local planning and development of responses in a robust and effective manner in partnership with state agencies. In partnership with Community Action Network two reflective sessions were held in September and December to appreciate the role women as leaders in their communities have provided.



Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Observatory on Violence against Women

NWC continued to chair the National Observatory on Violence against Women. To mark the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women, the Observatory held its annual conference in December entitled 'Prevention and Protection from Violence: Examining Gender-Based Harassment'.

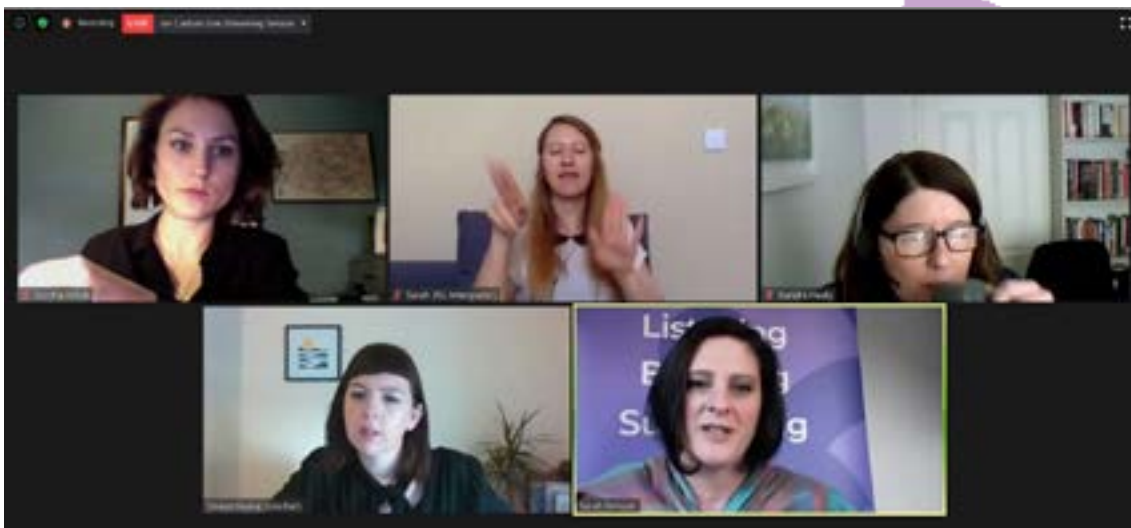
This annual event focuses on different aspects of the Istanbul Convention. This year's theme concentrated on the various forms and harms that result from gender-based harassment.

We were pleased to be joined by Professor Marceline Naudi who gave the keynote address focusing on gender-based harassment under the Istanbul Convention. Professor Naudi represented Malta on the Council of Europe ad Hoc Committee on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CAHVIO) which drafted the Istanbul Convention, and is now an elected member and President of its Group of Experts, the GREVIO.

The keynote was followed by a wide-ranging panel discussion that considered gender-based harassment from a variety of different perspectives. Pirkko Mahlamäki, Secretary General of the Finnish Disability Forum, discussed the experiences of disabled women. Salome Mbugua, CEO of AkiDWA, spoke to the

experiences of migrant women. Sandra Healy, DCU spoke of sexual harassment within higher education. Mary-Louise Lynch, founder of Sisi, discussed harassment in intimate partner relationships and post separation. Sarah Benson, CEO Women's Aid, considered the experiences of young women both online and offline and Sinead Keane from BelongTo spoke to the experiences of sexual harassment of the LGBT+ community.

Members of the Observatory on Violence against women include: Aoibhneas, AkiDwA, Action Aid Ireland, Cairde, Chrysalis Drug Programme, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Galway Rape Crisis Centre, Longford Women's Link, Love & Care for People, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN), National Women's Council (NWC), Oxfam Ireland, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Ruhama, Sexual Violence Centre Cork, Sonas Domestic Violence Charity, Sisi, Women's Aid, YWCA Ireland.



Online Harassment and Harmful Communications Bill

NWC partnered with members of the Observatory to table joint amendments to the Online Harassment and Harmful Communications Bill. The issues surrounding harassment, both online and offline, stalking and image-based sexual abuse have been of great concern to us and our organisations for many years. We are committed to working to support victims of these awful and heinous crimes and to campaign for policy and legislative reform to ensure that victims have access to justice and that perpetrators are held to account.

Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, known as Coco's Law creates two new offences which criminalise the non-consensual distribution of intimate images was signed into law on 28th December 2020.



Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Higher Education Institutes – ESHTe Project

The overall goal of the Irish ESHTe project is to support the implementation of the new 'Safe Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutes Framework (SRSP)' developed by the Technical Group convened by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) of which NWC was a member.

NWC continued to build and enhance relationships with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Student Unions, sectoral bodies, specialist support agencies, An Garda Síochána, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and other relevant agencies through the National Advisory Committee (NAC) which is being convened by NWC and which continued to meet remotely throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. We are delighted that NAC membership has grown considerably and, in line with best international practice, continues to be intersectional.

A key development during the course of the year was the NAC meeting with the new Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (FHRIS), Simon Harris, to introduce him to the structure and work of the NAC. In accordance with the Minister's direction, the NAC has begun to expand beyond the remit of students to include staff experiences of sexual harassment and violence in higher education.



It Stops Now campaign

In March 2020 students across Ireland took a stand against sexual violence and harassment in third level education, as part of the nationwide It Stops Now campaign that was run by the National Women's Council (NWC), the Union of Students Ireland (USI) and student unions all over Ireland. The campaign was part of a host of International Women's Week activities across Ireland and globally.

The campaign saw students from USI, UCC, Athlone IT, NUI Maynooth, NCAD, UCD, Waterford IT, IT Carlow, Carlow College, DCU, TCD, TU Dublin (City Campus, Blanchardstown Campus and Tallaght Campus), and NUI Galway all taking part in this year's event. There were murals, banners, posters and social media activity throughout the day. This high visibility campaign aimed to tackle the harmful behaviours which prevent students from being able to safely and equally participate in college life by driving change through awareness, training and support structures. The events play an important role in this, reminding us all of our shared responsibilities in creating a culture of zero tolerance to sexual violence and harassment, both on and off campus.





Sexual Offences Bill – Part IV Review

NWC welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the review of Part IV of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. Our submission welcomed the focus in the Terms of Reference on the impact that Part IV has had on the most vulnerable in the sex trade – prostituted women and girls and people who sell sexual access. This recognition of the most vulnerable encapsulates the rationale for the introduction of Part IV and we welcomed the focus being squarely on those who are victim-survivors of the sex trade.

Among our detailed recommendations we called for the establishment of State funded exit pathways out of the sex trade to be provided for in statute. Additionally, the essential need for fully resourced services and supports for those who are in, or who wish to leave, prostitution. The pathways should include regularisation of immigration status; access to housing and social protection; education and training programmes; access to free healthcare including mental health supports, and; access to justice.

Development of Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based violence

NWC partnered with Safe Ireland to work with the Department of Justice on the development of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based violence. This is a unique partnership between the two organisations to work collaboratively to support the Department in the development of the new Strategy and to support its implementation. In 2020 we worked together to tender for the consultants to carry out the work. The tendering process was successful and the work will continue in 2021 with the expectation of a new Strategy by the end of 2021.

O'Malley Report and Implementation Plan

NWC welcomed the release of the O'Malley Report and the Department of Justice's implementation plan 'Supporting a Victim's Journey'. The O'Malley Report and the Implementation plan outline the protections for vulnerable witnesses in the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences cases.

We particularly welcomed the clear commitment by Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee, to map out the victim's journey and to recognise the different experiences of victims. We emphasised the specific needs of victims where sexual violence occurs in a domestic violence context.

NWC also welcomed the emphasis on training for all statutory agencies and the need for greater joined-up working across all the State agencies. It is very positive to see the recognition of the comprehensive range of supports a victim may need to be fully supported from the time of reporting to the release of the perpetrator and all the steps in-between.

NWC welcomed the Department of Justice's implementation plan 'Supporting a Victim's Journey' as a living document where learning can continuously be incorporated and the critical involvement of frontline services and advocacy organisations in determining future reforms is recognised. In order to realise the ambition outlined by Minister McEntee, NWC has called for additional funding to be made available to services to ensure that every woman who reports sexual violence can access and receive the supports she needs and in a timely manner.

NWC also welcomed the opportunity to input into the Justice Committees consideration of a victim's testimony in cases of rape and sexual assault. NWC's submission reflects the lived experiences of the women that we have worked with and that have contacted us in huge numbers over many years. In accordance with the remit set out by the Justice Committee our submission focused on two core areas: contextualising a victim's testimony and special measures to improve a victim's testimony. The submission concluded with a broader recommendation on the needed reforms of trial rules and processes that impact significantly on a victim-survivors experience of the trial process.

Challenging Violence against Women - #FeministAgenda webinar

The third webinar of our #FeministAgenda series explored the global and national response to violence against women during the Covid-19 emergency. We examined the impact the crisis is having on women who experience violence and abuse and how the survivor voice is a fundamental part of this conversation.

The webinar discussion focused on how Covid-19 has exacerbated violence against women and how a feminist recovery must include a dedicated and reimagined response to domestic and gender-based violence as we move into the recovery phase.

We were delighted to have the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Dubravka Šimonovic give the keynote address which focused on the international perspective and response. Noeline Balckwell, CEO, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, and Sarah Benson, CEO, Women's Aid spoke to the national impact the crisis is having on services that support women who experience domestic and sexual violence. Mary Louise Lynch, founder of Sisi spoke from the perspective of survivors and the personal impact this will be having on women. The webinar was chaired by Orla O'Connor.

We were delighted to be joined by a mixed audience made up of policy makers and influencers, community activists, researchers and the general public.

THE FEMINIST AGENDA Date: Thursday 11th June
Time: 11.30am-1pm #FeministAgenda

Challenging Violence Against Women

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Dubravka Šimonovic | UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women |
| Noeline Blackwell | CEO Dublin Rape Crisis Centre |
| Sarah Benson | CEO Women's Aid |
| Mary Louise Lynch | Founder of Sisi, a survivor participation project |
| Orla O'Connor | Director, National Women's Council |



Working in Solidarity

Women and Racism Online Webinar – Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival

NWC, the National Traveller Women's Forum and AkiDwA highlighted the impact of everyday racism on women and the need for us to build a society that respects and promotes diversity at its webinar 'Women and Racism'.

Women's organisations came together to stand up against racism and sexism. They called for the inclusion of misogyny in the forthcoming Hate Crime legislation. The event was part of the Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival, organised by Smashing Times and Frontline Defenders.

Speakers at the event included Oluchi Porter, AkiDwA Board Member, Gabi Muntean, Pavee Point, Eileen Flynn, National Traveller Womens Forum, Ola Mustapha, Campaigner on Direct Provision, Salome Mbugba, AkiDwA, Linda Keitasha, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland and Anastasia Crickley, Community Work Ireland. The event was co-chaired by Orla O'Connor, Director NWC and Maria Joyce, National Traveller Women's Forum.



From Grassroots to Global - Civil Society Opportunities and Challenges Webinar

In July 2020 NWC jointly hosted a webinar with Community Work Ireland (CWI) and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL). We discussed the opportunities and challenges for civil society organisations during the Covid-19 crisis at global, national and grassroots level.

Speakers included Fintan Farrell, Former Director, European Anti-Poverty Network, Anastasia Crickley, Community Work Ireland, Liam Herrick, Director of ICCL and Francine Blaché-Breen, Donegal Building Intercultural Communities. The webinar was chaired by Orla O'Connor, Director, NWC.

Panelists shared their experiences and reflections on the current context. They highlighted the important role civil society organisations play in delivering essential services during the pandemic and identifying the impact of measures on vulnerable groups. Speakers also called for greater support and resources to civil society organisations so that they can play their crucial role in our democracy.

NWC joins Le Chéile

Le Chéile was officially launched at the beginning of December in response to the rise of the far right and racism in Ireland. NWC Director, Orla O'Connor, is on the Steering Group and featured in the photo call for their official launch. Le Chéile is a coalition of civil society organisations, political parties and individuals and advancing the cause of diversity not division. NWC views Le Chéile as an important initiative to stand against those who seek to erode and undermine women's rights and equality in our society.



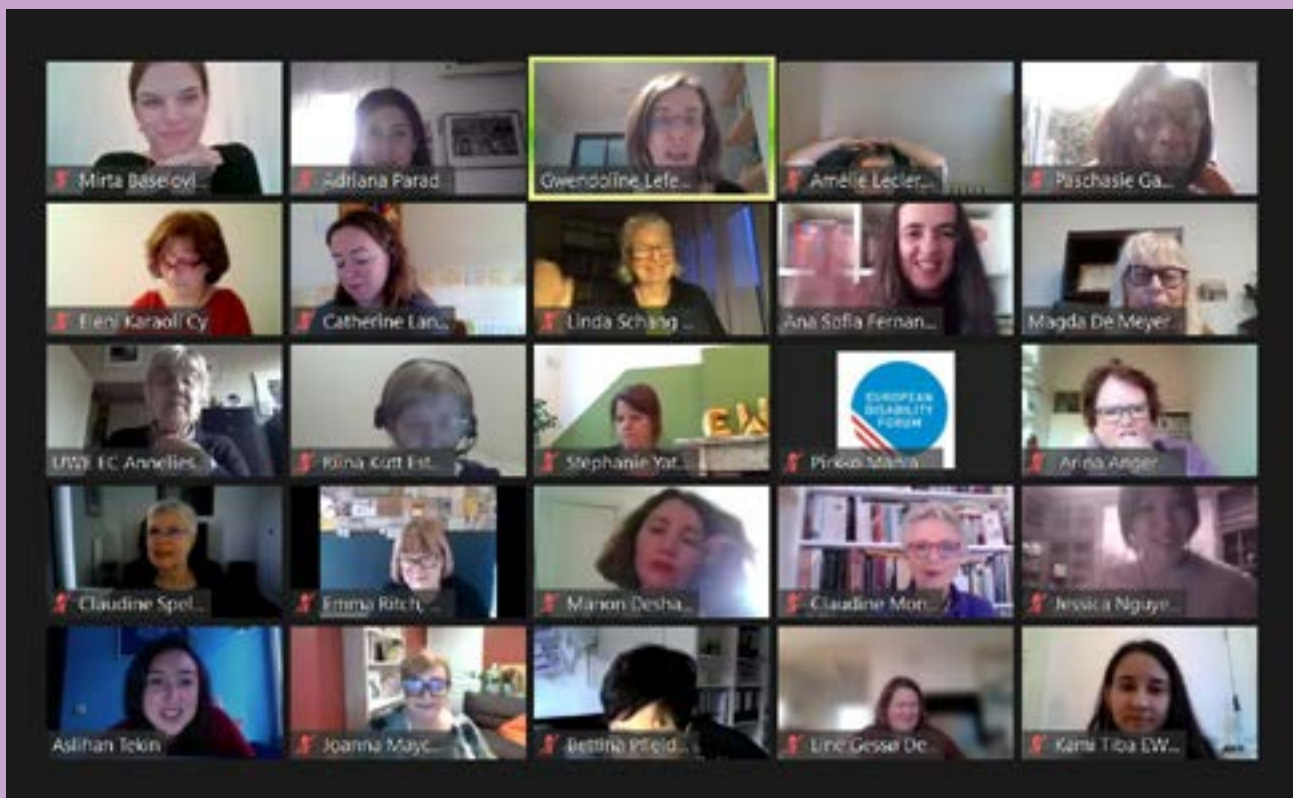


Working at European Level – European Women’s Lobby

NWC is a board member of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), the largest network of women’s organisation in the EU, promoting women’s rights and gender equality.

EWL worked to continue to advance political work for a feminist Europe, on EU and global actions to end violence against women and girls and sexual exploitation, on feminist economics and Gender Budgeting and on the next long-term EU budget. After years of lobbying, the European Commission adopted its 5-year Gender Equality strategy in March 2020, just before the full effects of Covid-19 began to be felt across Europe.

Our representative, Catherine Lane, attended the General Assembly in February 2020 and regularly participated virtually to contribute to EU wide positions on the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on women. NWC staff members and members also engaged on EWL working groups, including the Task Force on Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights and European Observatory on Violence against Women. NWC also supported EWL’s lobbying activities at EU and national level including gender mainstreaming of the Multi Annual Financial Framework and Recovery funds. This included being part of the Council of Europe mobilise against sexism campaign alongside nine other EWL members. Each participating member implemented awareness raising activities and also engaged with their national governments. NWC’s particular focus was on advocating for gender to be a protected ground in forthcoming hate crime legislation.





NWC – New ways of working during Covid-19

Covid-19 restrictions meant that NWC quickly had to adapt to a completely new way of remote working. With NWC offices closed for most of 2020, NWC had to upskill and invest in new technologies in order to ensure effective communication and remote working between co-workers. This included training in terms of organising webinars and online meetings.

In addition, NWC held our Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meeting through online voting. Members were asked to vote on our motions and also elect our new Executive Board using an online voting service facilitated by an external independent provider.

NWC also invested in the accessibility of our meetings and we were able to offer ISL interpretation for all public meetings and webinars and for internal meetings when required.

Our new Membership Strategy

In November 2020 NWC adopted its new membership strategy. The strategy provides a roadmap for NWC's membership development and engagement with members until 2025.

It gives a clear mandate to NWC to grow and develop as an inclusive organisation that reflects the diversity of women's experiences in Ireland while maintaining its capacity to advocate and speak with one voice on behalf of our members.

The strategy outlines five goals for the organisation including building and diversifying the membership base; engaging the membership; NWC a space for sharing and reflection; engaging individual supporters and developing internal systems and structures.

The strategy is based on extensive consultations with our members, including a comprehensive members survey that over 70 of our members participated in and focus groups with NWC's Executive Board, staff and particular interest groups, including young women, migrant women, disabled women and women from the Business community.



We want to hear from you!

NWCI Membership Survey

Deadline extended until
8th April!

Welcome to Our New Group Members

In 2020 we welcomed four new group members

Croi Rath Naoi

Wicklow Women's Social Inclusion Group, Croi Rath Naoi, are a rural women's support and community group working with women with Disability, rural and migrant women.

Independent Living Movement

Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) was established as the first Irish Center for Independent Living in 1992 by and for disabled people with the main aim that disabled people achieved Independent Living, choice and control over their lives and full participation in society as equal citizens.

www.ilmie.ie

Laois Domestic Abuse Service

Laois Domestic Abuse Service are a domestic violence support service for women and children in County Laois

www.laoisdomesticabuseservice.ie

New Communities Partnership

New Communities Partnership (NCP) is an independent national network of more than 150 immigrant-led groups comprising 65 nationalities with offices in Dublin and Cork with outreach to other cities.

www.newcommunities.ie



Supporter Engagement

NWC completely revamped our supporter communications in 2020. Our bi-monthly newsflash updates were replaced with much more frequent and engaging weekly supporter emails and one monthly newsletter providing an overview of our key campaigns at the moment.

We also established a 'welcome journey' for all new email subscribers, introducing them to our organisation and beginning the important process of relationship building with them. Our email communications have focused on engagement, such as asking our supporters to share social media campaigns online and surveys.

In response, our email supporters have been an increasingly essential part in sharing our social media campaigns this year, successfully increasing engagement online. Our Covid-19 and Women's emergency helpline posts, in particular were one of the most shared social media posts of 2020, driven by supporter engagement.



Digital Fundraising

We launched our first ever Christmas digital fundraising campaign, called 'Make 2021 a Better Year for Women' in mid-December across social media and supporter emails. Our campaign messaging focused on our extensive Women and Covid-19 advocacy work in highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women. We appealed to our supporters to help us continue our vital campaigning and advocacy against the continued discrimination of women, particularly in regard to the Covid-19 response.

This campaign continued into the early days of January 2021 for Nollaig na mBan, with a very generous response from our supporters, which made for a strong start for fundraising in the new year, marking the beginnings of a number of exciting fundraising initiatives for 2021 and beyond.

We wish to thank all our supporters for their incredible generosity and for helping us to make a real difference in advancing women's equality in Ireland.

Rebranding of NWC – Our new Look

NWC was delighted to collaborate with the design agency Language on a joint project to revamp NWC's logo and brand identity.

We launched our new logo and look early in June 2020. The central element of the new NWC identity is the 'W' mark. It is a hand drawn gesture that reflects the energy of the organisation and the women it represents. It is a symbol of warmth, reliability and hard work. We also launched a new tagline for the organisation: Our lives. Our rights. Our voice. The new identity was rolled out across the organisation and all of our communications channels over the course of the summer.



NWC in the Media and on Social Media

- NWC's Director and other policy team members appeared on national and local broadcast media throughout the year on topics such as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on women, sexual harassment on campus and criticism of the numbers of women running in the snap general election, including an interview with NWC's Director on Newstalk's Pat Kenny.
- Two national opinion pieces in 2020 on Nollaig na mBan (on the Citizen's Assembly) and welfare and work.
- A total of 514 recorded press mentions in 2020, an increase from 418 in 2019.
- 18% overall increase in social media followers in 2020, with all channels showing growth. Instagram has had by far the most growth in 2020 and accounts for 40% of overall increase in social media followers.
- Trending social media campaigns such as #FemGen and #StopOnlineAbuse
- Increased Twitter followers by over 4,400 followers, meaning we now have over 36,414 followers, with over a million impressions on average each month.
- Grew our Instagram from 4,600 to 9,444 and we have average views of 400-500 people per Instagram story.
- Increased our Facebook page likes to over 22,500.
- Twitter account of our Director Orla O'Connor increased by 1,500 followers, breaking the 10k mark to almost 10,200.
- Over 63,400 users of our website www.nwci.ie - an increase of 8,400 users.
- NWC is using our website and our social media as a hub relating to Covid-19 and the impact on women. We have web pages around Minding Your Health, Minding Your Mental Health and Supporting Women Experiencing Violence.
- Major coverage of our key asks for Budget 2021.
- Sockies 2020 - NWC won four categories the Sockies including overall Best Instagram for an NGO, a Silver award for Social Media for Factual Communications and for Social Media for an NGO, and finally a Bronze for NGO Twitter.



Our Team



Orla O'Connor, Director



Sarah Clarkin,
Communications
and Social Media
Coordinator



Emma Foley,
Reproductive Health
Rights Officer
(until April 2020)



Anne Gibney, Head of
Finance and Operations



Laura Harmon, Women's
Leadership Coordinator
(until October 2020)



Mary Hayes, Women's
Health Policy Officer



Catherine Lane, Women
in Local, Community
and Rural Development
Officer



Cliona Loughnane,
Women's Health
Coordinator (until
December 2020)



**Jennifer McCarthy
Flynn**, Head of Policy

Our Team



Susan McCormack,
Administrator



Sandra McCullagh,
Women's Economic
Equality Coordinator



Helen Mullarkey,
Membership Liaison
Officer



Hayley Mulligan,
Violence against
Women Officer



Silke Paasche, Head of
Communications and
Membership



Laura Pakenham, Digital
Communications and
Fundraising Officer
(from September 2020)



Denise Roche, Legal and
Policy Officer (until June
2020)

Grainne McDermott,
Receptionist (until
September 2020)

Louise Hennessy,
Receptionist (until
September 2020)

People we worked with in 2020

We sincerely thank the following people who worked with us and supported our campaigns in 2020

- Marie Lynch
- Aida Rinkeviciene
- Emma Allen
- Claire McGing
- Kathleen O'Meara
- Colette Kelleher
- Rachel Doyle
- Sinead Kennedy
- Aoife Dermody
- Jean O'Brien
- Feargha Ni Bhroin
- Caroline Magee
- Laoise Ní Dhonnchu
- Phuong Nguyen
- Kayleigh McCarthy
- Amy Heffernan
- Louise Brady
- Adam May
- Katy Finnegan
- Abigail Smith
- Tom Duke
- Jane O'Sullivan
- Dr Lucy Anne Buckley
- Katherine McVeigh
- Claire Bruton
- Sheena Frost
- Golda Hession



Our Executive Board



Louise Lovett, Chairperson

Louise recently retired from her role as CEO of Longford Women's Link (LWL), a substantial rural women's NGO that advocates on the issues that impact women and their families. Louise was recognised for her work by being awarded the Image Magazine Social Entrepreneur Business Woman of the Year 2017. Prior to working in the community and voluntary sector, Louise gained extensive management and strategic planning experience working in the corporate sector for over 27 years. Louise is Chairperson of Longford County Childcare Committee (LCCC), a member of the Longford LCDC, the Midlands Regional Joint Consultative Housing Forum (MRJHCF), the Longford Westmeath Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) and of Longford County Council's Socio-Economic Strategic Policy Committee.



Margaret Martin, Vice Chairperson

Most of Margaret's working life centred on women's issues, particularly violence against women, and community education. Recently retired from her role as Director of Women's Aid other key posts included: Women's Education Officer and Deputy Director at AONTAS; Coordinator with POWER Partnership (NWC, WERRC, UCD, Women's Support Network, Belfast and University of Ulster); and Projects Manager in NWC.



Ethel Buckley

Ethel was elected Deputy General Secretary of Ireland's largest trade union in 2017. As SIPTU Deputy General Secretary for Organising and Membership Development she is responsible for the union's organising, campaigning, education and learning, communications, equality and a network of District Councils. She has led high profile campaigns such as the Justice for Clerys Workers Campaign and Fair Play campaign for union recognition for the Republic of Ireland's international women's football team. She is a member of the Executive Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Our Executive Board



Norah Burns

Norah is Co-Director of Clinical Legal Education and a lecturer in the School of Law at the University of Limerick. She is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the School of Law at Trinity College Dublin and an External Examiner for law modules at Waterford Institute of Technology. Dr Burns holds a Bachelor of Laws in Law and European Studies, a Master of Laws in Human Rights in Criminal Justice and a Masters in Third Level Teaching, Learning and Research. She completed her PhD in the School of Law in TCD in 2017. In 2018 she was chosen by the Asia-Europe Foundation to attend the Asia Europe Heads of State meeting in Brussels as a future young ethical leader in Europe. In 2020 Norah was chosen to represent the University of Limerick in the Regional Teaching Excellence Awards.



Vivienne Glanville

Vivienne has over 18 years experience working in the area of women's human rights in the community sector in a voluntary and professional capacity. Vivienne is passionate about community initiatives which support the development of women and women's engagement in civil society. She is an NCCWN (National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks) local Coordinator.



Emilia Marchelewska

Emilia is passionate about women health and wellbeing. She is a Health Advocacy Officer with Cairde, an advocacy organisation challenging ethnic minorities health inequalities. She leads Migrant Mental Health and HealthConnect.ie projects. She is also a vice chair of the CKU Centre for Counselling and Therapy, and a member of Forum Polonia. Her experience includes supporting individuals and communities, engaging with services and policy makers and working with the media. Emilia has MA in Social Psychology, BA in Youth Rehabilitation, PMP. She now studies Positive Psychology and Health at the RCSI.

Our Executive Board



Sarah Monaghan

Sarah is Campaigns Manager for The Wheel, the National Association of Charities, Community and Voluntary Organisations and Social Enterprises, where she works as part of the public policy team. Sarah has been involved in the Abortion Rights Campaign since 2014 and has acted as Campaign Co-Convener as well as serving on the Board. She was a founding member of Together for Yes where she sat on the National Executive while also acting as a Campaign Spokesperson and Head of Campaign Outputs. She was Director of Logistics on the Campaign to Re-Elect Michael D Higgins in 2018. She has a BA in Psychology and English Literature from NUIG as well as an MA in Comparative Literature from DCU and an MA in American Literature from UCD.



Jennifer Okeke Campbell

Jennifer is a community activist and former chairperson of a migrant women's organisation based in Ireland. She is currently the Anti-Trafficking Officer with Immigrant Council of Ireland. Jennifer has extensive experience on issues of gender, human rights and migration (refugees, asylum seekers, direct provision). She has a proven history of supporting local migrant communities in the promotion of integration. Jennifer is currently a PhD candidate with Dublin City University exploring the experience of migrant women trafficked into/through Ireland for sexual exploitation. She holds a BSC from University College Birmingham and a Masters in International Relations, from the School of Law and Government, DCU.



Sara R Phillips

Sara is a Trans activist working globally. She has been involved with human rights activism for over 40 years. She is currently in her 9th year (third 3-year term) as Chair of the Board of Directors of Ireland's national trans organisation, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI). Sara is also the treasurer of the International Trans Fund in New York, and a board member of Transgender Europe. Sara is an experienced senior manager and consultant across many industries including the construction industry, complemented by an ACCA – Chartered accountancy qualification. Sara is currently the National Manager in Ireland for multinational construction materials manufacturer CPG-Europe.

Our Executive Board



Nuala Ryan

Nuala, a dedicated feminist and a long-standing member of NWC, represented the Irish Federation of University Women for a number of years. She has a special interest in European affairs and has been the Irish representative on the European Network of Women (ENOW) and the board of the European Women's Lobby in Brussels. Currently, she is Chairperson of a Prison Visiting Committee. Nuala's work reflects her concerns regarding women's social exclusion and her commitment to the importance of education.



Shirley Scott

Shirley is the policy manager for the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. She has been employed there since 2004 where she has held a number of positions within that organisation. She has been involved in voluntary work for much of her adult life and currently serves on the board of Bethany, the National Bereavement Support Group for Adults. She has a Bachelor of Business Studies from Dublin City University as well as a BA (Humanities) and MA (Human Development) from St Patrick's College (DCU).

Committees, Campaigns & Groups

NWCI is a Board Member of

- European Women's Lobby
- Community Work Ireland

NWCI is a member of the following Committees, Campaigns and Groups

- Alcohol Health Alliance
- Big Start
- Campaign for an All-Ireland National Health Service
- CervicalCheck Public Patient Involvement Panel
- Community Platform
- Community and Voluntary Pillar
- Community Work Ireland Mental Health Network
- Children Living with Domestic and Sexual Abuse
- Victims' Rights Alliance
- Alcohol and Gender Based Violence
- Better Europe Alliance
- Courting Disaster Coalition
- CSO Sexual Violence Survey Liaison Group
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights
- Department of Justice and Equality – Strategy Committee for the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020
- Department of Public Expenditure & Reform – Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group
- Four Day Week Ireland Campaign
- HEA Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment Working Group
- Health Reform Alliance
- Home Care Coalition
- HPV Vaccination Alliance
- HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Partners Group'

- HSE Patient Forum
- Irish Cancer Society Prevention Committee
- Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women and Girls
- Le Chéile
- Monitoring Committee of the Second National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence
- Monitoring Committee of the Second National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence
NGO- Union Sub Group
- National Advisory Committee to End Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education
- National One Parent Family Alliance
- National Steering Committee on FGM
- Public Participation Network National Advisory Group
- Raise the Roof Coalition
- 'Still Here' and 'No More Excuses' Campaign
Advisory Group
- Stop67 Coalition
- Survivors Informing Services and Institutions Sisi
– Advisory Group
- The Tusla Strategic Review of Domestic Violence
Accommodation Group
- Women's Mental Health Network

NWCI is a member of the following Organisations

- Age Action
- Barnardos
- European Anti-Poverty Network
- INOU – Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Network against Racism
- Mental Health Reform
- NALA – the National Adult Literacy Agency
- Smashing Times Theatre and Film Company

Submissions and Publications

February 2020 Joint submission with the Dublin Cycling Campaign to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Sustainable Mobility Review

Women Beyond the Dáil: A Guide to Establishing Local Caucus with Women Councillors

March 2020 Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

April 2020 Covid-19 NGO Group – Marginalised Groups and Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights

May 2020 Submission to the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth on a workforce development plan for early years and school age childcare sector

June 2020 A Briefing on Women's Mental Health in Ireland which was released alongside Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health policy for Everyone

Department of Finance 2021 Pre-Budget Submission

Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection 2021 Pre-Budget Submission

July 2020 Joint Statement with Mental Health Reform on Women's Mental Health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

August 2020 Submission to the Department of Justice on the Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy

Submission to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation on guidance for remote working

September 2020 A Feminist Recovery Plan – NWC's Pre-Budget Submission 2021

Submission to the Review of Part IV of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017

Impact of Covid-19 on Women's Community Sector

September 2020 Supporting one parent families during and after Covid-19: A joint submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response

October 2020 Submission to the Department of Rural and Community Development Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023

Submission to the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023

November 2020 NWC Women's Experience of Caring During Covid-19 Survey Report

Submission to Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation on Ireland's National Economic Plan

'Out of Silence - Women's Mental Health in their Own Words' poster published in University College Cork Psychology Health and Medicine Conference Book.

Legal and Administrative Information

Board Members 2020

Ellen O'Malley Dunlop (Resigned 14th January 2020)
 Rosaleen McDonagh (Resigned 11th March 2020)
 Sarah Benson (Resigned 4th June 2020)
 Sinead Keane (Resigned 4th June 2020)
 Catriona Graham (Resigned 4th June 2020)
 Ini Usanga (Resigned 4th June 2020)
 Ashimedu Okonkwo (Resigned 4th June 2020)
 Nuala Ryan
 Vivienne Glanville
 Louise Lovett
 Ethel Buckley (Appointed 24th August 2020)
 Margaret Martin (Appointed 24th August 2020)
 Jennifer Okeke Campbell (Appointed 24th August 2020)
 Shirley Scott (Appointed 24th August 2020)
 Sarah Monaghan (Appointed 13th November 2020)
 Sara Philips (Appointed 13th November 2020)
 Norah Burns (Appointed 13th November 2020)
 Emilia Marchelewska (Appointed 13th November 2020)

Company Secretary

Anne Gibney

Registered Office

100 North King Street
 Dublin 7

Auditor

Browne Murphy & Hughes
 Chartered & Certified Accountants
 28 Upper Fitzwilliam Street
 Dublin 2

Bankers

Bank of Ireland
 Lower Baggot Street
 Dublin 2

Solicitor

Garlan Furey Solicitors
 20 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2

Financial Report

The main work and activities of NWCI for 2020 were in line with our Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Income & Expenditures:

Income

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Department of Justice & Equality | 552,567 |
| Pobal –SSNO | 90,000 |
| Group membership | 24,227 |
| Individual membership sub | 13,357 |
| HSE | 141,500 |
| Donations | 5,856 |
| DCGRA – Social partnership | 18,840 |
| Miscellaneous income | 54,875 |
| IHREC | 10,921 |
| Department of Education | 22,000 |
| Department of Housing | 3,700 |
| Centre for Reproductive Rights | 30,205 |
| | € 968,048 |

Expenditure

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Staff costs | 712,611 |
| Office running costs | 33,529 |
| Rent, cleaning | 94,915 |
| Communication & information | 25,588 |
| Governance and Statutory costs | 16,359 |
| Professional Fees | 11,286 |
| Programme Activities | 62,581 |
| | € 956,869 |

Financial Results

The financial results for the financial year ended 31st December 2020 show a net surplus of €11,179 (2019: net surplus €84,606).

Income

National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) raised total income of €968,048 for the financial year ended 31st December 2020 (2019: €1,139,239).

Expenditures

Total expenditure for the year at €956,869 some of which relates to income received in previous years for programmes of work which were carried out in 2020.

The balance sheet is showing reserves of €164,058 in restricted funds and €81,363 in unrestricted funds. The directors regard this level of unrestricted funds as inadequate for contingency purposes and have resolved to try to increase the level of unrestricted reserves in the future.

Reserves to be maintained at a level which ensures that NWCI's core activity could continue during a period of unforeseen difficulty. It takes into account risks associated with each stream of income and expenditure being different from that budgeted, planned activity level and the organisations commitments.

NWCI's ability to deliver quality, value for money programmes has ensured strong positive relationships continue with Government Departments, Trusts and Philanthropic organisations. NWCI wishes to increase the grants received from membership and non-statutory organisations.

National Womens Council of Ireland

Income & Expenditure Account For the Year Ended 31st December 2020

| | € Restricted funds 2020 | € Unrestricted funds 2020 | € total 2020 | € total 2019 |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Incoming Resources | | | | |
| Donations | – | 43,440 | 43,440 | 36,678 |
| Charitable Activities | 874,098 | 50,510 | 924,608 | 1,102,561 |
| Total incoming resources | 874,098 | 93,950 | 968,048 | 1,139,239 |
| Resources Expended | | | | |
| Raising funds | (5,898) | (2,522) | (8,420) | (9,248) |
| Charitable Activities | (875,618) | (72,831) | (948,449) | (1,045,385) |
| Total resources expended | (881,516) | (75,353) | (956,869) | (1,054,633) |
| Net /surplus for the financial year | (7,418) | 18,597 | 11,179 | 84,606 |

These financial statements were approved by the directors on 8th April 2021 and are signed on their behalf by Nuala Ryan, Director and Vivienne Glanville, Director.

National Womens Council of Ireland

Statement of Financial Position As at December 2020

| | € | € 2020 | € | € 2019 |
|---|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Current Assets | | | | |
| Debtors | 4,978 | | 12,618 | |
| Cash at bank and in hand | 324,971 | | 319,335 | |
| | 329,949 | | 331,953 | |
| Creditors: amounts falling due within one year | (84,528) | | (97,711) | |
| Net Current Assets | | 245,421 | | 234,242 |
| Reserves | | | | |
| Restricted Funds | | 164,058 | | 171,476 |
| Unrestricted Funds | | 81,363 | | 62,766 |
| Members' funds | | 245,421 | | 234,242 |

These financial statements were approved by the directors on 8th April 2021 and are signed on their behalf by Nuala Ryan, Director and Vivienne Glanville, Director

These summary accounts have been extracted from the statutory financial statements of the National Women's Council of Ireland. Those statutory financial statements, on which the Auditors (Browne Murphy & Hughes) expressed an unqualified audit opinion, will be filed with the Registrar of Companies following the Annual General Meeting. Copies of the full audited financial statements have been sent to members and are available on the NWCI Website (www.nwci.ie).

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National Women's Council

National Women's Council
100 North King Street
Dublin 7

www.nwci.ie

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